

Literal Texts

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GOOD MORNING!

The Romantic Period

The Romantic period is marked with the 18th century period by the intellectual and the social transformation. So, it's not just a transitional era; there is an intellectual and social transformation throughout Europe. It didn't only center in England; it spread throughout Europe. It was driven by three significant revolutions:

1. **The American Revolution**
2. **The French Revolution**
3. **The Industrial Revolution**

They were crucial and very important in shaping the modern consciousness. Modern here is not in the sense that it is the 20th century; we call the 20th century modern. We use the word modern to describe the previous century in the sense that it is new; it comes with new inventions and innovations. So, the revolutions played a crucial role in shaping modern consciousness. We often refer to the 18th century as the birth of modern.

❖ The American Revolution:

It's originated as a colonial rebellion. What does that mean? Who rebelled against whom?

Student: Native people in the American colonies against the monarchy of England

Student: They are not talking about native, but about English-speaking colonies which are subjected to the king of England.

Professor: So, we have to differentiate between the native people who lived in America, and the people who conquered America. As we all know, Britain, Spain, and other countries in Europe conquered America and had colonies there. So, because of their strict rules and their political ties to Britain, for example, or Spain, there were quite dissatisfaction with the political scene there. They used to pay taxes and to have their rules come from England, for example, or Spain. So, they were really dissatisfied with the situation. So, what happened?

Student: They rebelled against the taxes imposed by the crown.

Professor: So, they rebelled against King George III. In the case of England, they fought for independence. It's a very famous revolution. There were hundreds of articles written for the sake of independence. There is an article called, "For God's Sake, Let's Have an Independence," which fought for the American independence and to be separated and isolated from the British crown or the British royal regime.

Student: By English-speaking subjects, they meant the American one in England?

Professor: The colonies who were speaking English in America: As you all know, Columbus found America.

Student: What were their nationalities?

Professor: They could be Spanish, German, French, etc. because as you all know, people fled the strict regime in the European countries to America to find freedom. They were asking for freedom; they always called it the country of freedom. So, because of their strict political regime in Europe, they fled to America to find a safer place, or a place where they can feel liberated politically and economically because America is a very rich land. What happened? Those who fled to America still had a political ties to the countries they fled from. In a way or another, they repeated the same cycle, the same restriction, and the same oppression. There was a repeated oppression and repression. So, they called for independence politically.

Student: So, when you say English speakers, it doesn't have to mean native English.

Professor: No, the people who fled were not merely British. They were from all over Europe. But when they had to escape to America, they had to speak English in order for them to have a common language. Are you familiar with the series called 1883? It's a very good series which talks about the immigration from Europe to America, and you can get a fully grasped idea of that process and how frustrated they were because of the European repressed regime.

Student: What do we mean by political ties?

Professor: Political ties here are الروابط السياسية; it means that when you rule a certain land, you have to adhere to certain rules. For example, here in Syria, we have to adhere to certain political rules in order to live in such a land. Such political ties were forwarded or were transported with the people who escaped to America.

Student: They were from different countries.

Professor: Yes. However, they were under the rule of the large colonies like Britain or Spain.

Student: So, after the discovery of America, it was colonized?

Professor: Yes, it was colonized.

Student: Can I rephrase it?

Professor: Yes?

Student: The English-speaking subject of England could be Spanish or, I don't know, over Europe.

Professor: The English-speaking subject in the colonies in America. People who lived in Europe escaped to America. They were not merely British; they were not merely from England. They were from Spain, France, Germany, and all over Europe. So, those who fled had to communicate and they found that English is the language that could be used in order to communicate with others. They agreed between each other to use the English language, so it's called the English speaking colonies. It's not because they were English, but because they spoke in English. They rebelled against King George. Do you know who were the people who escaped?

Student: Some of them were criminals.

Professor: Some of them used to be criminals, yes. So, the colonies or let's say Britain used to send the criminals to America, so most of them were criminals.

Student: What do we mean by the new world?

Professor: America was called the new world because it was recently discovered.

So, the American Revolution originated as a colonial rebellion against the rule of King George III of England. The conflict began primarily due to taxation policies imposed by the British crown without representation for the colonists. So, they rebelled because of the large amount of taxes they had to pay for the British crown, and they were frustrated and dissatisfied with the economic abuse they used to get from the British crown. They had to rebel against it; it climaxed into a war of independence fought by the American colonies against Britain. Because the British army was there, there had to be a war between the colonies, the people who lived in the colonies and the British army until they get the independence. The revolution led to the establishment of the United States of America, marking the first successful breakaway of colonies from a European power. This is very important.

What were the ideals of this revolution? What were they advocating for?

Student: Freedom and independence

Professor: Yes, and a very important thing, what is it?

Student: Equality.

Professor: No, democracy. So, the ideas of freedom, self-governance, and democracy that emerged from this revolution influenced political thought worldwide. So, because of the American revolution, who opposed the European regime, these ideas such as freedom, self-governance and democracy influenced Europe back and shaped the Romantic era. That's a very important idea here too.

❖ **The French revolution:**

Professor: Tell me about it.

Student: It was against the monarchy, and the ending was gruesome.

Professor: So, the French revolution (1789-1799) lasted for 10 years. It's considered one of the most radical and impactful revolutions in European history which led to overthrow of the monarchy.

Student: What do you mean by radical?

Professor: Radical means it's very extreme, or it stumbles things up.

Student: جزري

Professor: Yes, because here we are talking about monarchy, and the poor people in France were rebelling against the monarchy, so it was very radical, as we say, 180 degree. It led to overthrow of the French monarchy which had been one of the most powerful monarchies in Europe. Are you familiar with Mary Antoinette?

