

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman Study Guide

**A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mark
Wollstonecraft**

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Introduction

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), by Mary Wollstonecraft, was published in London during the third year of the French Revolution and the fifth year of George Washington's presidency of the new United States of America. Responding to other writers who praised or attacked these antimonarchical uprisings, the tone of the book is by turn confrontational, instructive, harshly critical, sarcastically funny, idealistic, and visionary. Rooting her argument that women deserve an education equal to men's on the human duty to use God's gift of reason, Wollstonecraft set traditional gender roles on their ear. Though she states that she loves man as her "fellow," she is clear that "his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man."

Long cited as the fundamental text of Western feminism, the book continues to contribute to modern social thought in many ways. Wollstonecraft repeatedly makes the connection between slaves and Western women even those in the middle class. She delves into the psychology of the materially dependent to examine why women generally play along with the prejudices held against them. She links race-based chattel slavery to gendered bondage, exposing how "masters" of women benefit from creating a subhuman female to fulfill their designs. Referring to gendered oppression as slavery, she brings the nebulous "woman question" into the spotlight of civil and human rights and lifts to public awareness the relationship between public political systems (the divine right of kings) and private personal systems (the divine right of husbands).

Wollstonecraft sought to improve philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1788) educational philosophy (the goal of education is to learn how to live) by leaps and bounds. Insisting that females had been created not merely to complement males, but with duties to carry out in public and spiritual realms, she urges that children of both sexes be taught to "begin to think." Rather than viewing knowledge as something to acquire and own, she suggests a process fueled by life experiences, which would allow thinkers to reason through events and ideally arrive at the practice of moral virtue. This is a process of lifelong learning. She applied her own method throughout her life, hence her philosophy (consisting of seven published volumes) kept changing. For example, in 1792, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* emphasized the view that human sexuality that was meant to be short-lived and supplanted by other duties. But after her love affair with Gilbert Imlay, her own work challenged this naive opinion, pondering the relationship of society to female desire. This method of applying reason and book-learning to life experience, and shining the lamp of the latter on the former, is known today as feminist pedagogy.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman touches on many other strands in the mesh of social injustice. Readers will notice the repetition of certain topics and key words. These point to the history behind Wollstonecraft's concerns and highlight concerns of the day. Some of these concepts include "tyrant," "mob," "despotism," "liberty," "natural" (versus "artful"), "moral," "virtue," "vice," "revolution," and "reason." The source of these words can be traced to the Western philosophical movement known as the Enlightenment, and



to uprisings that were overthrowing old forms of government based on monarchies. Her structure is also designed to appeal to her contemporaries. Wollstonecraft's writing is elliptical: rather than attack certain issues head-on, she returns to them over and over again, establishing their importance by examining them from many different angles. This method was intended to better appeal to the day's literate British audience, which she said suffered from a "fear of innovation." Therefore *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is written with a layered effect, mimicking the way prejudices affect layer after layer of human experience.

Far from offering dead debates, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* continues to address today's concerns. For instance, Wollstonecraft argues that neither the soul nor the mind has a sex. At the same time, she acknowledges that men are, in general, physically stronger, while women are naturally inclined to please and relate. Some bio-determinists direct their research to debating and supporting the same gender claims. In "The New Science of Sex" (2003), Iain Murray, for example, cites Andrew Sullivan's research claiming that because of high rates of testosterone, men think more, "especially about concrete problems in the immediate present," and they are more "frustrated" when action is thwarted. Murray also notes that some bio-determinists believe humans may be similar to mice when it comes to "a gene that determines 'good' motherhood." Murray also cites Cambridge University psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, whose research indicates that men are "much more likely" to have a systematizing-type brain, while women exhibit a brain type known as empathizing. Two hundred years after her death, many issues that Wollstonecraft raised in her essay have shifted shape, but are still just as pressing and relevant.



Author Biography

Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft, the eldest daughter of a violent, impoverished "gentleman," was born in 1759 in Hoxton, England. In her twenties, she founded a school for the children of the Dissenters, a group that lived by the twin codes of reason and piety while working for an egalitarian British society. After the school closed in 1785, she was offered work as an editorial assistant, writer, and reviewer for the radical London publisher Joseph Johnson. In this capacity, her intellectual circle expanded to include famous political thinkers such as Thomas Paine and William Blake.

