

WOMEN OF THE WORLD

Why should Renaissance paintings always pose
madonnas out of doors, sheltered at most
by pergola or porch? Bellini's owes
in part her strangeness to her throne as outpost.
Far without a city like a toy,
walled and empty, she lays out her boy,
whose livid looks already seem brought low,
over her lap. She draws back in woe,
their only neighbors fated snake and bird
by man's first disobedience cast as foes.
The future's here with her; as if they'd heard,
carpenters, intent, rush to and fro.

A modern sovereign rose to single rule
from outcast station as a prostitute –
so courtesans excelled in thought's pursuit
as reigning intellects of ancient schools –
quite impossible to picture her
as framed within a Dutch interior.
We must image as beyond the pale
a public destiny for womankind.
Attempts to place her in our order fail;
the virgin is all mother, the whore all mind.