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New York Tribune, Wednesday, April 14, 1915
WOMAN'S VARIED INTERESTS

Woman's the Virtues, Man's the Stupidity, Is the Division the Gentle Inventor of Kewpies Makes.

Rose O'Neill, Artist – Poet – Composer, Inveighs Against Man as the Creator of Traditional Virtues from Which She
Would Free the Woman of the Future.

By Doris E. Fleischman.

Pity those gentle souls whose battle cry of despair is "What is the world coming to?" for they are to get another shock. Now, honestly, what mental vision did the name of Rose O'Neill, artists, inventor of cuddle children, kindly old grande dames and kewpies bring before you? Of course, a little, round, dimpling woman whose sweet, joyous thoughts shine in her quiet face, and who, secure in her serene bower of gentle femininity, regards the onslaughts of feminism at most with a detached tolerance, if not with actual disapproval.

You wouldn't expect this from her mouth:

"Man has made and ignorantly kept woman a slave.

"He has forced upon her certain virtues which have been convenient to him.

"He has damned as intuition her greatest virtue, knowledge."

Yet so indeed, does Rose O'Neill speak. Rose O'Neill, the chief attribute of whose work is its feminine charm, that attribute which poets, too, possess. Yet perhaps it is her vision of how glorious woman would be that makes her excoriate man so fiercely, and woman, in her present state, too.

Woman is a sheep, with capacity to propagate. So, Miss O'Neill pictures her; so she speaks of her.

"Woman is a sheep woman, placidly convinced of her unalterable sheepishness," she intoned. "She has yet to learn that she is far the greater of the two sexes. Woman is the philosopher. What she knows man must figure laboriously through logic. For centuries she has borne the greatest insult of the world, but she is now to be emancipated.

With Happiness Vices Disappear.

"Fallen women, and women who marry for any reason other than love, are identical. Both will be eliminated when woman achieves economic independence. When unions are truly happy most of the vices will disappear automatically, and the world will be a better place. But marriage ties are useless and harmful."

Thus, this pretty woman interprets the present state of slavery of woman and points to the beginnings of humanity as the fatal cause of the ignorant present.

"In the beginning of time woman was physically inferior during the periods of childbirth. It was then that stupid man assumed his superiority. He fastened her labor upon her as a guilt, instead of saying to her, 'You are now doing twice as much work as I am. Therefore, you are the greater.' And woman meekly said, 'Oh, yes, I know I can't run so fast now,' and signed.

"And then to augment his comfort he shackled her. At first it was with chains, iron necklets and anklets. Do you know that in Les Invalides there is on exhibition a metal garment which women wore during the Crusades while their men were away?"

Gentle Virtues Convenient.

"After this, men learned that women could be kept with words. They were much easier to make than chains, and more convenient. So, men taught them that chastity was woman's great virtue. Even now only one thing can 'ruin' a woman. That word should be non-existent, for it represents false ideals. He taught her that prudence and obedience and all the gentler attributes were fine and womanly. It was convenient for the husband, and it was convenient for the father before he gave her to the husband. And women have believed the silly things."

Miss O'Neill wrapped her silk lounging robe more closely about her and shook back her short golden hair. She had cut it, she told me, not because it was fashionable, but because it was more convenient when she lived in the

forest last year. She was seated in her large studio in Washington Square South, with steps leading up to the enormous window seat. At one end of the room was a piano, for Miss O'Neill composes as well as makes kewpies. About the room are various pictures, some painted by herself, in which the love motif predominated. One picture especially striking was that of a woman, who, explained the artist, was just emerging from the animal state. This woman, with low brow, brilliant red hair, heavy coarse features is painted luridly in positive green tones, with flashes of red. She is weeping. "That," said Miss O'Neill, "is the first thing which the newly created woman does. It represents the aspiration of womanhood, of humanity. I have written a poem for it: not a complete poem, just fragments." And she kindly jotted down for me the verses which she had completed.

"I know not in what obliterated place I heard the cry
Or wast thou beast or human

...

I asked that ancestral weeper why she wept,
'Was it the love of the fierce mate
More bitter than thy modern hate?
Or didst thou lie too long naked to the moving malice of the moon
And the disdain of stars?
Until thy heart broke in this wolf's cry of loneliness?
Or was it a presage of high
Climbing, unborn grief that was to be.
Until at last the climber from the clod shall be crying for a god?"

"That isn't vers libre, it is just fragmentary," smiled the poet. "But I do think vers libre is a splendid thing, just like the new art. Neither is worked over laboriously, but both give first impressions. They are meaningful and virile."

Woman, Not Man, the Thinker.

Besides her poems, her music, her kewpies and children's verses, and her painting, Miss O'Neill has written a number of novels. She is writing at present about a modern heroine named Varga, of whom, by the way, she has modelled a beautiful head, the picture of which is to make the frontispiece.

"Vargo is the last, the very latest, word in modern womanhood," Miss O'Neill explained. "She has thrown off all the senseless conventions, all the shackles, that a primal blunder on the part of stupid man has kept on her for following ages. Isn't it funny that the thinking member of the union is always the one who has been kept in subjection, who has been regarded civically and religiously as nil? Why women think all around men!

"Men have been the specialists. Women have done all the rest. In the homes they have been the carpenters, the doctors, the nurses, the cooks, the diplomats, the educators. And man has been the plumber, or the cashier, or the streetcar conductor, or the cave man. Just think of what woman will do, now that she is to obtain freedom!

"But she must be taught, as a young girl, not that she is a woman who can do what men allow her to do, but that she is to be the producer. She is to think about her vocation when she is young just as the man does now. Then when the time comes for choice, she is to emancipate herself from all traditions. She is to eliminate from her mind all thoughts of shocking anybody or anything.

Moral Shocks Absurd.

"If the world were only shock proof to everything but ugliness, we would have been far more advanced than we are now. Things should be considered for their intrinsic virtue and practicability. Moral shocks are absurd.

"Now is the time when every young woman may enter any profession she likes. She may devise many pursuits to which the sluggish consciousness of man has not been alive. She may be a pioneer if she will strike out freely." Miss O'Neill's sister then brought over a plaster placque at which the artist-poet is working. It represents a weeping satyr in the midst of grapes and happiness.

"This will not be popular, I suppose," sighed Miss O'Neill. "for the American public makes a cult of optimism. It is very nice in a way. I love to dispense happiness, and I love to have it. But, too, I enjoy the tragedies of life. They are eternal verities. We are all tragedies. We all die sooner than we want, and if we do not, that is a still greater tragedy. It is that fact to which we are all trying to blind ourselves."

The Future of a "Race of Slaves."

And then I asked her about woman and her destiny in the world of art. She wrote a little message and pressed it in my hand:

"I have a thrilling hope that women are going to do something glorious in the arts. It is my passionate conviction. I am always indignant when women are denied creative power in art – that it has not widely shown itself proves nothing. It is stupid to expect free things from a race of slaves.

"The freed woman will laugh at this insulting dictum, beater her wide wings" –

Article's artwork:

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Miss O'Neill's conception of present-day woman as a child-bearing sheep.