After the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, she traveled to France to write about the ongoing Revolution, where she fell in love with an American, Gilbert Imlay. They had a daughter, Francis. Imlay sent Wollstonecraft to Scandinavia on business, then abandoned her. The ill-fated love affair left her musing about the brutal consequences that conventional societies impose on female sexual desire.

Returning to London, Wollstonecraft began a relationship with William Godwin. When she found herself pregnant, she convinced Godwin to wed. While pregnant, she worked on *The Wrongs of Woman*, a kind of sequel to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The book was never finished, as Wollstonecraft died on September 10, 1797, of complications from childbirth. She had delivered a daughter who would become Mary Shelley, author of the Gothic masterpiece *Frankenstein*.

Chapter II: the Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed

Wollstonecraft states that the "tyranny of man" is preserved through a number of clever arguments that promote irreconcilable gendered differences. Her argument, on the other hand, bases itself in the similarities between males and females, for both were created human by God. Hence, both share the same task of seeking perfection through living full, virtuous lives. Wollstonecraft promotes a concept of virtue (a commendable quality or behavior) that is not attainable by conforming to rules, but must be discovered and chosen when people face challenges in their lives.

Touching on Milton's portrayal of Eve in *Paradise Lost* (1667), Wollstonecraft recalls the old argument that women lack souls. She insists that females are soulful, and therefore fully human. They are insulted by "those who advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes.... [with a] winning softness ... that governs by obeying." Gentleness and softness, childishness and innocence, in any adult's behavior, equate with weakness. Wollstonecraft compares career officers and courtiers to affluent women, for all are "taught to please, and they only live to please." Thus women (and other servile dependents) "acquire manners before morals." Their virtues are sham, superficial, and used to manipulate, and they become prey to the prejudices of the authority figures to whom they submit.



In this chapter, Wollstonecraft first touches on what constitutes a good marriage. She finds love to be a "common passion"—a device to avoid the practices of choice, reason, and long-lasting friendship between women and men. She insists that the main purposes of marriage are to raise a family and to perfect oneself in the virtues in preparation for the ecstasies of the afterlife.

Chapter Iii: the Same Subject Continued

Wollstonecraft continues to discuss ways in which women are defined as "fair defects" of nature. She introduces the relationship between a strong body and a strong mind. Women of the higher classes have been trained to cultivate physical fragility as a sign of refined femininity. Wollstonecraft argues that actual physical strength is essential to all who would undertake intellectual passions. She asks why women should not undertake them. The one superior trait inherent in men appears to be brawn-not brains, and not virtue. She urges women not to seek short-term favor with authority by conforming to a model of constitutional weakness, and appeals to mothers to pass human dignity on to their daughters, rather than teaching them constraint and making them ill. Young girls, like young boys, she declares, would much rather "frolic in the open air" than be half-starved and sedentary. Likewise, though girls are said to have an innate fondness for pretty things, especially dressing up, this is because such narrow pleasures are all that are offered them.

In Chapter III, Wollstonecraft begins to critique the gender theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, still revered as the most-quoted, most-admired educator of the Enlightenment. She imagines a middle-class woman whose qualities conform to Rousseau's description of the ideal female. If such a woman is widowed, with no ready skills or the reasoning power to learn them, she must find a way to raise her children. Even if she is plucky rather than vain and vacuous, she may soon prove the adage that "the blind may as easily be led into a ditch as along the beaten road." In contrast, Wollstonecraft imagines a woman trained to reason independently. In the same situation, this widow is able to take good care of her family, find love in her children, and pin her happiness on the afterlife.

Chapter Iv: Observations on the State of Degradation to Which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes

Wollstonecraft returns to the issue of the relationship between the soul and education, again emphasizing that females have immortal souls. Therefore, since experience leads to the soul's cultivation, women should cease to be valued according to physical beauty and submissive manners, and be trained toward reaching perfection. Wollstonecraft points out many factors that combine to degrade the female sex-in actual behavior, as well as by stereotype. Here the author first delves into how prejudice morphs into self-fulfilling prophecy. The ways in which females have been degraded have produced a history in which they have "always been either a slave or a despot" and either role "equally retards the progress of reason."



Some methods through which women become susceptible to accepting gendered difference, says Wollstonecraft, include social rewards for giving men beauty and pleasure. These play upon a female tendency to gratify emotions above loving reason: thus women vie to win a man's love. Women have also been trained to delight in sensation more than in performing their duties well. Encouraged to pamper their fleeting passions and ever seeking a state of physiological charge, women are not drawn toward delayed satisfactions that rise from the more demanding process of reason. Their training of "amiable weakness" authorizes them to seek the protection of men.