Student: Yes, about cake,

Professor: Although it's misquoted, and she didn't say that. However she is famous with the quote that says, "Let them eat cake." Unlike the American revolution which was about independence, the French revolution was about restructuring society from within. It is political; however, it's to restructure the society from within, not from outside. They didn't have an external intervention.

What French ideals were introduced? Liberty, equality, and fraternity. Fraternity means to love the other human, aiming to create a more just and equal society. So, they were advocating for liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Initially inspired other European nations, but as the revolution became violent, it was called the reign of terror. Because of the amount of people who were killed, many supporters became disillusioned.

Student: Why did it turn into a violent one?

Professor: Because people sought revenge, and they were really bloodthirsty. It was very extreme. They wanted to topple everything. They wanted to have a black or white; they saw people as black or white: either 100% good or 100% bad. People who were poor saw the rich people as 100% the enemy. It was very violent revolutionary.

There were politicians who were very corrupt and who sought political titles, so you can add to that. It's possible in all revolutions. You can see our revolution; however, our case is different. The political turmoil eventually led to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte, who later reshaped Europe, not only France, because of his occupations of other countries.

Student: What do they mean by "the atrocities of the first few years disillusioned many of its enthusiasts?"

Professor: The people who rebelled against the monarchy were advocating for liberty, equality and fraternity. However, they were disillusioned because of the amount of blood. Disillusioned means that you are not adhering to the ideals that you were advocated for. The ideals were to be free and to love the other human. However, that was not the case there. They used to avenge each other a lot and there was chaos. Are you familiar with the Tale of Two Cities By Charles Dickens? It talks about the French Revolution. It talks about how people used to avenge each other. It was a very violent revolution.

❖ Industrial Revolution.

In the mid-18th century till the 19th century

What was the Industrial Revolution? Tell me about it.

Unlike the American and French Revolution which were political, the Industrial Revolution was an economic and technological transformation.

Marked the shift from the handmade goods to machine-based production drastically changing industries. So, people who used to work and use their hands, because there were not machines, were unemployed. They had to face the fate of being unemployed because of the Industrial Revolution. And the shape of the economy was drastically changing.

Student: In Europe, generally?

Professor: In Europe. Yes, definitely. Here, Romanticism is not only about England. However, it's in whole Europe. Here, we are talking about a whole movement, the Romantic movement here. It's just how the movement affected England.

Innovations in technology, transportation, and manufacturing led to increased production and efficiency.

Growth of urban centres and industrial cities. Changes in labour structures leading to factory-based economies. So, instead of labour ^{اليد العاملة}, things were turned into factories. There were a lot of factories in urban and industrial cities and there were increased production and efficiency.

It had a long-lasting effect on global trade, social structures, and living conditions. Setting the foundation for the modern industrial world. The world that we are living in right now is a modern industrial world.

How would the industrial revolution affect the social structure?

Student: By making people unemployed, it affects the social structure.

Professor: Okay, that's a good point. And?

Student: Because of the division of contradictory opinions

Professor: Opinions? Are we here debating? Is it about an intellectual thing or an industrial thing? Here we're talking money, mere trade and industry.

Student: The rich man became richer, and the poor became poorer.

Professor: Thank you so much. And?

Student: The gap between them.

Professor: The rich people got richer and the poor people got poorer. However, there was an emergence of the middle class. The middle class, the class in the middle between the rich and the poor emerged because of what? Because of the industry. Because you can have your own factory if you can manage to gather some money and work something out. So, the social structure here differed.

The living conditions of people. How did the industrial revolution affect the living conditions?

Student: Made it easier.

Professor: Yes, it made it easier on those who had money.

Student: So, what about the poor people?

Professor: They got poorer.

Imagine if someone is working in a factory and is given very small amount of money. Okay? How would they live? They would only have, as we say in Arabic, قوت اليوم

The shape of the industry has changed because of that. If I am to be, let's say, a shoemaker, I no longer have to make it myself. There is a machine to make it. So, those who had the craft or who were able to make it themselves were unemployed. So, this is the case.

Student: What does the Industrial revolution have to do with Romanticism? What's the connection?

Professor: That's a very good question. As we all know, we said that the American Revolution and the French Revolution were highly affecting the Romantic era and advocating for freedom, liberty, fraternity, and so on and so forth.

The Romantic poets and writers used to escape to the rural places. They used to be reluctant of the idea of having a modern city and a modern lifestyle. They rejected the idea of the industrial revolution. Because of the industrial revolution, merely – and it's a very important factor – certain Romantic poets wrote poems, changed styles of poems and changed their poetry. They reacted against the industrial revolution.

Are you familiar with a poet called William Wordsworth? Okay, the answer is no. Imagine the Romantic poets like young men who escaped to rural. How would you feel about them in our modern society? Like hippies to a certain extent, you would look down on them. People used to look down on them because of such tendency to escape the industrial modernized world.

- **Key characteristics of the Romantic period:**

What were the characteristics of the Romantic period?

Student: Hope, aspiration, and anxiety that resulted from the tremendous change of the modern era.

Professor: Okay, we have an emphasis on individualism and personal meaning. So, they were really advocates of individualism. Do you know the meaning of the word individualism? الفردانية It's different from humanism. Individualism here is when you rely on your own opinion rather than an external one. So, when it comes to religion, they used to follow their own spiritual path in a separate part from the religion.

Student: So, they seek the answer from themselves, not from religion.

Professor: Yes, through their walks in nature, they would seek spirituality and personal faith apart from the dominant religion that used to be.

Student: Did they have a humanized religion?

Professor: Sort of.

Student: Unlike others, Romanticism wasn't about going back to the classics, but to create their own style.

Professor: Yes, that's exactly it. It's to break free from the rules and religious restrictions, and not only religious, but sometimes societal restrictions. It's to focus on yourself, on your personal faith, and on your spirituality. It's not to have a mediator. Do you know what a mediator is?

