

Literary Criticism (From Plato to Leavis)
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Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Hello. Welcome to a session on Mary Wollstonecraft and her work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

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- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman
- Published in 1792
- Founding manifesto of western feminism
- A political tract for the necessity of education of women
- relevance of this text in the present era



So this was published in 1792, and I will quite soon discuss some of the major arguments by Wollstonecraft. And this book is contested as one of the foundational texts or a founding manifesto for western feminism and we will look into why soon.

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Historical Background



- Period of Stress on Rationality and questioning of traditional authority; since 17th century
- Period of French and American Revolutions
- Philosophical debates- on the nature of freedom and human rationality
- American Declaration of Independence (1776), and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789)
- Rights of 'man'- is the term generic?
- Immediate prompts-
 1. writing of new French constitution;
 2. report on education by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord- French National Assembly, directing girls education on more subservient activities



And the context for the publication of this book is that during that time, one of the ministers in the National Assembly in France published a report on the education of women and he said that women should only be educated for the domestic purposes and they should be given only domestic intelligence. And in response to this, Wollstonecraft publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and she says that rights cannot be based on tradition and it should only be based on reason and rationality and she argues for the education of women, and by that all classes of children.

And this was exactly the time when they were okay to allow women to be educated in certain sections but they still felt that political participation of women is unessential or inessential and it is absurd. So again, most of the times *A Vindication of Rights of Woman* was always considered as a educational tract, or treatise on the necessity of education rather than a political tract for a feminist theory of that time.

It is generally understood that she received lot of criticism for publishing this work but when the book was actually published it was being accepted and there was a reading public which appreciated her efforts; but later by the 19th and the 20th century she started having lot of criticisms and critiques on the text as an inadequate one.

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Arguments:

- Introduction:

Adult women are treated as subordinate beings; being attractive, elegant and meek;

- Chapter 1:

Why are women subjugated?

prejudice, lack of education, lack of ability to take on a profession, their own silliness and eschewing of reason, and a governmental structure that does not yield enough power to the people.

Women have a soul just as men do; both sexes have a capacity for reason and should exercise it.



All the arguments are segregated in different sections of the book, we will read an excerpt of the introduction. And in the introduction, she says that neglect of girls' education is the reason the women or the adult women's conditions have not improved, and they should not be treated as subordinate beings whose only reason for existence is to be attractive and to provide emotional and sexual entertainment for men.

And she also says that women buy into this operation by being so attracted to the idea of beauty and spending lot of time in perfecting their beauty. And therefore, they must be made aware of the fundamental rights and they should be made aware of the possible opportunities to progress.

In one of the early chapters or the first chapter itself she mentions lot of reasons on why women are subjugated. One, she says is prejudice. Two, again, as we saw earlier it, she sees it as lack of education and because of no education, they have a lack of ability to take on a profession. And therefore, they all stick to the idea of domesticated life.

And, which means, she says, they all develop a sense of silliness because of no education and there is no knowledge as such that is being taught other than the domestic affairs. They have lot of frivolous concerns such as jealousy over other women. And therefore, they also end up being immoral. So she says that women also have a soul just like the men do. And if the soul is unsexed, then both sexes have a capacity for reason and should endeavour to exercise it.

She says the men exercise the capacity to reason while the women do not because they do not have the awareness or they do not have the education to do so. And there is no necessity for

them to actually exercise it within the household or the domestic space. And for this reason of unsexing the idea of mind, unsexing the idea of soul from the physical body, she receives a lot of criticisms from the future or the later feminists because for them, the idea of the body should be accepted as it is and the soul of the body or the being should not be removed from the body itself.

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• Chapter 2:

In what ways are the women rendered subordinate?

They are taught that looks are the paramount concern and they tend to cultivate weakness and artificiality to appear pleasing to others.

Reason and common sense are usually ignored in favour of emotion and sentiment

These trends are considered problematic as these women either ignore their children or spoil them.

Marriage should resemble friendship- husband and wife should be companions



And in the second chapter, she gives or she details the various ways in which women are made subordinate, and how they are taught that the paramount concern is to please the men and supposed to appear pretty. And this makes them dependent on the men and therefore, they do not have any necessity to exercise reason. And therefore, common sense is ignored and emotion and sentiment are held closer to oneself.

When this trend exists and when the young girls become women and they do not have an education, they remain ignorant and as a result of this ignorance they are not fit to bring up children. They are not fit to raise the family and they do not seem adequate to raise another child. And therefore, she says that men and women should be in a marriage, should be like companions where both are able to support each other both emotionally and rationally and politically.

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- Chapter 5:

Wollstonecraft comments and criticises the writers who perpetuated ideas that held women as subordinate.

- Rousseau: Freedom is for the men

- Chapter 6:

According to Wollstonecraft, for women, false notions as early impressions are not tempered by knowledge or nuance.

- Chapter 7:

Modesty is not the same as humility. Women who exercise most reason are the most modest.

Men place the burden of upholding chastity on women but men also must be chaste.