Women are taught to believe that they are the sensitive, emotional half of a heterosexual unit—the natural complement to the logical male. In childhood they are trained to appear docile, patient, and good humored, masking their true feelings and denying their intellects. Their training is seldom ordered toward expertise in a subject, but geared toward domestic life. Referring always to women "of quality," the author cites examples of how women become parodies of themselves. Rousseau's model is mentioned again, because he details desirable feminine qualities for the partner of Emilius (usually known as *Émile*), the ideal (male) product of an enlightened education. Wollstonecraft reexamines these reason-denying female qualities, pointing out how they are socially produced.

Chapter V: Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt

Now the author strikes out in great detail at Rousseau's ideal gender model, and sometimes at the man himself. She quotes from Rousseau's *Émile, or On Education* (1762) extensively to attack his model. Rousseau's Sophia, the ideal wife, is as famous as Emilius himself. But while Rousseau holds that Emilius must be educated according to his reasonable, assertive, and independent nature, Sophia—and all good women, should learn:

To please us, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young,... to advise, to console us, to render our lives easy and agreeable: these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy.

In addition to learning restraint from the cradle, Sophia-women should be taught to tolerate a moody husband, while also appealing to their "master" sexually, so that an educated man will desire to stay with his family, despite his natural fondness for liberty. Wollstonecraft takes issue with Rousseau's daydream. She declares, "The being who patiently endures injustice, and silently bears insults, will soon become unjust, or unable to discern right from wrong." She questions whether a "beautiful, innocent and silly" wife can entice a reasoning man to remain faithful. In any case, this is too high a price for a woman to pay sacrificing her ability to reason in order to maintain her temporary position as seductive, compliant "mistress" of her husband's desire.

The author addresses the words of several advisors to female readers. Dr. Fordyce explains that a woman is loveliest when in "pious recollection ... she assumes, without knowing it ... the beauties of holiness," which brings her into kinship with angels.



Wollstonecraft scoffs at the intentions behind such "idle, empty words" that aim to create slaves, not full human beings. Fordyce goes on to blame the young wives of abusive or neglectful husbands for their own plight: why have they not coaxed out his better qualities, overlooked his mistakes, and submitted to his authority? Wollstonecraft retorts, "Such a woman ought to be an angel—or she is an ass," but she lacks human character. Another would-be consultant is Dr. Gregory, who writes to his daughters to warn them of the common deceptions of men. Wollstonecraft agrees that men can be deceitful, but doubts that "decorum" can protect girls from villains, as Dr. Gregory suggests. An education that "make[s] the heart clean, and give[s] the head employment" would be better protection.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman discusses some female writers of the time who attempt to preserve the gendered status quo, as well as activist female voices. The author salutes Catharine Macaulay, and then closes by noting her dislike of the dogmatic pedagogy promoted by Lord Chesterfield. By requiring students to accept "moss-covered opinions" rather than experience life and develop moral reasoning skills, he wants to short-circuit the practical-spiritual process of true education.

Chapter Vi: the Effect Which an Early Association of Ideas Has upon the Character

In this chapter, the author examines effects of poor education and negative trends on small children. Education is meant to provide the young with a basic mental content to draw on during associative thinking. Glitches occur when they are taught to habitually associate certain ideas and impressions (mechanical thinking), or to associate impressions with emotions rather than with reason. Such faulty mental processes encourage a form of mental slavery.

Yet Wollstonecraft defends women for generally being rote learners: after all, they have been taught to obey, not to question, and not to focus on rigorous topics. Rather, they have been instructed to produce manners—not morals—and to concentrate on love, which the author terms an arbitrary passion with no basis in reason (unlike esteem). A practical example of her focus on passion rather than reason shows up in how women look for a mate. Many women prefer the dashing but unstable qualities of a "rake," because such men are thrilling. A virtuous husband's stability and disrespect for weakness, on the other hand, may be viewed as unappealing. But the rake's character is lacking in sense, as well as principles: he will introduce his wife to misery, bad habits, and the dangerous morals of a life based on titillation.

