

Literal Texts

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GOOD MORNING!

A Vindication of the Rights of Women Introduction

I will do a bit of a revision to the Vindication of the Rights of Women. Who can remind me what this is about?

Student: The right of education of women in the 18th century.

Professor: What education? Is it the education of schools?

Student: The conventions.

Professor: The upbringing of a woman, that is the education. What else? What is she advocating for?

Student: The right of women to have a voice.

Student: Trying to change the societal view towards women.

Student: Equality with men.

Professor: Is she asking to be equal?

Students: No.

Professor: What is she asking for?

Student: To treat a woman as a human being, not as an object.

Professor: Yes, this is when it comes to the role of women in alluring men.

The introduction of the book sets out her view that neglect of girls' education is largely to blame for the conditions of adult women. So, she is blaming adult women in an indirect way that the conditions that women are living in is because of the adult women. There is passive

reaction to the statuesque which is the convention and the accepted norm when it comes to how women should behave and how women should act in such a society.

They are treated as subordinate beings who care only about being attractive, elegant, and meek. They buy into this oppression and they do not have the tools to vindicate their fundamental rights or the awareness that they are in such a condition. So, they are behaving in a passive attitude. They are behaving passively in order for them to appear as elegant, attractive, meek. Meek here means shy which is one of the causes that is continuing in this vicious circle of oppression and submission.

Now, she referred to the volumes or the books of genius. The book that Mary wrote was directed to two men in specific who wrote and suggested that women must only concern themselves with domestic affairs and stay out of the political arena. So, this is the main cause that Mary was writing for. She was addressing and writing back at two men who were the French Charles and the other, I cannot recall. But they were saying that women should stay at home, and they should not concern themselves with political causes or whatsoever. And politically, what do you think it means? Does it have to do with politics?

Student: To have votes.

Professor: Votes and? Does it have to do with how the country is running? Political here doesn't mean that she is advocating for something that has to do with how the government is being run. Political means to have a cause. When you have a cause, it means you are advocating for something. Here, her cause is to advocate for women's rights. It is not political in the traditional sense of the word. It's to have something to advocate and fight for. It can be freedom. It can be liberty of women. It can be whatever you like.

Vindication of the Rights of Women stands on its own as a mainstream in university courses on women's history and feminism. So, this text is being studied at universities in Europe and all over the world as the cornerstone when it comes to feminism and when it comes to women writers who were advocating for women's rights. The text has become one of the most influential points of departure in Western canon. It

means that when it comes to feminism, again, and the writings of women, this text is highly significant and highly important.

In the text, she starts by expressing melancholy of emotions, of sorrowful indignation. What does indignation mean? To be frustrated with something. Melancholy means sadness or sorrowful. Setting a tone of both frustration and urgency. So, she is frustrated as a woman when it comes to women's rights and she is advocating it in an urgent terms. This reveals her deep concern for the state of humanity, particularly the subjugation and the degradation of women. So, the humanity in general when it comes to their attitude and behavior towards women especially here, of course, our context is the English society. The juxtaposition of sorrow and indignation reflects her empathetic yet competitive approach to addressing systematic inequalities. She is feisty. She is saying that she is eager to fight for the rights of women and she is also empathetic about the systematic inequality when it comes to the society that she is living in. What do you think the sort of ideals in the 18th century that they were promoting as men or as society? What sort of ideals that used to be in the 18th century?

Student: Patriarchy.

Professor: Patriarchy is when you have superiority and inferiority, yes. Men have more authority than women, or feeling superiority over women.

Student: Inequality between women and men.

Professor: You think so? She is advocating for equality. However, such a society would ask for the quite opposite.

