



Some Reflections upon Marriage

Mary Astell

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Throughout her life, in her personal relationships as well as in her role as a public intellectual, the English thinker Mary Astell (1666-1731) supported women, wrote to and for women, and, to the greatest extent possible, moved from advocacy to action on their behalf. In *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (London, 1700), Astell focused her attention on the institution of marriage. For Astell, marriage is a divinely ordained state, a “Christian institution,” the only way to perpetuate humankind. But, she asks, “if marriage be such a blessed state, how comes it . . . there are so few happy marriages?” When her analysis is complete, there is not much to recommend the institution, at least from a woman’s perspective. Marriage is necessary since it represents “the only honorable way of continuing mankind.” But, as Astell observes, the woman who marries “ought to lay it down for an indisputable maxim that her husband must govern absolutely and entirely and that she has nothing else to do but to please and obey.” Her radical conclusion? If she cannot accept marriage “as it truly is,” then a woman might choose not to marry: perhaps, Astell suggests, “it is not good for a woman to marry.” Despite the importance of *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, no previous edition has addressed the complications of Astell’s prose style, and none has added the kind of glossing and notes that will assist student readers in their engagement with her distinctive voice. This edition, designed for classroom use, provides an ample introduction, a carefully modernized text, helpful glosses and notes, and a useful bibliography with references for further reading.

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