In further chapters, she talks about the women or the writers themselves who have perpetuated the idea of subordination of women and she mainly goes about criticising Rousseau and where he says freedom is for the men. And when he says men, he does not include men as humans but men as only men, excluding the women out of the picture. And because Rousseau is considered as a figure who was very influential in the French Revolution times, she spends a bit of her sections of the book talking about what was actually wrong or what is so objectionable about his works.

And in one of the chapters, she talks about the importance of development of character itself for the women, and how they should be taught nuances of knowledge that are very much necessary for them to be independent. And so that they are independent to not look for men who are decent in the sense of politically wealthy or wealthy in the economic sense.

And later, another chapter she spends on talking about the subject of modesty, and she explains that modesty is not the same as humility and she says that the women who exercise the most reason are the most modest. In that sense that she is trying to push for rationality in women's lives and asking them all to be educated just so they can be rational and they can reason out on the future steps in one's own life.

Yes, so she says that women's modesty can only improve when their bodies are strengthened and their minds are enlarged by active exertions. Here what she means by bodies are strengthened, she also remembers that men and women are unequal in the bodily or unequal in the physical strength. And she also says that because men have already been exposed to the

idea of enlightenment, exposed to the idea of intelligence, it is now time for the women to also follow the same trend and start being more active and use their minds.

Although in that period, women's morality is generally undermined, she says that their reputation is what is most significantly upheld in the period. And men place the burden of reputation, burden of upholding chastity on a woman's shoulder and this alone is not okay, because men should also learn to be chaste. And therefore, it is upon the women when they are to bring up a child who will also be a responsible and more reputed personality who is also moral, for both, men and women.

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- Chapter 9:

Women should be financially independent.

According to her, there is a need for the women to be good citizens and good mother by which she performs her duty and activity in the public sphere.

- Chapter 10-11:

There must be reforms in education for women just so their parenting does not tyrannize or spoil the children.

- Chapter 12:

Her educational reform suggestions include merging of private and public education, co-education and participatory educational structure.



She again goes on to say that women need more financial independence and that financial independence is not just for oneself but it is also a duty and activity in the public sphere. And if the women want to step into the public sphere from the domestic sphere, they should be able to and that the education will be able to provide.

And to be a good citizen and to be a good mother the women have to pursue intelligence. She also says that when women are reformed through education, they will stop being jealous of other women, and they will also be good mothers who kindly raise a child who is also responsible, instead of tyrannizing the children or spoiling them.

Some of the educational reforms that Wollstonecraft thinks of, or the ideas of reforms that she thinks of, is to include a conflation of public and private education. And she also suggests co-education where men and women get to study in the same space. And she also calls for a more democratic and participatory educational structure where there is little bit of flexibility

to learn what the children want to learn, especially for the social classes where she says the lower classes who might want to go into a profession of their own should be allowed to take that path when they reach a certain age. And they should all not always be pushed towards learning philosophical and spiritual or religious intelligence alone.

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• Chapter 13:

Women's indulgence in silliness- visiting fortune tellers and healers; reading stupid novels that cook up stale tales; engaging in rivalries with other women

Women and men must have things in common to have successful marriages.

Women's faults are not a result of natural deficiency but insufficient education.

An excerpt from the book:

" if woman is not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; and for truth must be common to all" (1796, vii)



She details, in one of the last chapters she also talks about how women indulge in silliness like fortune tellers and healers. And she says they all end up reading stupid novels. When she says stupid novel she means the novels that are about women, which are about their relationships and friendships they share with each other or that revolves around a life of love where they expect a knight to sweep them off their feet. And she says they should stop caring about their dress and they need a big revolution in the manners.

And then later she also gets criticised for the same and we will try to discuss that in the later section. And she, one of the concluding arguments she makes is that, generally when the marriage is not successful and it is the fault of women or both men and the women. The woman's fault is not a result of natural deficiency in the woman, but it is stemmed from the socially constructed and socially shaped idea of life and the insufficient education that the society provides for the girl or the woman.

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- Theme:

- Marriage as friendship
- Problems of sensibility
- Reason and Rationality
- Educational Reform
- Liberalism
- Enriching the middle class women's lives

- Major critiques:

- Her style of writing as misogynist
- Her tracts creates a distance between her and the women.



So some of the themes that Wollstonecraft deals with is marriage as a friendship where she says that both man and woman has to be a companion. She says that only then both of them can compensate for each other's faults and they can be mature in the dealing of their marriage life and raise responsible and moral children. She again, as we saw earlier, she criticises sensibilities and she criticises the idea of sentimentality.

Instead, she propagates reason and rationality to an extent that she says that reason and rationality are to an extent masculine and that has to be imbibed or that has to be incurred by the women themselves to be able to step out into the public sphere. And most of her tract is based on idea of educational reform and therefore, as we saw, it is generally considered as an educational tract which is apolitical.

And she falls back on the idea of liberalism, quite often in her statements and her arguments. And she is more about enriching the middle class women's lives than the upper class women. She criticises the upper class woman's life for being so ignorant and she says that the lower class women do not have the time to think of educating themselves and they are already busy running around earning for their own families.