During the 18th century, the enlightenment ideals of reason and the progress were shaping discourse. These principles were often applied exclusively to men. So, she is saying here that a woman is only appreciated for her beauty. The enlightenment ideals, of course, are highlighting the reason and progress and everything that is concerning with intellectuality, but they are only exclusive to men. She is positioning herself as a critic of this hypocrisy, emphasizing the need of women's inclusion in the pursuit of civilization and progress. So, she is saying that a woman in the 18th century society is only

concerned with her beauty, and the way she would behave. However, at that time, the enlightenment ideals also highlight reason, progress, and intellectuality. So, it is creating some sort of hypocrisy or some sort of duality that would only exclude women from such criteria. A woman is only accepted in such a society only when she is appreciating of appearance, and a woman who concerns herself with intellectuality and reason is excluded. So, this is some sort of historical background and relating it to the text.

She is saying that the root of misery is neglected education. Education here means neglected education of her fellow creatures as the primary cause of societal misery.

She particularly emphasizes the determinative effects of women's lack of education, suggesting that their intellectual and moral deficiencies are not inherent, but rather a consequence of systematic neglect. So, it is not that I am not intellectual because I am a woman, but because such a society would tell me that I should not focus on my intellect or my career or whatsoever. I should focus on my appearance.

Student: What do you mean by neglected education?

Professor: It means the sort of books that were promoted or were spread between people and what these books advocate for. And it means the upbringing of a society. It doesn't mean the actual math and science. It's the way a woman is being brought up in a society.

Then, the writer goes to the metaphor of flower. Who can remind me of the explanation of this metaphor? No one.

Student: We didn't focus on the text because we prepared My Last Duchess.

Professor: We'll take My Last Duchess for next time, and we'll leave the Profession for Women by Virginia Woolf. So, one text is dropped.

Student: But My Last Duchess is too long.

Professor: It is a dramatic monologue. It's some sort of narrative. It wouldn't be as heavy as Alexander Pope.

So, Mary was saying that a woman's concern is only her appearance and her beauty. But she has the capacity and the ability and the potential to be more than that. She compares women to flowers planted in soil that is too rich. Why do you think it is too rich? She used the

metaphor of women being planted in too rich soil to critique the way women were raised in her time. She is arguing that women were treated like delicate ornamental plants that are overprotected and indulged and encouraged to focus only on beauty and pleasing men. When such characteristics are the things that are focused on, you have too rich soil for women because they exclude intellectuality and reason. They make them only focus on the appearance. So, instead of being allowed to grow strong through education, and challenge the real life situations and conditions, she is brought up in a very delicate too rich a soil, overprotective condition and society.

Rich soil can sometimes make flowers or plants weak by providing too much nourishment without requiring them to develop deep and strong roots. The author is applying the idea of women that you need to be aware of such environments, and you need to wake up, suggesting that the excessive luxury and ease. You don't need to do anything. It's overprotective environment. It made them fragile and dependent rather than resilient and capable. So, this is the metaphor. She believed that women like plants need a balance, intellectual and moral challenges that would help them grow into strong independent individuals rather than being ornamental and weak.

Student: I didn't understand the metaphor.

Professor: She is saying that the soil, if it is too rich, and here it's a metaphor of the society that would overprotect women, it wouldn't allow women to grow deep, and deep here refers to deep intellectual reason, or develop a career. They would only allow her, as a woman, to develop her appearance, to focus on it, and leave other things to men. This is the metaphor.

The impact of Enlightenment ideals:

What were the Enlightenment ideals at that time?

We have to contrast between the Romanticism as a movement that advocated for individuality and the Enlightenment movement that used to be because of the Industrial Revolution, and because of many innovations and innovative ideas that used to be there at that time.

Enlightenment advocating for reason, intellectuality, innovation, and focusing on the mind.

I'm going here an idea by idea in the text. Mary is critiquing this whole system of education propagated by male authors. So, she's here critiquing the education in the book of geniuses. These writers, she argued, treat women as objects of desire rather than as rational beings, prioritizing their roles as alluring mistresses over affectionate wives and rational mothers. This focus on superficiality distorts women's understanding and self-worth, perpetuating their subjugation. So, because they are only concerned about women being alluring and seductive over being affectionate wives or rational mothers, this sort of idea would focus only on the superficiality of a woman, would undermine the self-worth of a woman, and would perpetuate and would promote subjugation.

