

## The Virtues and The Delights

“Sapcre Aude. Have Courage to use your own understanding: that is the motto of the Enlightenment”

*An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? Kant*

The Virtues and the Delights celebrates those philosophers of the past as well as those now living who have the courage to use their understanding in pursuit of an equality that respects cultural and sexual difference. The Enlightenment is interpreted as an unfinished project, which promotes the secular principle of human perfectibility where human beings are affirmed as active agents in determining their own independence and futures. Feminism retains the emancipatory tradition and refutes the doctrinaire interpretation of the ‘age of reason. Early feminists such as Astell and Wollstonecraft took issue with the patriarchal underpinnings of the Enlightenment demanding a vital place for women in settings the agenda for like in the ‘Cities of the future’ This work highlights their contribution and critique of the philosophies of their time.

The ‘Virtues’, feminine qualities which transcend moral strictures (Chastity) are set in a garden of delights where things are not quite what they seem, yet where happiness may still be possible. The ‘Delights’ are those of intellectual debate and reasoning but also pleasure and passion. This an utopian space where women can dream of having it all.

Voltaire and Sade are fellow travelers in dispute with contemporary views of women and nature. Emilie du Chatelet, Louise d’Empinay and Mary Wollstonecraft are voices which protest Rousseau’s view of women created for man’s delight. Sade’s Juliette takes on the male order’ enjoying all the pleasures of which nature makes a duty’.

The Virtues and the Delights vindicates and celebrates the cultural achievements and intellectual rights of women with recourse to irony and humour. It proposes an experimental form of history writing, a hybrid between the spaces of images and words, a re-framing of history.