Chapter Vii: Modestycomprehensively Considered and Not as a Sexual Virtue

Modesty is a virtue, the author claims, to be sought by both men and women. It is not a performance piece enacted by women to prove they are sweet, innocent, and feminine. Nor does modesty sprout from sexual avoidance. It is, rather, the "child of reason," and



is a behavior steeped in "respect for man, as man, is the foundation of every noble sentiment."

Wollstonecraft begins this chapter by spoofing the flowery graces attributed to female modesty, but her assessment of the attribute is serious. She defends it as the most enhancing virtue because it "teaches a man not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think," while yet not humbling or debasing himself. Personal reserve, not blushes, gives rise to modesty. In relationships, modesty thrives not on sensibility but on affection. And if women truly wish to learn it, they must pursue knowledge of the world, for modesty lives "in close union with humanity."

Chapter VIII: Mortality Undermined by Sexual Notions of the Importance of a Good Reputation

Wollstonecraft once again compares courtiers and women in general as both having to appear appealing to those they depend on. Not concerned with truly moral behavior,

it is the eye of man that they have been taught to dread-and if they can lull their Argus to sleep, they seldom think of heaven or themselves, because their reputation is safe; and it is reputation, not chastity and all its fair train, that they are employed to keep free from spot, not as a virtue, but to preserve their station in the world.

The author tells tales of women of high reputation who have carried out clandestine intrigues. She laments the social system that creates "female depravity" and deception in sexual matters. This occurs due to the double standard that says women who are unchaste can never again be "respectable," while men are admired for having affairs. She also critiques those "like the Pharisees" who seek to fool others with their high reputations, but whose laudable actions are only for show. In reality, God reads all human hearts, so people are wise not to judge one another. All humans harbor vice and mistakes, but from these they can learn to reason, improve, and sympathize. She urges married women to avoid carnal "intemperance" because men and women marry, primarily, to parent the young and produce virtue. Virtue should be respected for its own sake, not as a sign of a clean reputation.

Chapter IX: of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society

As a pearl grows within an oyster, virtue cannot develop without the friction that people encounter daily while carrying out private and public duties. One of the basic duties that assists the growth of virtue is earning a living. While those who inherit wealth may be cushioned from need, and thus free to indulge in vanities and titillations, they lack a vital element that would allow them to perfect their characters. Wollstonecraft asserts that women who inherit wealth are even more handicapped in character than men; for male heirs can still enter public life as soldiers or statesmen, while rich women are still restricted to a domestic existence. These problems would be lessened if there were



more equality of wealth and of rank in society, but women, Wollstonecraft asserts, will never develop their highest potentials until they take up a career.

Why should they assist, Wollstonecraft asks, becoming nurses rather than doctors? Why not prepare to become businesswomen, or for a post in politics? Why think small? Dedicated motherhood and full responsibility for the household should also be the task of women, wealthy or not. Instead, they are encouraged to be "the wanton solace of men" fit only for "frothy pleasure." In an abrupt rhetorical move, Wollstonecraft asks enlightened males to help women—now vain and slavishly obedient—to "snap [their] chains" and become motivated to seek "respectable" duties. She laments how few women of economic privilege are willing to, on their own initiative, seek the path of enlightenment: "Proud of their weakness ... they must always be protected, guarded from care, and all the rough toils that dignify the mind." They are not willing to "resign the privileges of rank and sex for the privileges of humanity."

Chapter X: Parental Affection

In this chapter, Wollstonecraft identifies parental affection as the appropriate foundation for parental power. She notes that parents can use their position to impose the duty of obedience on their offspring, extending a "despotic stretch of power." She warns that women must be strong, enlightened parents if they hope to raise intelligent and dutiful children, and that "meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers." Mothers who shirk their motherly responsibilities by sending their children to a wetnurse and then to a boarding school have no right to expect loyalty from their adult children, she contends: "they who do their duty by proxy should not murmur if they miss the reward of duty—parental affection produces filial duty."

Chapter Xi: Duty to Parents

Parents should raise their children to be rational, independent people, because such children will have the most devotion to their own parents, just as they become superior parents of superior children themselves. Daughters trained to be obedient to their parents are ready to become obedient wives, but not good mothers, she explains. Girls taught to be so obedient that they "never think of consulting their inclination ... become adulteresses, and neglect the education of their children." The author believes that parents' attitudes toward their children should be as follows:

It is your interest to obey me till you can judge for yourself; ... but when your mind arrives at maturity, you must only obey me, or rather respect my opinions, so far as they coincide with the light that is breaking in your own mind.