She calls out male dominance in shaping women's education and laments its effect. So, what were men advocating for at that time?

Student: Beauty and physical aspects.

Professor: Okay. What else?

Student: Alluring mistresses.

Student: Affectionate wives and rational mothers.

Professor: Limiting them in certain roles. What else? Being passive and submissive or subjugating them to their desire and needs.

Her critique of men of genius, here in the text, who promote these harmful ideals underscores the complexity of even intellectual elites in perpetuating women's oppression. So, she is writing back at the intellectual elites who wrote about women, but in a way that would her society accept her writings.

She's quite clever and quite aware of her audience. She knows that such a society wouldn't accept.

Student: A pun?

Professor: Not a pun, but a witty way, she knows how to play it. So, she's writing back at the intellectual elites who promote harmful ideals when it comes to women, her beauty, and her exclusive role in the political arena that woman is not needed.

After that she points out that women are conditioned to prioritize inspiring love over earning respect. She argues that this diminishes their potential to cultivate virtues and abilities.

Respect in her framework is tied to rationality and intellectual engagement, whereas love, as society defines it for women, is rooted in physical attraction and fleeting emotions. The society would only focus on their physical attraction, and would like for a woman to focus only on physical attraction. As opposed to Mary's vindication, which is saying that a woman should focus on her intellectuality and on her rationality, and this is what earns a woman respect, not her beauty.

Now, her feminist critique of patriarchy. She highlights how women dissatisfied with their natural pre-eminence. What is pre-eminence? It means superiority. Men are superior to women, but they promote this idea because of their natural pre-eminence, superiority when it comes to physical strength. So, she highlights how men manipulate societal structures because they have the physical strength. They manipulate societal structure to subjugate women further. The artificial lowering of women's status, ensuring that they remain alluring objects rather than enduring relationship as friends and equals.

The idea when it comes to the Muslim fashion, and fashion here doesn't have to do with clothes, but the attitude. What is she saying concerning this idea?

Student: In Islam, women are subordinate beings, not as a part of the human species.

Student: She has misconceptions about Islam.

Professor: Do you think it is the case?

Student: No.

Professor: So, it's the 18th century orientalist stereotype. Are you familiar with the word orientalist?

Student: المستشرقين

Professor: Okay, but I need more ideas. What were the ideas of the orientalist? Those who came from the west and studied the orient. So, they came to us, like, Napoleon Bonaparte, he came with a bunch of scientists to study Egypt, and they wrote volumes about Egypt. So, they had misconceptions. They interpreted the land and the people according to their perception and to the filters in their minds. So, they had misconceptions about the land, the people, and religions. These ideas were later created to be stereotypes, and these stereotypes right now are used. Have you ever seen such a thing in a movie?

Stereotypes is صورة نمطية. These stereotypes are still being promoted.

So, Mary mentions of true Muslim fashion reflects 18th century orientalist stereotypes, and her own Eurocentric biases. What is Eurocentric? Eurocentric is something that has to do with the place. يعني تحيزات أوروبية So, while it serves to criticize how women are subordinated in patriarchal systems, it also reveals the limits of her universalism, as she unfairly uses Islam as a stand-in for oppressive gender norms. So, she is using Islam as the thing to compare or to use for the English society to understand how they are subordinating women and oppressing women. So, she is comparing Islam to her society and their behavior, and she is saying that you are like the Muslim culture that is treating women as subordinate with oppression.

Student: Is that the dignified distinction she mentioned?

Professor: Yes, when improvable racism is allowed to be the dignified distinction, which raises women above the brute feature and puts a natural scepter in a female. When the scientists came to Egypt, this is a very important event, they saw women with نقاب, they saw women with certain way of clothing, so they had an image, and this image was promoted. So, she is comparing that to their society and saying that you are like the Muslim society that is objectifying women.