Student: وسيط

Professor: Yes. It's not to have a mediator between yourself and God or a higher holy entity. They rebelled against the previous religious narratives or regimes. So, there were always rebellions.

Student: There were rebellion on their ancestors.

Professor: Not only ancestors, but the society they used to live in. So, it's not only rebellion in the sense of the political rebellion or having a political revolution, but here in terms of intellectualism and personal and spiritual faith. So, it didn't only limit itself to politics.

Student: When they say that they established a counter-theology of existence, does that mean they are atheists somehow?

Professor: No, they were not atheists.

Student: Doesn't counter-theology existence mean that they have a different explanation?

Professor: Yes, but does that mean that they are atheists? If you have a different interpretation of the same holy text, does that make you an atheist?

Student: But it's existence, how people came to earth, and how existence began. That's how I understand it.

Professor: Different interpretation doesn't mean atheism. I would agree with you partially. They sought a different spiritual path. They didn't want the traditional way of being religious.

Student: What's the difference between humanism and individualism?

Professor: Humanism focused on the human, as we are now familiar with. Humanism was a reaction against the middle age regimes and political, social, and economic regimes that they used to have in the middle ages. And humanism thought or the core philosophy value was to focus on the human. They thought that the human is the centre of the universe. Life comes and goes out of him. However, individuality here doesn't mean that you are the centre. Here, you are a reliant; you rely on your opinion. You seek an inner faith, inner way of dealing with things. You have your own opinions, and you form your opinions apart from your society.

Student: I didn't understand this line "Romanticism also exhibited a tendency to humanize religious narratives and establish a counter theology of existence."

Professor: Okay, think of it this way: To reinterpret religious ideas. The traditional way of interpreting religion was countered with a different interpretation. They used to believe before the Romantic era, for example, that they had to have something like صكوك الغفران. They used to believe that they have to go to a priest to get documents for people to see if they are going to heaven or if they are going to hell. Such interpretation of the Holy Book would definitely be re-evaluated by the Romantics, and this is the counter-argument. This is the counter-religious ideas that they used to reinterpret, or they used to re-advocate. There should not be a mediator between the self and God.

The Romantics used to seek spirituality apart from religious institutions. However, let's focus here on the individualism and the personal meaning.

The Romantics rejected traditional authoritative structures such as the church and monarchy, and they opposed demagogy. Demagogy refers to the practice of gaining power and influence by appealing to people's emotions, prejudices, and desires rather than using rational arguments or facts. So, they were against manipulation.

Demagogy involves manipulation, exaggeration, misleading rhetoric to sway public opinion. So, they used to manipulate. Demagogy is to manipulate the public opinion; it's like politicians' jobs. It's a way to rule. Politicians manipulate people's emotions, prejudices and desires. So, Romantics were opposing such things.

They were against such authoritative structures like the church which stands for religion, monarchy which stands for political power and demagogy. Now, this is one of the characteristics of the Romantic period.

Another characteristic of the Romantic period is the humanization of religious narratives. That's very important.

Student: What do you mean?

Professor: Reinterpreting.

So, Romantics sought to reinterpret religious ideas in a way that resonated with personal experience. According to my personal experience and my understanding, because here we are advocating for individualism and we are advocating for my personal spiritual path, they reinterpreted the religious narratives in a way that resonated with their personal experience.

So, if my personal experience is bad, I might reinterpret the religious narrative in a way that would reflect my personal experience. They shifted their way of understanding religion. For example, if there is a priest who is interpreting religion, Romantics would reject that and would seek their own interpretation of the holy text.

Student: Why didn't they say individualized religion instead of humanized religion? We said that humanism is different from individualism.

Professor: Honestly, both of them are slightly related. The humanist movement is slightly related to the Romantic movement. The humanist movement was in the Renaissance. It's slightly related in the sense that they are going back to the self, not an external source like religious source or political or so on and so forth. So, I can slightly say it's humanization. However, you can focus on individualism. Let's focus

on individual narrative. I don't want the church to interpret the holy Bible for me, for example, in the case of Christianity. I want my own personal opinion.

Student: We say that they are reinterpreting the religious idea according to their understanding of their own experience. What is their counter-theology of existence?

Professor: You have to see each poet and how they dealt with the theology of existence. They had a common ground. However, if you are to get into the teeny tiny details, you have to see each poet. However, in general, they put the intermediacy of the church aside and they followed their own spiritual path. This is the middle ground of all poets.

Student: I mean what's their theology of existence?

Professor: There isn't one clear-cut answer for such a question. You have to see each poet and how they dealt with the idea of existence. What do we mean by existence?

Student: How things began or the existence of people in general?

Professor: Their existence. Sometimes certain thoughts would go through the idea of the beginning. It's about my purpose on earth right now. It's not that much into religion. Darwin lived in the Romantic period, but I'm here only focusing on literature. This is why I'm answering in terms of literature.

Going back to the individualization of religious narratives, instead of strict doctrinal beliefs, Romantics explored spiritual and personal faith in their works. They put the traditional interpretation of religion aside, and they followed their own spiritual and personal faith. This shift led to the counter-theology of existence, emphasizing inner experience over institutionalized religion. So, your personal experience is focused or emphasized over the traditional interpretation of religion, or the institutionalized religion.

So, the first, emphasizing on individualism and personal meaning, this is one characteristic. The second is the individualization of religious narratives. And the third, aesthetic rebellion against neo-classicism.

Neoclassicism was after the restoration period. They used to even reshape the shape of the tree. They used to make it in a way that would look symmetrical or in a very geometrical way, which is very funny. So, romantics were opposing such things. They advocated for liberty and wilderness. The wilderness is about being wild, being the natural self.