Most of the critiques of Wollstonecraft call out her style of writing which they consider very misogynist. And she is critiqued a lot for the distance as an author she creates between her and the women category that she talks about. We will now read an excerpt from the introduction, and then we will go about the other sections.

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"My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists--I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them, that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt." (1796, 6)



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We will later see, reading through the book we will also see that she uses the last line to talk about why the marriage fails or why the failure of marriage is always the burden of women. Going back to the introduction.

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"Dismissing then those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex; and that secondary views should be brought to this simple touchstone." (1796, 7)

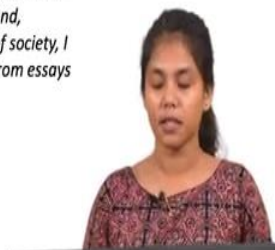


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"This is a rough sketch of my plan; and should I express my conviction with the energetic emotions that I feel whenever I think of the subject, the dictates of experience and reflection will be felt by some of my readers. Animated by this important object, I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style---I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, nor in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach the heart.---I shall be employed about things, not words! and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slide from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation." (1796, 7-8)



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"These pretty nothings, these caricatures of the real beauty of sensibility, dropping glibly from the tongue, vitiate the taste, and create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth; and a deluge of false sentiments and over-stretched feelings, stifling the natural emotions of the heart, render the domestic pleasures insipid, that ought to sweeten the exercise of those severe duties, which educate a rational and immortal being for a nobler field of action."

(1796, 8)



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“The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments: meanwhile, strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves, the only way women can rise in the world---by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry, they act as such children may be expected to act: they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures. Surely these weak beings are only fit for the seraglio! Can they govern a family, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?”

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"If then it can be fairly deduced from the present conduct of the sex, from the prevalent fondness for pleasure, which takes place of ambition and those nobler passions that open and enlarge the soul; that the instruction which women have received has only tended, with the constitution of civil society, to render them insignificant objects of desire;--- mere propagators of fools!--- if it can be proved, that in aiming to accomplish them, without cultivating their understandings, they are taken out of their sphere of duties, and made ridiculous and useless when the short lived bloom of beauty is over, I presume that rational men will excuse me for endeavouring to persuade them to become more masculine and respectable." (1796, 9-10)



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"Indeed the word masculine is only a bugbear: there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude; for their apparent inferiority with respect to bodily strength, must render them, in some degree, dependent on men in the various relations of life; but why should it be increased by prejudices that give a sex to virtue, and confound simple truths with sensual reveries?" (1796, 10)



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*"Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength, which leads them to play off those contemptible infantile airs that undermine esteem even whilst they excite desire. ... It seems scarcely necessary to say, that I now speak of the sex in general. Many individuals have more sense than their male relatives; and, as nothing preponderates where there is a constant struggle for an equilibrium, without it has naturally more gravity, some women govern their husbands without degrading themselves, because intellect will always govern."
(1796, 10-11)*



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So this is an excerpt from the introduction where she pretty much provides most of the arguments she is going to elaborate later in chapters. As part of a course you are doing right now, which has literary criticism more on the lines, we will look into the stylistics, the rhetoric or the ideas that she creates as the text itself than going into the feminist argument she makes. Most of her arguments are contested again and again due to the historically removed understanding or a retrospective understanding of the text, that when kept in a historically located period, when understood more at the conjunction of the personal life of the author and a political tract, you will see that the arguments she provided were valid.

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- A vindication of the Rights of woman- instructional literature

Argues for a revolution in female manners; rights of men and women are tied to the respect of rights of children

- Masculine woman:

The term transfers to woman the patriarchal virtues attributed to man. This woman is born from politics and at the same time rooted in the figure of voice of the text. (author's identity as wife/daughter/lover/mother/woman)

Author's voice- language of truth; rational arguments to disrupt masculine discourse

According to her, in 18th century, no neutral writings were available; reason for use of this style is to distance herself from the women she is speaking for and their transformations into a rational women



When she argues for the revolution in female manners, her feminist views are discussed through instructional literature, which are also fictional such as Maria or Mary. And we will also see some of those instructional attitude flow into the non-fictional tract or the political tract itself. Although, till now, it has not been agreed upon as a political tract.

One of the arguments that are inferred from her text is that she not just asks for the right of women, and she also says that by propagating the rights of women and of men, she respects the right of children. So this way, you see that there is an extension from a narrow idea of woman and her oppression to an inclusion of more subjugated people or sidelined people. So let us look at the idea of masculine woman before we go into the other sections.

The term transfers the patriarchal virtues attributed to the man to a woman. And this woman is born from politics and at the same time, rooted in the figure of the voice itself. Here, the voice is that of Mary Wollstonecraft, who has gone through a lot in her life, where she has been a mother, she has been a lover, she has been a daughter, and she has been just a woman. And all of these experiences shape the voice of the treatise. And we will look more into this as we go forward.