Student: Why did they take this stereotype about us while they have the same oppression back then?

Professor: The attitude back then when it comes to the Orient, and when it comes to imagining the Orient is always inferior. When it comes to the Orient, the adjectives that you would relate to as inferiority, as passivity, as ignorance, as submission, and all these negative adjectives. We can't blame the author here, but blame who's promoting subordinate adjectives to this particular land or this particular people at that time. So, when she is saying that Islam is treating women as subordinate beings, it is quite justified because the political discourse is doing that.

Mary suggests that men possess physical superiority as a law of nature. This is something out of hand. They are superior because this is their nature. This is how men are created which she describes as a noble privilege. However, she challenges the idea that this physical difference justifies broader inequalities in intellectual and moral realms by addressing the biological argument that men are superior to women because of the way biology works. She undermines one of the most common justifications for women's subjugation in her time. She is

saying in a way that men use this argument to subjugate women further. We are superior physically, so by extension we should be superior in all areas of life. This is a very important idea.

Student: Is she critiquing men for having an appearance because they are men and they are superior than women because of that?

Professor: No. You got me wrong there. She is saying that men use the argument that they are physically superior and manipulate this argument to further subjugate women.

So, Mary demonstrates strategic restraints by stating she does not intend to stir up violently the debated question of women's equality. So, she is playing here because she knows her audience and her readers. She is quite aware of the Englishmen and how severe they are in criticism. This calculated move reflects her awareness of her audience, male readers, who might dismiss her work if she appears too radical. If she is trying to say that we should be equal from the first word, this text wouldn't be accepted. She's manipulating. She's maneuvering her way.

Yet by stating her opinion afterward, she subtly asserts her feminist stance, refusing to ignore the issue entirely. So, she is subtly; she is hinting at it and she is stating it. And with doing so, she is asserting her feminist stance that women should be equal, not because men are superior when it comes to their physical strength, but women too should have an equality when it comes to all areas of life.

Her critique of how men regard females rather as women than human creatures is a powerful statement of the dehumanization and objectification of women within patriarchal society. By reducing women to their roles as wives, mothers, or objects of desire, men deny them the recognition of their shared humanity and the opportunity to develop their intellectual and moral potential. So, Mary's call for equality grounded in reason and education remains a foundational argument in feminist thought, urging society to move beyond gender roles to embrace the full humanity of all individuals. So, she is saying please do not limit women to their gender roles as mothers, as objects of desire, as wives. A woman is more capable than that. She can be a politician, and she can be whatever she likes. Above all, she has to be treated as a human, not as a woman.

All in all, a Vindication of the Rights of Women encapsulates her incisive critique of women's subjugation and her call for educational reform, and education here it means the way women were brought up, the upbringing of women.

By addressing societal structures, patriarchal norms, and gender expectations, she builds a compelling argument for women's equality rooted in reason and virtue. So, a woman's worth and value is rooted in her virtue and reason, not in her beauty. This is her argument.

Her use of metaphors, rhetorical strategies, the way she manipulated her way, and appeals to enlightenment principles – and the enlightenment principles were reason, intellectuality, and innovation – ensures that her critique remains persuasive and logical.

We were debating about this last time:

But not content with this natural pre-eminence, men endeavour to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment; and women, intoxicated by the adoration which men, under the influence of their senses, pay them, do not seek to obtain a durable interest in their hearts, or to become the friends of the fellow creatures who find amusement in their society.

The fellow creatures here are men.

She's writing for women to be treated as human beings. This is the base of her argument. But, of course, she is also advocating for equality because she is saying that a woman is capable if she is given the chance. That's it.

There is a question on page no.55:

- Compare with classmates and instructors the theme and tone of this work and of Pope's Epistle to a Lady.