Unlike their Augustan predecessors, the Augustan was the neoclassicism. What is neoclassicism? Why is it called neoclassicism?

Student: الكلاسيكيون الجدد

Professor: Yes, we can say so. But I mean in our context. Classism is the Roman and Greek literature. Neoclassic is the going back to classism, having your own way of doing things, apart from that era.

So unlike their Augustan predecessors who focused on strict poetic forms and structures decorum, they used to be very strict socially and physically. They used to restrict themselves physically in a certain attitude, in a certain position: one standing, one sitting, etc. They would behave with others, especially women, in a way that would adhere to the social code.

So, unlike the Augustan predecessors, Romantics valued emotional depth over rigid structures. The Augustan predecessors also used to focus on reason a lot. They used to emphasize reason over everything.

The romanticism was a movement to rebel against such things. So, instead of focusing on reason the whole time, they had an extreme reflex, and they valued emotions over argument and reason. Do you know the difference between following your heart and weighing things reasonably? When someone is following his/her heart, it's when you have a powerful emotion driving you. You rely on your intuition in a way or another.

In the neoclassicism, let's take the marriage example, instead of marrying someone for love, I would marry that person because he has this and that, and because of his money, his status, and his class. So, the Romanticism was a movement against such a thing. It relied and valued emotional depth over the rigid structures: mental, physical, social, and political.

Student: Who focused on the poetic form?

Professor: The neo-classics, or let's say the Augustan.

Poets like S.T. Coleridge: Samuel Taylor Coleridge is a Romantic poet. S.T. Coleridge advocated for the organic form which means poetry should develop naturally, rather than conform to pre-established rules. It is something that we can relate to the shape of the tree. So, in the neo-classics period, or in the Augustan period, they used to have the geometrical shape for the tree. They used to shape it in a way that is very symmetrical. However, for a Romantic poet or writer, they are more prone to the natural organic way of things. Organic form means...

Student: Let it shape by its own.

Professor: To let it be as it is.

So, the organic form is something related to poetry in specific. It's something that can be used in general. However, in poetry, it refers to a theory of poetic composition that suggests a poem should develop naturally, like a living organism, rather than conforming to pre-established rules or rigid structures. It's to let the poem flow naturally, not to adhere to the strict rhythm that used to be in the Augustan.

Student: Can we say Shakespeare was neoclassicist?

Professor: I would say no because Shakespeare followed the Blank Verse, which is something not that much strict. The neoclassicism is very strict. You have to adhere to the way of writing a poem, the style, the vocab, and the ideas. Ideas are very important.

Student: The neoclassical age was called the age of Dryden and Pope.

Professor: Yes, that's accurate.

So, the idea of the organic form is to develop a poem naturally. It's like a living organism. It's like a tree developing naturally, not restricting, not conforming to a certain pre-established rules, and not conforming to rigid structures.

Which is something that is closely linked to Romantic and post-Romantic notions of creativity, where form emerges from the poem

content. There is a form; however, it develops naturally. There is a form for the tree. However, you don't restrict it and shape it; it grows the way it is. So, creativity is one thing, and imagination is another. They were very important for the romantics. There is also emotions.

Student: Can we add heroism?

Professor: Why?

Student: I read it on Google.

Professor: Let me check it and come back to you next week. I need to make sure, to double check, if it is possible.

So, in the romantic period, we are stressing on:

- Creativity, imagination, and emotion
- The form emerges from the poem's content, not imposed on it externally.
- Individualism

This idea opposed the neo-classicist insistence on external forms, favoring poetry that emerged from the inner experience of the poet. So, the very important idea here is favoring poetry that emerged from the inner experience of the poet. Back then, before the Romanticism, they used to talk in their poetry about social and political things. For example, if you can contrast it with Alexander Pope's poetry, Epistle to a Lady, it's about the characteristics. It's something that is a bit general, broad, and not personal. It's not that much of a personal poem. However, in Romanticism, and in the Romantic period, a poem is written according to your own experience.

For example, if I am to go to the wilderness and experience things, I would go back and write a poem throughout my experience. The Romantic poetry is defined as an overflow of emotions that is recollected in tranquility. It means that when you experience things, you have an experience. For example, if you went climbing a mountain, you live the whole experience. You feel it. Your emotions sink in. Then, you don't write things on the spot. However, you go back, for example, to your home. You recollect it in tranquility, in a calm manner. So, this is the definition of the Romantic poetry. So, it's a very unique poetry.

Romanticism is a very interesting era to read, especially the poetry. It's very romantic.

Student: It's easier to understand.

Professor: It touches your heart, in fact. It's not about understanding it. It touches your emotions because sometimes it's about a personal experience. It touches you personally. This is why it's very interesting and the poets are very good like Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley.

So, to sum things up:

Romanticism was not just a literary movement, but a philosophical and cultural response to the upheavals of the time. It emphasized personal freedom, emotional depth and spiritual exploration and that's very important in Romanticism. The shift from structured classicism to organic creativity represented the quest for authenticity in both life and art. Authenticity is very important; it is a key word here in Romanticism. When you are authentic, when you are striving for authenticity, it means you are trying to become an individualist. It means that you are focusing on your experience, on your emotions, and on your spiritual path apart from the religious. You are not imitating.

Student: What's the meaning of quest?

Professor: It's in the spiritual sense. When you try to have a spiritual life, you go in depth in your soul, ideas, and emotions to seek certain spiritual values that you like to have.

Student: Is it related to imagination?

Professor: No, imagination is a key thing in Romanticism.

Student: It's when you search for answers from within.

Professor:

Yes, it's focusing on yourself from within. Like for example, when Prophet Muhammad went to Ghar Hira, this is a spiritual quest. This is him trying to find spiritual answers for things that he was trying to figure out, for example.

Student: What is the authenticity?