She claims that her voice is the language of truth. She disguises her voice in rational arguments and rhetoric to disrupt the discourse that is majorly masculine. And she uses the available masculine discursive means to criticise the patriarchal society itself. So she is critiquing the society, being part of the society and knowing that her ideas are somehow shaped by her experiences of the society.

And according to her, there were no neutral or ungendered writings available in the 18th century at all. And therefore, in her endeavour to provide, to critique the patriarchal society, she ended up using the style that would distance her from the woman she was speaking for, and their transformations into a rational woman. So the whole idea of the book is to transform any woman into a rational being or a rational woman or a rational citizen who is eligible to be part of a political sphere. And to do this she employs the discourse of intelligentsia that is majorly masculine.

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- First person speaker- (found in political discourse of the period); not to offer a personal or emotional response but to stress on a certainty or imperative tone

Rarely used possessive pronouns when referring to women; through gendered language her voice assumes a masculine identity;

(critic- John Whale): act of ventriloquism- changing of one's voice; she suppressed her feelings by engaging in the language of Enlightenment rationalist

"What nonsense!"- (change in voice)- passionate/emotional outburst; contradicting the deliberated voice of the text

"Where are they to be found?"- struggle to fit her reality as a thinking and feeling woman against the portrayal of masculine woman. (2017)



Wollstonecraft's books closely resemble the literary conventions that are employed by the male writers of the political theories, which are, for example, Thomas Paine of those times or any other political tract for that time. She is very much related to the tradition of Republicans and she is very much seen as a follower in the tradition of John Locke and his treatise on rights and duties.

While she employs a first-person speaker like we saw in the introduction, and by doing that she found herself within the political discourse of the period. She employs a first person speaker pronoun in the introduction, but she also does it in a way that she is the observer of the whole society and therefore, she distances herself from the women she is talking about.

So, she does not use pronouns such as 'my sex' or she does not use pronouns such as 'my sisters', nothing of that sort. Rarely would she have used anything that shows that she is part of the women she is talking about. And she also ascertains, as we saw in the start that her treatise will address the head than the heart.

And to reflect this, she again rarely uses the first person to offer any personal or emotional response. Rather, it is always used to stress or define a certainty within the text or an imperative gesture within the text. For example, she uses the phrase “I shall” even in the introductions. By using a detached first-person speaker, the voice of the text pursues to convince the readers by demonstrating that it is a reasonable argument. And yes, there are these times where she has her emotional outbursts, and we will talk about that later.

One of the reviewers of the Big Monthly Review, reviews her work and says that Wollstonecraft continually returns to gendered language as a necessary means to support her argument. Speaking through such images, her voice assumes a masculine and therefore more accepted identity, and her readers are more readily persuaded by its rationale. This, she uses as a strategy and this strategy is what determines the presence of a masculine woman in her work.

So, the gendered language is the political language she is using. And by assuming or by going with the idea that rationality and reason are masculine while sentimentality is feminine, she tries to subvert the whole idea of understanding of masculinity and femininity and the patriarchal hegemony, even in the language.

One of the critics John Whale contests that Wollstonecraft is engaged in a act of ventriloquism, and argues that she is merrily adopting the macho language of the enlightened rationalists and suppressing her feelings. This accusation forces us to closely inspect the work and this change in voice that he is talking about is found in some of the exclamations.

So there is a paragraph where she mentions what Rousseau talks about the idea of woman or her condition as a woman, and then she exclaims, “What nonsense!” And these are the moments in the text where the woman behind the voice, the woman behind the words that is giving a political treatise is peeking out. So these are the moments where we see that she is trying to balance the idea of herself as a woman who is experiencing these social conditions and at the same time, who is trying to urge the people in a rational manner to let go of those conditioning and constructions.

In some of the places Wollstonecraft reveals a voice that is both passionate and enthusiastic, so contradicting to the voice that is meant to appear calm and deliberated and therefore, judicious. In another instance, the readers discover energetic outbursts and lyrical intrusions. For example, when describing a case of a woman, she says this, “a woman who will soon find

that her charms are oblique sunbeams, when the summer is past and gone". So this she talks about when she is talking about the woman who is more fixed to the idea of beauty itself.

She hides her charged emotions behind the wall of rhetoric, and there is a struggle to fit her reality as a thinking and a feeling woman against the portrayal of the masculine woman that she tends to create or exhibit. And there are these small disruptions such as the emotional outburst itself in the text, which confirms the difficulty of presenting the masculine woman in the text restricted by the patriarchal society which she is part of and against which she is rebelling.

Wollstonecraft cannot define a masculine woman that satisfies both her theory and her experience of being a woman and thus she asks where they are to be found? Here, we see this, the idea of masculine woman is more analysed by this person called Imogene Cambridge in an article published in 2017, she explains more on the idea of her voice that is trying to place 'masculine woman' within her experiences as woman.

So she creates this tension where there is a masculine woman who is supposed to be able to or who is capable of participating in the political sphere, and there is a woman who is still ignorant of the idea of political sphere and who is experiencing just the domestic life, if I may say so. And to do this, to present the masculine woman or to push for the idea of a masculine woman where she means masculine here as the rationale and the more reasoning woman who need not be very detached from sensibilities or detached from emotional and sentimentality. But somebody who is able to logically go forward and make choices in life or logically live the life as a companion to man who is not subjugated as part of the society. Let us go into the stylistic choices that Wollstonecraft makes to go about the political treatise.