Professor: What is a tone? What does it mean?

Student: Sounds?

Student: The style.

Student: The whole feature of the text.

Professor: Okay, let's read it.

Tone: By identifying the author's attitude towards his or her subject, we identify the tone of his work. Students often confuse Tone with Mood. The distinction may seem like splitting hairs. However, students

should keep in mind that mood is more symbiotically connected to the setting (time and place of the work)

Leave mood aside. Tone is the author's attitude. It's not the way he/she says it. It's not about the pronunciation of the words. It's about the author's position when it comes to this particular subject.

Mary's position or stance or attitude towards women is positive. Vis-a-vis, Alexander Pope's is negative. Tone means attitude, position, and stance.

Themes:

- The nature of women:

Student: Pope is secretly critiquing women and the societal norms in that era. Mary is critiquing society also, but in a positive way.

Professor: So, when it comes to women, how did she view them and how Pope viewed women? Can you compare and contrast?

Student: He's making a contradiction. He's saying that women are changeable and fickle. Here, she sees women as subjective to men.

Professor: However, the core argument. What is Pope advocating? That women are fickle and changeable and cannot be trusted. In contrast to Mary, who is saying that no.

Student: They can be rational.

Professor: Yes, thank you so much. What else?

Student: Was that his opinion?

Professor: He's stating that with society, and Mary is stating his position.

Student: But what about Pope?

Professor: He critiqued society.

Student: I mean what was his opinion?

Professor: Most women have characters, but these characters are too extreme. They are either Madonna or whore.

Student: Women can be rational, and have nobler ambitions by their abilities and virtues. So, Mary saw that they are rational creatures, and have the same mentality like men. So, they should have the same rights. For Pope, women were changeable. You can't trust them.

Professor: Yes, thank you so much. Mary is critiquing her society. She is saying that women are treated as irrational and only in a superficial attitude that focuses only on her appearance and beauty.

Wollstonecraft asserts that women's perceived weaknesses are not innate but socially constructed.

Professor: What does it mean to be socially constructed?

Student: By society.

Professor: Okay.

She critiques the education and social systems that reduce women to superficial beings focused on beauty and pleasing men. Her goal is to reclaim women's humanity, presenting them as rational beings deserving of equality and respect.

Professor: What does it mean to reclaim?

Student: To take it back.

Professor: Yes. So, rather than treating them as alluring mistresses, they should be treated as rational beings or affectionate wives and rational mothers.

In *Epistle to a Lady*, Pope adopts a satirical tone to explore the nature of women, portraying them as inherently flawed, fickle, and inconsistent.

What does it mean to inherently? They are flawed by nature.


While his depiction is poetic and witty, it reflects a deeply ingrained patriarchal view, presenting women's behaviour as determined by their nature rather than societal influences.

Ingrained means something that is rooted. So, Pope is focusing on the nature of women, and saying that it is deeply rooted in women that they are fickle, and they are inconsistent.

• **Education and Virtue:**

Wollstonecraft argues that women's lack of access to education is the primary reason for their supposed inferiority. She emphasizes the importance of reason and virtue, believing that these qualities can only flourish when women are educated and treated as equals to men.

The sum up of her text: Yes, the upbringing of a woman is very important, but if you are to advocate for women to be equal, then you are saying that she could be a politician. Can a woman be a politician without education? This is by extension.

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Believing that these qualities can only flourish when women are educated and treated as equals to men.

Professor:

Treated is educational which is the upbringing, and educated is schooled. What did Pope say? Does he advocate for women's rights and education?

Student: No, women are weak, and changeable by nature.

Professor: Yes, fickle and changeable.

Student: They are black and white.

Student: Two extremes.

Professor: Okay.

Pope, on the other hand, does not advocate for women's education or development. Instead, he critiques women for their lack of virtue and inconsistency, without addressing the societal structures that confine them to frivolous roles. His view reflects a deterministic attitude, implying that women are incapable of achieving virtue on par with men.