Professor: Authenticity here in terms of intellectualism, in terms of the way of thinking whether it's social or political. However, the idea here is not to imitate. It is to always rely on your personal spiritual exploration of things. The emotions also is very important.

Mary Wollstonecraft

Professor: Who is Mary Wollstonecraft?

Student: A famous spokesperson of the 18th century.

Professor: Okay.

A leading spokesperson for the rights of women in the 18th century, Mary Wollstonecraft had a difficult and unsettled childhood. In 1784, May, her sister, and a friend started a school.

So, she's a leading spokesperson for rights of women in the 18th century. In the 18th century also, there were loads of rigid ideas when it comes to women, how they should behave, how they should appear, how they should represent themselves, and what they should focus on. So, it's very important here. When you mention something like a leading spokesperson in the 18th century, it means something very huge. So, she had a difficult and unsettled childhood. In 1784, May, her sister, and a friend started a school.

Later in life, she went to Ireland as a governess to Lord Kingsborough's children. In 1788, she returned to England and proceeded to write a number of controversial works. The radical publisher J. Johnson published some of her reviews and translations, including *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, her novel *Mary*, and her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Mary Wollstonecraft's husband died after giving birth to her daughter Mary Godwin, who would later become the wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley, the famous Romantic poet. After her death, Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin published his wife's *Posthumous Works*, which became an inspiration to a generation of radicals and revolutionaries in the 19th century, including her daughter and her son-in-law.

So, she got married to someone who was called William Goodwin who was a writer too, and she gave birth to Mary Shelley who is very famous for her novel Frankenstein. Are you familiar with it?

Student: Yes.

Professor: So, she gave birth to Mary Shelley who got married to Percy Shelley. Percy Shelley is a very famous Romantic poet.

Student: Why was J. Johnson a radical publisher?

Professor: At that time, to publish for a woman was something forbidden. So, to publish is to be radical. Mary herself, if you're familiar with her autobiography, faced the same fate. Her novel wasn't accepted because she was a woman, so she published it under another name, under a male name.

Student: Even the endings of novels are made in a way to fit the society. If a woman rebelled, they would kill her at the end.

Professor: Yes, you can kill the hero at the end just for the sake of society.

Student: It's like saying that she died because she rebelled, so don't do the same thing.

Professor: Yes, it's like a way to maneuver the society. The purpose behind killing the hero or the heroine here is not to be judged and punished by society. I can present you with a hero or a heroine who breaks so many taboos and societal rules, and then, he/she got punished at the end of the novel or play. It's a way to maneuver as we say in Arabic *تبعيد الشبهات*. Have you heard of Christopher Marlowe and his play Dr. Faustus? Dr. Faustus broke so many religious, societal, and political taboos; however, by the end of the play, he was burned alive.

Student: What do they mean by governess here?

Professor: In this context, it means teacher. If you noticed, Mary Wollstonecraft wasn't only advocating for the rights of women, but also to the rights of men because men also had to behave in a way that adhere to the societal codes or norms. I as a man should not be emotional. I should behave in a certain way. Or I as a woman should have this and that.

After her death, Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin published his wife's Posthumous Works, which became an inspiration to a generation of radicals and revolutionaries in the 19th century, including her daughter and her son-in-law.

So, she was very radical, and her ideas were very revolutionary.

Romanticism is more about revolution, rebellion, and being yourself.

These are all the key ideas and words for the period.

Student: What is the meaning of vindication?

Professor: Justifications.

From A Vindication of the Rights of Women

Introduction

After considering the historic page, and viewing the living world with anxious solicitude, the most melancholy emotions of sorrowful indignation have depressed my spirits, and I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial. I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result?—a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. 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 when they ought to have arrived at maturity.—One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who,

considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers; and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.

In a treatise, therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement must not be overlooked; especially when it is asserted, in direct terms, that the books of instruction, written by men of genius, have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions; and that, in the true style of Mahometanism, they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species, when improveable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble hand.

Yet, because I am a woman, I would not lead my readers to suppose that I mean violently to agitate the contested question respecting the equality or inferiority of the sex; but as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it over without subjecting the main tendency of my reasoning to misconstruction, I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion.-In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman. A degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied-and it is a noble prerogative! 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.

Professor:

What is the text about? What is she trying to tell the reader?

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Student: The woman's situation in the society and how education contributed in her case. In the end, it is confessing that men and women have their differences, but not to the extent that they are above each other.

Professor: To what extent then?

Student: They have their own rights, and the other sex has its own rights.

Professor: Is she eliminating them from society? What is she doing here? She is advocating for women's rights, yet...

Student: Glorifying men?

Professor: Glorifying men? Did you get the sense that she is glorifying men?

Student: She said that they are inferior and women are superior.

Student: To limit their control over women's rights

Professor: She is advocating for women to have their own mind, to have their own thoughts, and to not consider themselves inferior just because they are women. This is one. Any other ideas?

Student: Not to see her as a luring object

Professor: Yes, that's a very good idea. So, not to see women as objects you can be fascinated by and only focus on the physical aspect

Student: Like subordinate beings

Professor: Yes, that's good. Any other ideas?

Student: Is she critiquing men?

Professor: Maybe she is critiquing society, not men. Here, we are critiquing the patriarchal system. Are you familiar with the word patriarchal?

Students: Yes.

Professor: Here, she is critiquing the system that subjugate women and made them subordinate to men just because of their gender. So, we are talking about subjugating women according to gender. That's very important. I don't think we are going to read things line by line. However, I'm going to give you a summation of the text.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is a groundbreaking work of feminist philosophy that advocates for women's education and equality in an era when such ideas were revolutionary. As we have mentioned already, the 18th century is an era where women were subjugated or were felt lower or inferior to men. This was the system.