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Structure of the Work

- Exposition (Initial Situation)-three basic premises; arguments
 1. humanity is special because it has the power to overcome its animal instincts with the power of reason
 2. the one thing that makes one human being better than another is virtue or moral goodness
 3. the reason we have passions and emotions is so we can use reason to overcome them and gain knowledge in the process
- Rising Action (Conflict, Complication)
worst force oppressing women is the idea that women should receive a different education than men
- Climax (Crisis, Turning Point)
improve *all* of education- creation of a national public school system that boys and girls will access equally, for no charge. The schools will be paid for by public taxes.



We are looking at the text itself and the structure of the text and the way it is written more because it is a course on literary criticism. And while her arguments do matter and they are much contested and her work is very relevant to the period, we have come far away to understand the depth of her arguments for the period.

The style of the text is a majorly discussed topic in rhetorical theory and debates on style has resulted in reversing of ideas even in the past, and style determines the political potential of the text and the ideological boundaries of any text. Wollstonecraft critiques the institutions and the social systems in the *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

And she generally operates in the realm of abstract where she is discussing concepts, and she is discussing the concept of subversion. Not subversion, she is discussing the concept of being oppressed, she is discussing the concept of intelligence and the idea of political participation.

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- Falling Action

In the closing parts of *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft speaks directly to parents and tells them what they can do to raise better children

- Resolution (Denouement)

Wollstonecraft closes *Vindication* by speaking to men and asking them not to be tyrants



But in doing these discussions, there is a value of virtue that she discusses as a fundamental idea. And this, she says, is abstract for any life, be it male or female. And therefore she removes the idea of virtue from the person as a body and places it on the person as an identity, person as a being. And by doing this she receives a lot of criticism for de-gendering the idea of soul and the idea of mind. To understand this we might have to really understand the historical significance of this text or the historical context of this text which is beyond the scope of this presentation.

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Stylistic choices:



Use of rhetorical question: (to critique institutions and social systems)

"can they be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?" (1796)

Use of analogy: (to argue for both theoretical and domestic level)

"the conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season why they ought to have arrived at maturity" (1796)



One of the rhetorical devices Wollstonecraft uses is the rhetorical questions itself she asks, a question that is asked for which the answer is not accepted. This is made to express opinions

that will be agreeable for the readers too and there will be a support of the readers because the question is such that answers cannot be expected while at the same time the questions are so direct and so grounded.

She critiques the institution of marriage and at the same time the inequality that is present between married couples through the question- "Can they be expected to govern a family with judgement, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?" This question condemns the idealised notion of beauty or the realm of beauty for a woman itself, especially among the unmarried women, which after a point the idea of beauty is irrelevant to their lives. And because they were so grounded in perfecting their own beauty they become unfit to take care of the family.

Another rhetorical device she uses is a lot of analogies and Wollstonecraft for example, for an instance, Wollstonecraft claims that no proper education in the girls resulted in their unhealthy minds. And she says, "The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased the fastidious eyes, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season they ought to have arrived at maturity."

This talks about how the woman becomes unfit after a point when she has children and she does not know how to grow them up. These rhetorical devices, the questions and the analogies or the metaphors, she does not really use metaphors, but it is more like the similes. She tries to explain a concept, comparing it with another concept, like the flower we just saw. And these devices allow the author to argue for, both theoretical concepts and at the same time, the domestic grounded experiences of the women.

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Different notions of reading the rhetorical style:

1) Anachronism-

Helen Cixous- women writings must be free from binaries and prejudices. "*Woman must write woman.*" (1976, 877)

2) Aesthetic monism-

Louis T Milic- Author's choice of style as deliberate (1965)

For Wollstonecraft, the term virtue in the Enlightenment influenced era is related to agency.

Luke Reddington- Wollstonecraft's polemic style allows her to be an Enlightenment intellectual; her tone is the stylistic equivalent of call to storm the Bastille in France. (2013)



There are two different notions of reading the rhetorical style, one is anachronism and the other one is called the aesthetic monism. When you read a text from the retrospective lens and situate the text outside the historical specificity it is an example of anachronism.

And the frequent question that is asked is the fairness of the retrospective projection of the text or the stress on the text, especially that which is of the 18th or the 17th century most of the times. And new literary theories diverge the readings from the historically recognised understandings and it is on this basis generally, feminist critiques offer radically different readings of literary texts that have been commented upon earlier or that have been already celebrated.

Their readings are mostly based on the premise that women have consistently been slandered and objectified in literature and have also been largely excluded from literary production and criticism. And therefore any texts written in any period or in any history must be read, must be criticised for the way they create the image of the woman.