Professor: Deterministic means it's already determined. This is the implication. While Pope didn't address the societal structures, Mary addressed them with the systematic way of dealing with women that confines them to specific roles.

Student: Where did the last idea come from?

Professor: This is you detecting when you analyze and interpret what he is referring to after all.

• Relationships Between Men and Women:

Wollstonecraft critiques the way patriarchal society reduces relationships to transactions where women seek love and admiration rather than mutual respect.

She focuses on her beauty rather than focusing on nurturing her potentials.

She advocates for relationships based on intellectual companionship and equality, challenging the idea of women as "alluring mistresses."

Now, Pope:

Pope depicts relationships between men and women as adversarial or farcical.

Student: Farcical.

Professor: Catch her before she falls. It is from farce. Do you know the meaning of the word? It is similar to clowning. Women are clowning.

So, he depicts relationship between men and women as farcical. It is not something you can depend on.

Women are seen as manipulative, and men as victims of their whims. His tone is mocking and cynical, portraying relationships as a theatre of vanity and superficiality rather than mutual respect or partnership.

Do you know the meaning of the word cynical? It means mocking. Portraying relationships as a theatre. This is why the word farcical is here. His tone is farcical and satirical.

Tones

1. Wollstonecraft: Passionate and Persuasive

Wollstonecraft's tone is earnest, rational, and reformist.

Professor: Do you know the meaning of the word earnest? Honest and serious. Reformist?

Student: اصلاحية

Professor:

Yes, she is trying to reform society.

She writes with a sense of urgency and moral purpose, blending sorrow and indignation to appeal to her readers' sense of justice.

So, there is justice in her cause. This is the political cause here.

Her arguments are driven by Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress, seeking to uplift women and society as a whole.

So, she is saying that you should reform your society's convention and attitude towards women because this adheres to the enlightenment ideals which men at that time were promoting for or were advocating for. So, there is some sort of duality here. There is some sort of hypocrisy when men advocate for reason and progress and at the same time they are saying no, women should be excluded of this.

Mary sought to uplift women and society as a whole. Uplift means to transcend or to ascend. She sought to improve women's status culturally, economically, and politically. So, her tone is passionate and persuasive.

2. Pope: Satirical and Cynical

Pope's tone is satirical, witty, and often derisive. He critiques women's behaviour through caricature, presenting them as absurdly vain, irrational, and inconsistent.

He presented women as inconsistent and fickle, and he portrayed them as some sort of caricatures because they are too extreme. They are not like women.

While his poetic skill and humour make the critique engaging, his tone lacks the constructive energy of Wollstonecraft's, leaning instead into mockery.

So, he's not constructing in the terms that he is giving a critique that is constructive, but it's mockery.

Mary's prose is dense with philosophical arguments and metaphorical critiques. Metaphorical critiques because she used the flower metaphor. Drawing from Enlightenment principles to advocate for societal reform, she writes with an explicit purpose to challenge the status quo and promote gender equality. The status quo is something that is norm, or that is the convention of the society.

Pope is highly structured, elegant, and satirical, using rhyming couplets to deliver biting observations. However, his critique lacks depth and introspection, as he does not question the societal forces shaping women's behavior. His approach is more entertainment-driven than reformist.

So, Mary is a reformist, and Pope is more entertainment-driven in his poem.

Student: What's the meaning of entertainment-driven?

Professor: It's written for the sake of pleasure. It's just to entertain. Sometimes, Shakespeare writes to entertain.

The final idea here:

Mary's work is underpinned by a belief in progress, equality, and the transformative power of education. She envisions a better future where women can fully participate in intellectual and moral life, arguing that their development is essential for the advancement of society.

Pope's work reflects the patriarchal assumptions of his time, portraying women as inherently flawed and irredeemable. He seems to accept these limitations as a fixed reality, offering no vision for change or improvement. This is the core philosophy of their texts.