Written during the Enlightenment, Wollstonecraft draws upon the intellectual spirit of the age to critique the social, cultural, and political institutions that perpetuate women's subjugation. The political, cultural, and social institutions gathered all to subordinate women and make them inferior to men.

Enlightenment here in terms of the new and revolutionary ideas

Student: What do you mean by perpetuate here in this context?

Professor: To continue doing something

Key Themes:

- The writer here is advocating for **equality through education**.
- **Critique of femininity:** Femininity here is between two quotation marks because the system back then was advocating for a certain definition of femininity. Femininity here is not in the essence that I am a woman and I am feminine, or just in the physical aspect. Here, I as a woman should behave in a certain feminine way in order for me to fit in a given society.
- **Virtue and rationality:** She argues that a woman should be judged according to her virtue and rationality not by the emotional or physical aspect. So, she should be judged as a human being, not as a woman, and this is in the second page if you can go back to it, "considering females as women rather than human creatures." So, the society at that time would judge a woman just according to her gender, not because she is a human, but because she is a woman. So, I as a society would behave in a certain way, and would impose on you certain rules just because your gender is a woman.
- **Marriage and independence:** Marriage and independence in this text is also obvious, and the impact of the Enlightenment ideas on the individual rights.

Let's go line by line:

After considering the historic page...

Student: There was a page before it.

Professor: No, if you saw the footnote, page here means record. The historical record in terms of what?

Student: Record of the situation of women?

Professor: Yes, of women.

After considering the historic page, and viewing the living world with anxious solicitude,

Professor: What is solicitude? Her stance is anxious considering the historic record. It means considering the history of human society. So, she is anxious about what? Who would like to continue?

After considering the historic page, and viewing the living world with anxious solicitude, the most melancholy emotions of sorrowful indignation have depressed my spirits, and I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial.

In simple words, she is sad about the situation of women, and she is obliged to confess that there is a difference between man and man or man and woman.

Student: Why did she say that there is a difference between man and man?

Professor: In terms of being a human, not being a gender.

Student: Woman is equal to man as a person.

Professor: Yes. So, either it is because of nature, and nature here is the physical attributes that is given to a man or the physical attributes that is given to a woman, or because the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial. The civilization means here the social norms. She is saying the difference here according to society which means civilization or is it because of nature, because of the way we are built?

Student: Why doesn't the word man here mean a male person?

Professor: She is differentiating between men and women. So, when she is saying man here, she's saying a person. We have to consider here also the period and the language at that time.

I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man

How could nature make a great difference between Anas and Ali if you have to take it to only talk about man? Obviously, the context here is differentiating between women and men.

Or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial.

Professor: Partial in terms of what? What is partial?

Student: متحيزة للرجل

Professor: So, she is saying that I cannot pinpoint whether it is civilization that has made men superior or the physical aspect of men that made them superior. This is the argument here. Civilization in terms of society and the rules that are created.

I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result?—a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures...

Fellow creatures here are women.

A profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore...

Professor: What is deplore?

Student: الذي استنكره

Professor: Yes.

and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes...

Concurring here is agreed.

...originating from one hasty conclusion.

So, she is saying that the miserable situation that women are weak and wretched is because of lack of education, and she relied on this conclusion on various books written on the subject of education. So, she is saying that the cause of the misery and the lack of freedom in the lives of women is because of education.

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;

Professor: What is she saying here?

Student: Why is the soil too rich and not poor?

Professor: That's what I'm trying to ask you.

Student: There is a similarity between women and flowers.

Professor: Yes, can you elaborate? Can you explain?

Student: Can we say that the flowers are the women, and the soil is the traditions and the customs of the societies?

Student: The shallow view of women as just an icon of beauty without considering the depth in her personality.

Professor: Yes, that's accurate. She is saying that because women are only judged through their physical aspect and beauty, they are presented through their beauty. So, she is saying that when you plant a flower in a rich soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty. It means that her virtues and her rationality are sacrificed for the physical aspect of women.

Why too rich? Because women have depth, reason, and intellectuality. They have the ability to have education. They have the ability to think. However, society only limits them in one thing which is their physical beauty.

Student:

I don't understand the idea of the rich soil.

Student:

Does she mean the society by the word soil?

Student: I understand that the flower is her external beauty, but the soil is her internal beauty. It's not the society. The soil is within her because if we consider that the soil is the society, it's not going to be rich. It's going to be corrupted. So, the soil is not the society here.

Student: A flower is planted in a fertile environment or in rich soil. So, the woman is the flower. Where do we plant her? This is our question. Why did she use rich soil?

Professor: Hear this:

Wollstonecraft compares women to flowers planted in soil that is too rich, a metaphor illustrating how society prioritizes women's beauty over their strength and utility. This barren blooming signifies a superficial cultivation of women's appearance and charm which ultimately leads to their early societal dismissal. The metaphor underscores how societal expectations of femininity strip women of their potential to mature intellectually and morally.

So, as I said, when only focusing on the physical aspects, it is limiting women's ability, intellectuality, reason, potential to educate themselves and mature. So, they only focused on the superficial aspects of women.

Student: So, the beauty is the rich soil for society.

Professor: Exactly.

Student: Why is there (a) before soil?

Professor: Let's read it again.

For, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil.

It means a given soil.

For, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty.

It's just like when you are in the wrong place, and you have so many potentials. You have so many things to give, but you're not given focus or you're not given importance to such traits or attributes. Society only focus on one thing in you, and this is the beauty. It's a shallow judgment of women.

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 when they ought to have arrived at maturity.

Professor: Because society only focuses on beauty, women age. What happens when women age?

Student: They fade.

Student: They lose their effect.

Professor: Exactly. When their beauty fade, they lose that attention.

disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.