And taking an example of Cixous, she urges that women should find their own way. Cixous urges women to find their own way of writing that is free from binaries. And at the same time, she also says that they should object to the prejudices that the women or that the male-dominated literary arena itself had established in the earlier traditions. This is from the work she published in 1976. So that is exactly why she talks about male-dominated literary establishment, that when reading this text is more relevant, because when Wollstonecraft published this book, published this tract, she had very few predecessors.

So Cixous argues or demands that women must write women. And any argument about the applicability of modern notion of style should turn to the validity of the underlying premises of the text. And the foundational premise in here is viewed through the writer's techniques or the style of writing itself and how the style affects the message through their rhetorical techniques or through the structure of the text itself sometimes.

And their style and meaning sometimes are way too closely related, and therefore they cannot be separated. And that is exactly why sometimes the style of the writing is inseparable from the meaning itself. And for example, in this text we saw earlier that Wollstonecraft hides her experience as a woman behind the walls of masculine rhetorical techniques of first-person speaker who is speaking detached, whose voice is detached from the experienced woman, the category which she is also part of.

Another method of looking at the rhetorical style is aesthetic monism, and most of the times, both anachronism and aesthetic monism are seen in the two different sides of a spectrum or they are seen opposing or contrastingly. And aesthetic monism is of the view that any writer should blindly adopt any organic theories of writing that exists and they should write whatever they feel and that the way they express their feelings are inherently meaningful and anything they say are supposed to be inherently meaningful.

However, when you see a literary text within the classical traditions, it allows the reader to use any theory that would help the reader to understand the effect of the author's subconscious on his or her art or text. At the same time, it assumes that author's choice of style was deliberate and therefore, it does not give space for doubt or ambiguity. Aesthetic monism is mostly related to Louis T. Milic and the explanation of aesthetic monism that I have taken is also from Milic's work, which was published in 1965.

In the analysis of Wollstonecraft's work, we see that she shifts from discussion about education for women to larger debates about the nature of women that is prevalent in England, especially or more broadly in European intellectual communities. She looks at the works produced or the contributions of Bacon, looks more into the works of Milton and Rousseau. And the history she deals with is very recent history if we actually see and therefore the understanding of the women or the Western thought of women's nature and role in society is also from that era.

She argues against the arguments on acquirement of virtue, which is very inherently masculine and she wants to oppose the arguments provided to bar any woman from

education. And for her Enlightenment influenced the meaning of the lexical term virtue and that is something or anything related to agency or self-actualization.

And this idea of virtue, she says, is constructed for just the masculine community or the male members of the society. And for the female to be able to accommodate the idea of virtue, they must start being educated and they must start adopting the skills of reasoning.

She argues, “If the women are not a swarm of ephemeral triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence?” Though she does not approve of the idea of innocence itself, that are being attributed to the women and therefore keeping them away.

One of the writers/critics wrote a book called *Fighting Styles*. Luke Reddington who is the author of the book, *Fighting Styles* published in 2013 argues that in her challenge of subservient representation of even Milton's *Paradise Lost*, her learned and polemic style allows her to be an enlightened individual, and that makes her masculine in that sense.

Reddington says that her style demands an answer and it presents a challenge which also at the same time displays her acumen. He goes on to say that Wollstonecraft's tone is the stylistic equivalent of the call to storm the Bastille in France. This is right before the France Revolution, the storming of the Bastille happened and that is supposed to be very violent, very forceful and very on the face and that is exactly what he says her work was to the time.

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Ad hominem- attack on man for their faulty logic (2013)

Reddington quotes Cixous:

"We've been able to possess anything only by flying; [in French, "to fly" has the double meaning "to steal"] we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers" (1976, p. 887 as quoted by 2013).

Miriam Brody on Wollstonecraft's techniques:

1. Wollstonecraft adopts and draws attention to her forthright style (in introduction).
2. She condemns the affected femininity just like her predecessors.
3. She described a healthy, effective, unaffected woman who matches men in their ability to exercise the 'masculine' traits of language. Within this category of 'genus' or the exceptional woman. (1996)



Building on the arguments of Reddington, Rousseau in one of his works says that with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour for which she gives as a response, "What nonsense! When will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject?" That, Reddington says, as an attack on man or provides the label, *ad hominem*.

Reddington notes that she attacks Rousseau and the propagators of rights of men as only for men for their faulty logic based on which they form that argument itself. And that she continues that in the insistence that virtue is a human nature, it must include all humans and not just men. He also says that Wollstonecraft uses this style to distance herself from women in general. And by this she also aligns herself more closely with the men with whom she seeks an audience.

She saw style as central to gender and she chose to adopt a socially solitary role for the sake of a rhetorical mission. It is believed that she wrote it in a style that would make her work more rationale and more political just so that she could have the men's audience. In a different sense, it is not an instructional manual just for the woman or it is not instructional in nature just for the women, but this is a critique and an instructional manual of the patriarchal society for the members who are propagating patriarchy, which is in the most cases men.

Although she says that it is inherently embedded within the women to allow themselves to be oppressed. And that could only change with co-education and similar education for both men

and women and responsible parenting from the side of mostly, especially from the side of women. Yes, so through her stylistic techniques she illustrates the hegemony within the society which is again getting reflected in her work. At the same time, she is trying to subvert that hegemony through her work.

Drawing a parallel to Cixous' undertaking on what kind of writing women writers should take, we see that Wollstonecraft's adoption of these techniques were justified as the right tools to accomplish the task at hand. Cixous' claim that women should consider themselves free to take any style from the works of male-dominated world of writing and then use it in their own way, Reddington believes is what Wollstonecraft has done.

And here quoting Cixous, "We have been able possess anything only by flying; [in French, to fly has the double meaning to steal] we have lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers". This pretty much gives what Cixous is trying to tell for the woman writers and this we also see is very common in Wollstonecraft's writing.

And another critique analyses Wollstonecraft's writing or the rhetoric used by Wollstonecraft as she participates in the masculine discourse. So she uses a very persuasive prose intended for the public arena. And to do this, she uses three techniques. Wollstonecraft adopts and draws attention to her forthright style.

For example, we saw in the introduction, she is trying to say how she is trying to do that. She does not just use the first-person speaker distance from the women, but she also shows that she is distancing herself very clearly in the introduction. And she also says, do not take me wrong but this is what exists.

Wollstonecraft condemns the affected femininity just like her very few predecessors of that same time, and in this way she is using the already existing rhetoric in the literary tradition. And another technique she uses is that she described a healthy, effective and unaffected woman who matches men in their ability to exercise the masculine traits of language.

Within this category or new category she created, she placed herself and she called this category *genus* or in a simpler term, 'the exceptional woman'. Here, she wanted everybody to be part of that category, but during her time she says that she is part of the category; and she wishes that everybody becomes a part of this category, so that not because the country would move forward or not because she wants to subvert the patriarchal society alone, but also

because she does not want the adult woman category itself to stagnate and she wants progress for them or their living experiences.

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- Universality:

Broadview press, editors DL Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf debate and discuss the charges against the work-

Modern movements are foregrounded in revolutionaries' universalist claims

Her text as part of Republican traditions- both reason and passion; both rights and utility; ambivalence

Aporia or disjunct tensions inherent in the text- hermeneutic potentials

Her text as an example of Philosophical, ethical and political modernism

"necessity to go back to first principles in search of most simple truths, and to dispute with some prevailing prejudices every inch of ground" (1998, 5)



So going back to the criticisms that the work received from the feminist literary theory mostly, most generally, is the idea of universality within the text. So in the introduction of the text, she says she is a spokesperson for all the women and that her ability to write fancily in arguing for substantiate ideas will influence the reputation of the women at collective. So in the sense that it might either result in a rise of the reputation or because of the style she took up, it will reduce their reputation as women itself, which we see that later in the times when due to her life history, her work started to have less and less relevance to the society.

Two of the editors of the Broadview press try, when they were formulating another edition of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the editors DL Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf debate and discuss the charges, which are generally against the work. And in the political idea of the work itself, the major challenge or the major charge against the work is that it is using lot of Universalist claims. And at the same time, they argue that most of the modern movements would have been foregrounded in some revolutionary's Universalist claims.

Yet, the universalism that Wollstonecraft exhibits has its own limits. The one she claims, the one she grounds herself in has its limits. For example, when she is talking about the education of all men, both children and woman in a similar or in an equal setting, she also talks about the social classes, which are prevalent and she never talks about the inherent inequality within the social classes either when she is talking.

So she says that they might want to take up vocational training for the profession they might want to continue as part of a low class they might be and they should be allowed to do that. And for the women, she says that they need to be educated, they need to become like men, but not only because they want to be part of the political sphere or be part of the conversations in the political sphere, but mainly because they have to be able to raise better children. They have to be able to produce better citizens.

And this could be seen in two lights, one that she genuinely believes that, that is the reason or the second reason could be that, that is the first step into the bigger progress that she looks at as the first step towards the betterment of women's lives.

So going back to the comments by Macdonald and Scherf, they say that her text can be placed in the Republican traditions, and because she sees or recognises both the reason and the passion, at the same time she argues for both rights and utility. And in the case of utility, when she is talking about the middle-class women, she generally argues because she wants them to be independent financially.

So although she is grounded, her works present an ambivalence in the ideas that are very prevalent for any political thinker. And the fact that they say this also means that she was never considered as anybody, as a political philosopher or political thinker. So they say, the project of thinking about Universalist claims and thus about the concept of rights, however plunges us into a dialogue or an aporia between situational difference and the language of the universal right.

The unresolvable internal disjunction or the tension inherent in her work received a lot of confrontations. This unresolvable tension, which is inherent in her work, received a lot of feminist confrontations itself. And this is what I was trying to explain some time back when I was saying that she was trying to balance the idea of women being educated for themselves and at the same time educating themselves as part of providing better citizens.

So in another sense, she also uses religious ideas as grounds for an argument, and especially in the concerns of rights and justice and to attest. So, by this the recognition she receives is that of a hagiographic approach. And this means that she just does not provide views as a author or just a woman, but she also makes the work relevant by this approach she holds like by providing more ambiguities and providing more tensions within her work. And these tensions will allow future interpretative possibilities for what the work might have meant. And especially by situating it to a historical era and social era.