Maturity is in 40s. So, the only focus here is beauty, and the only limitation that women are facing here is their physical attributes, not their intellectualism or their virtue and value.

One cause of this barren blooming...

Professor: Why it is barren? Because it's going to fade anyway. Women's beauty with age is going to fade anyway.

I attribute to a false system of education.

Professor: Why is it a full system of education? Why is the writer saying that to focus on women's beauty is a full system of education? Is she referring to the actual education that we are having right now?

Student: No, the way we plant morals and principles in our children

Professor: So it's the societal conviction and norm; how they educate women to behave, to think, and to represent themselves.

Student: The social background?

Professor: Yes. It's not the education in terms of knowledge, but in terms of women's knowledge of themselves.

Student: Mentality.

Professor: Yes.

Gathered from the books written on this subject by men.

They used to write hundreds of books on how women should behave and how men should act. They were very restricted and limited in the way a man or a woman should represent themselves and should carry themselves. This is why romanticism tried to rebel against such norms and convictions.

Gathered from the books written on this subject by men who considering females rather as women than human creatures.

Professor: That's a very important sentence. What's the difference here between considering females as women, not as human creatures?

Student: The woman's personality is a stick in this view. It's like she is a special species, not part of the human world. She has her own world separated from humans.

Professor: She is treated according to her gender and she is given certain rules according to the gender, not as a human being.

Student: As a different race

Professor: Not a different race

Student: She has limited rights.

Professor: Yes, from the societal perspective. Who would like to explain the sentence more?

Student: Maybe they consider women as objects, or let's say something enjoyable.

Professor: You mean as a sex object?

Student: As a wife or a girlfriend, not as a human being.

Professor: It's not just in marriage here.

Student: I understand that she can't have the qualities that already exist in the man nature, like to be a hard worker. It's for men. She has to be soft, tender, and beautiful. That's the way that we evaluate a woman's personality.

Professor: Exactly, thank you so much. So, a woman is limited only to the household, to her role as a wife, as a daughter, and to her role that is contained within a household. She's not allowed to have a political life, a career or a voice. However, she is treated as a sub-

human where she is treated as a woman, not as a human creature. I, as a female, am a human being before I'm given the adjective female. I should have human rights before being called a woman. So, giving this adjective to a certain human being, which is here the gender females, is to treat this gender as a sub-human, to take from them certain rights, and only to limit them within certain roles.

One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers.

Professor: From an early age of their lives, women were taught to behave in a way to make them alluring mistresses, and to make them know how to please a man. Why alluring mistresses? Why the adjective alluring?

Student: The external shape

Professor: Focusing on their beauty and physical aspect
And the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.

Professor: So, a woman is only taught from an early age to think in a bubble, and this bubble is how to find a husband, how to find love, how to inspire love, and here in terms of her physical aspect, her beauty. The thing is to inspire love and be a symbol of physical beauty. She should behave in a very delicate and soft manner. She is taught in a way that would please men. This is the idea. The word bubble in this context means confused, deluded, or misunderstood.

Student: Why did she use the word bubbled? Where is the misunderstanding?

Professor: Because the writer is saying from the early sentence that:

One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures.

So this is a misconception.

Have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives.

Again, this is another misconception. This is another confusing, let's say, homage to alluring.

Student: What do we mean by homage?

Professor: Homage is to pay respect to something.

Student: How can we paraphrase it?

Professor: It means giving value and importance to certain values rather than others.

Student: I'm confused by this spacious homage.

Professor: When you pay homage to a certain thing, it's when you give respect, importance and value to that thing. So, she is saying that being an alluring mistress and being considered as a woman rather than a human creature is a misconception and a confused idea of how women should be treated in a given society.

The civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love.

So, they are only to inspire love and be the ones to allure men when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition. Instead of pursuing an intellectual or a nobler cause, women are only limited to inspire love and to be alluring objects. She is saying, instead of cherishing and aiming to pursue a higher cause, women are only limited to certain roles where they're only there to be alluring mistresses and to inspire love. Here, inspire love means being physically pretty.

Student: I don't understand.

Professor: When they ought to cherish is the writer's comment. "When they ought to cherish" can be paraphrased to "when they should have to cherish or pursue a higher cause." They are anxious. Women are brought up in such a society in a way to inspire, to look pretty physically, and to limit their roles only to their physical attributes.

In a treatise, therefore, on female rights and manners, the works which have been particularly written for their improvement must not be overlooked.

So, the books that were written to educate women on the way they should behave, think and act should not be overlooked. لازم ما نغض البصر عن

Especially when it is asserted, in direct terms, that the books of instruction, written by men of genius, have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions; and that, in the true style of Mahometanism, they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings.

The language is only complicated. However, it's very simple. She is saying that the books that were written and the Mahometanism – and this is a reference to Islam – are only making women subordinate; making them inferior or treating them as inferior beings.

Student: Does she mean study by treaty?

Professor: It's not a study. It's an article on female rights and manners or books. So, she linked the books that were written during that age on women's behaviors and the Mahometanism in treating women as inferior beings. This is to put it simply.

Student: I don't understand the sentence of they must not be overlooked.

Professor: She means that we shouldn't ignore the books that were written against women's rights. We must not overlook the rules of Islam. We should focus on them. What do you think of this idea when she is saying that Islam is treating women as subordinate beings?

Student: In her country, maybe that's the general idea of Islam. It's to make women submissive to men.

Professor: And what do you think about it? We are Muslims. What do you think? How would you argue against such an idea? Do you think Islam made women subordinate?

Student: No, of course not. But in her country, maybe it was a general idea as Christians. They think of Islam as it makes women submissive.

Professor: So, it's a misconception about Islam that it treats women as subordinate beings. And here, we should argue or critique such an idea because Islam is not like that. The core philosophy of Islam is to cherish women and to give them value. However, she linked Islam to the books that were written about women which made women subordinate to men.