So this internal disjunction that the editors are trying to talk about when she is making the ideas of rights, she also talks about how the ideas of faith or the ideas of justice is very related to Christian idea of justice, which is that also to that of the Protestant England ideas. And therefore that makes her less universal in understanding, which although could be considered as making her irrelevant for the current times, the work itself by providing this tension between placing the ideas of universal right and with the ideas of grounding what she means by equality creates an internal tension, which provides for further discussions, which, as the time moves forward, can be used to progress the whole category of woman itself.

And these tensions are not unique to her works, they are very much situated in the literary period of the production in the 18th century. And the recognition and the exploration of these tensions in the work will lead to hermeneutic or interpretative potentials, otherwise lost to a less critical or less historically oriented reading. By creating this tension within the text, the passages become more loaded sometimes and providing for a very heavy connotative meaning. When read through a less critical lens, it becomes more universalized, and when universalized the whole tension is ignored and that, the ignoring of the tension makes the text more irrelevant.

Graham Allen is one of the critics of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* or a reviewer, who says that *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is a fascinating example as a political or philosophical or at the same time ethical modernism. He says, “Found on the necessity to go back to the first principles in search of the most simple truth, and to dispute with some prevailing prejudices every inch of the ground, the text rests on the projection of aims rather than tracing of origins on a logic of becoming rather than a secure authoritative position of such first principles”.

Although when the feminist criticisms are mostly based on the fact that it sometimes it is being claimed as a foundational text some of the critiques also come forward and say that it is not a very bound text. It allows for more interpretative possibilities, it allows you to see how it uses modernist techniques. She generally uses modernist techniques and here, they pretty much mean the emotional outbursts that pop up and take a peek, and through which she allows the voice of herself as a woman, loud into the political tract, which is usually gendered masculine.

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"Wollstonecraft's text breaks through into, and manages to speak of, a beyond it cannot ground or authorize. These moments are stylized in terms of a temperamental 'romanticism' standing in forms of tension to a committed 'rationalism'." (1998)

"The relevant Wollstonecraft, the figure who is something more than the 'dead mother' of a supposedly incremental tradition of feminist thought, is, an author who was, paradoxically, entombed within and yet liberated by the confines of her revolutionary period of history; a moved, and yet because of that a situated, spectator. This recognizes Wollstonecraft as the rebellious 'daughter' of her times; a perspective which is as important as that more commonplace figuration: 'mother of feminism'." (1998)



He argues that Wollstonecraft's works attack theories of origination, such as Rousseau's work. Thinking the inhuman, as coined by Lyotard is the thinking of the possibility of the thought outside of the system, which constructs the thinker. Thus, the thinking that is squarely placed within the system, which we see is the case with Wollstonecraft's work, is a momentary discovery which threatens to rupture the systematic thinking or an ideological thinking it is actually supposed to support.

This is an act of subversion. And by critiquing the patriarchal hegemony through a masculine discourse, she propagates the ideas of letting go of those social conditions. And by that, she is subverting the whole idea of masculinity, idea of gendering and the idea of social constructions; masculinity and the patriarchal hegemony through social construction of how a woman should be.

Allen also continues that Wollstonecraft's work thought beyond the inequalities and prejudices of the system within which it was generated and yet in struggling to think this beyond, Wollstonecraft based her notions of transcendence on the very terms and foundations of the ideology she was attempting to escape.

"Wollstonecraft's text breaks through into and manages to speak of, a beyond it cannot ground or authorise. These moments are stylized in terms of temperamental 'romanticism' standing in forms of tension to a committed 'rationalism'". This exactly means the tension between the rational voice and the emotional outbursts, and therefore by doing this he reviews Wollstonecraft's work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, as such.

“The relevant Wollstonecraft, the figure who is something more than the dead mother of a supposedly incremental tradition of feminist thought, is an author who was paradoxically entombed within and yet liberated by the confines of her revolutionary period of history; a moved, and yet because of that, a situated spectator. This recognizes Wollstonecraft as the rebellious ‘daughter of her times’, and a perspective, which is as important as that more commonplace figuration: ‘mother of feminism’”.

So he says that by looking at her as the ‘mother of feminism’, there is a necessity to bound the text, necessity to make it very concrete, necessity of making it very inclusive of every possible notions and ideas of women's experience. However, he says, instead she could be looked at as a ‘rebellious daughter of her times’ by which he means that even with the constraints of her period of history, she used the discourse that is associated with masculinity to talk about the tradition that has been progressing since then of feminist thought.

I would like to conclude the presentation with a suggestion for further reading. A chapter titled, “The Problem of Cultural Bias: Wollstonecraft, Mill and Western Narratives of Women's Progress” from the book *Wollstonecraft, Mill and Women's Human Rights* by Eileen Hunt Botting. This work allows you to understand the idea of universality and the idea of the difference between the Western women's progress and the idea of human rights itself. Thank you.