Student: So, she critiques both men and Islam.

Professor: The writer critiqued the books of men of genius and Islam.

Student: What's the meaning of frivolous productions?

Professor: It means a huge amount of.

and not as a part of the human species.

Again, we go back to the same idea that females are treated as women, not as human beings.

When improveable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble land.

And men here means men and women. What's the dignified distinction here? What's the distinction which raises men above the brute creation and puts a natural scepter in a feeble land? She is saying that the only distinction that should be done when it comes to men and women is reason. I should be judged according to reason, or I should be allowed to express myself.

The language is only complicated. She is only complicating things. But to put it simply, she is saying women should not be judged according to their beauty and to their physical attributes. A woman should be judged according to her virtue, reason, and contribution to society, not according to the physical attributes.

Student: What's the meaning of "and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble land"? Is it figurative?

Professor: It's a figurative meaning. What is the scepter?

Student: صولجان

Professor: Yes. What is a feeble land?

Student: Like weak or something

Professor: Yes, it's just like the planting of a flower in a too rich a soil. In a way, it's the same metaphorical language. It's always having too much potential, and having too much to give, but you are always in the wrong place.

If you can go back to the footnote number three.

The statement represented a classic example of the common misconception of Islam among Europeans at that time. The idea that Islam teaches that women have no souls.

Professor: This is a misconception.

Student: It's her opinion. She's a Romantic writer and she voiced her opinion.

Professor: We have to differentiate in the sense that she's an individual and she's writing, and in the sense that she's publishing this. This is her personal experience and her ideas. However, there are always misconceptions about certain race or certain people. We – the people who live in the Orient or in the Middle East – believe or have certain stereotypical image of the West. So, this is what is happening right now here in the text. It's not about individualism or romanticism. It's only misconception.

Now, we're going to end it. We're not going to delve deeper. However, we're going to read it.

Yet, because I am a woman, I would not lead my readers to suppose that I mean violently to agitate the contested question respecting the equality or inferiority of the sex.

She is advocating for the rights of women as human beings, not as a gender. The inferiority of the sex: she's not here on focusing on the sex or the gender per se.

But as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it over without subjecting the main tendency of my reasoning to misconstruction, I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion.

So, to put it simply, she is differentiating between considering women as inferior and between considering women as human beings. She's not having the argument that women should be equal to men. This is a famous argument. She is advocating for women's rights as human beings, not as a gender. There is a difference here.

Student: So, she doesn't want equality between men and women.
Professor: It's not like that, but she's not discussing this. Her focus here is human rights.

Student: But equality is one of the rights.

Professor: Exactly, but this is not her argument.

But as the subject lies in my way, and I cannot pass it over without subjecting the main tendency of my reasoning to misconstruction...

She's saying for you not to misunderstand me...

I shall stop a moment to deliver, in a few words, my opinion.

يعني أنا راح اعطيكون شو بدني هلق

In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male.

This is why it's important for us to know her argument. She's not saying women and men are equal because she has given superiority to the physical attributes of men. So, this is not her argument. She's talking about the rights: like I'm not having this famous argument that says woman and men should be equal in all terms. She is saying that men are superior to females in terms of the strength.

This is the law of nature.

So, men by nature are inferior when it comes to strength and the physical attributes.

This is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman.

What does that mean? She is saying that men are superior in terms of their strength. "Unless this law is suspended," it means unless a certain man is weak. How would it be suspended? By having a man who is weak

A degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied.

She is saying that men are superior physically to women and we cannot deny this.

And it is a noble prerogative!

What is a prerogative?

Student: Privilege.

Professor: Yes, it's a privilege or a right.

But not content with this natural pre-eminence.

Professor: What is preeminence? It's a privilege.

Student: الامتياز الطبيعي

Professor: Yes.

Men endeavor to sink us still lower.

She is acknowledging the fact that men are superior in terms of their physical strength. However, although she is acknowledging that, she is saying that they still sink us in and try to make us inferior.

Merely to render us alluring objects for a moment.

She is saying that although we acknowledge that men are superior in their physical strength over women, men still sink us in lower and treat us inferior more and more merely to render us alluring objects for a moment. So, only to treat us as alluring objects.

And women, intoxicated by the adoration which men, under the influence of their senses, pay them.

Because women get intoxicated, if we can give it a synonym, it means infatuated by the idea or delusion by the adoration. So, they like the attention that men give them. She is saying that women like the attention that men give to their bodies. What do they do?

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.

So, they do not try to change such a tendency nor do they try to become the friends of the fellow creatures who find amusement in their society.

Student: They are very passive.

Professor: Yes, exactly. It's in most societies.

Student: I don't understand the fellow creatures who find amusement in their society. Are the fellow creatures men or women?

Professor: Now, fellow creatures here are men. They treat the subject passively. They do not try to change such a treatment of women and they find it interesting or intriguing for women. Women find it interesting for men to pay them interest in their hearts.

Student: I understand the fellow creatures as women.

Professor: How women would find amusement in their society?

Student: When men flatter them. Women are convinced that their external shape is everything. They start to think this way and get the pleasure or amusement by that.

Professor: I'm not quite sure. I need to check it out. However, the idea here is men treat women in a way that limits them to only alluring objects and women react passively about it. This is the core idea. However, I need to double check the last sentence.

Student: What should we study in this text?

Professor: Thematic concerns, the themes, and the main ideas. I would say the themes because we're going to compare and contrast this text with Pope's poem Epistle to a Lady, so this would also have some questions. We are going to stick to the metaphor of flower and the questions that are there. Sometimes, a critique of the ideas: What does the writer think of this idea? Sometimes, it's tricky to know what the writer is referring to. I'll bring you a sample next time.