Chapter Xii: on National Education

From Plato's time, Western philosophers have speculated about the sort of education that might create citizens who would build the ideal nation-state. In this pivotal chapter, Wollstonecraft outlines her own National Education program for Britain, recommending



that children of both sexes should learn together. The author is strongly opposed to boarding schools, which she feels teach vice, folly, arbitrary direction, insincerity, debauchery, and "the system of tyranny and abject slavery which is established among the [students], to say nothing of the slavery of forms, which makes religion less than a farce." She admires day schooling because it can foster affection within the family—an affection that can expand into warmth for all humankind. Day schools allow students to live at home and develop through family relations, but also to mix with their peers of both sexes, to learn to "begin to think." Although she is personally against the inequities of marriage, Wollstonecraft, considering her less-radical audience ("the fear of innovation, in this country, extends to every thing"), urges a shared male-female curriculum and coeducation, because:

If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfil [sic] the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens ... [and] are prepared to be [men's] companions rather than their mistresses.

Wollstonecraft declares that a state of war exists between the sexes. Both employ cunning and wiles to get what they want from the other. Women, in the political sense, are slaves, for women must gain their power indirectly and "are debased by their exertions to obtain illicit sway." In order to rectify this, women must be educated. A day school coed environment, "free and open to all classes" and run by the government to avoid the caprices of patrons, would raise girls to become competent mothers, wise citizens, and participants in public governance. Until the age of nine both genders' physical development would be prioritized. A wide range of subjects would be studied, but "these pursuits should never encroach on gymnastic plays in the open air."

Past the age of nine, students would be separated according to earning expectations. Boys and girls from the lower classes would study together in the morning, but in the afternoon girls would attend classes in such fields as sewing and weaving while boys might study mechanics, or something similar. The children of the upper classes would study subject matter appropriate to professional careers and intellectual interests. The author addresses the fears of her audience that boys and girls might become romantically involved. Early marriage is actually a good thing, says Wollstonecraft, but she concedes that arranged marriage will still remain custom, whether or not students take likings to each other. Day schools will be more "moral" than boarding schools are, at any rate.

Wollstonecraft's proposal specifies youth should be educated until the age of majority (eighteen years old) and that courses for non-vocational students should develop the reflective abilities needed to form sound judgments. Physical development must grow apace; hence dancing, music, and drawing will be offered. Ethics also receive attention: kindness to animals and sensitivity to social underlings are considered essential. From various angles, throughout the discussion of her educational proposal, Wollstonecraft returns to the dishonest wiles and devious ways through which uneducated women have had to try to fill needs and desires. She compares such nonvirtuous paths to the options that reasoning women can choose. Morally educated women will no longer be



"vile and foolish"; at school they will learn to be friends to both women and men. They will become more interesting conversationalists and more appealing to men, by acquiring the virtue and sense that can "give a human appearance to an animal appetite." These secondary enticements are meant to appeal for support for national co-educational schools, so that women will be allowed "to participate [in] the inherent rights of mankind."

Not for the first time, the author confronts the general societal fear that an educated woman will no longer be fit for mothering—considered her natural obligation. Wollstonecraft tries to allay this fear with anecdotes from her own observation and experience. She herself has engaged with the world, tested what she found against her education, and arrived at new, moral, solutions.

Chapter XIII: Some Instances of the Folly Which the Ignorance of Women Generates; with Concluding Reflections on the Moral Improvement That a Revolution in Female Manners Might Naturally Be Expected to Produce

In this final chapter, the author examines the generally low state of character that women of quality now exhibit, repeating that a wise education would revolutionize their ways of seeing and being. The tone of her opening is harsh and direct: she accuses women of sin, weakness, and folly. But these flaws exist because men have worked to impel and maintain them. The first "folly" she addresses relates to the "fashionable deception" of paying fortune-tellers to read the future. If they knew how to reason, she explains, women would understand that it is not a human's place to try to comprehend the incomprehensible, nor second-guess divine will.

The second "feminine weakness of character" discussed is a "sentimental" twist of mind, which is constantly reignited by reading romantic novels. The fondness for novels should be corrected, because they caricature the human race. A preference for histories, essays, and moral discussions should slowly be introduced. Wollstonecraft looks once more at the manipulation of women's general desire to please. This is deformed into making females eager to obey. Next, the author states mildly that people worldwide, of both genders, enjoy dress as a form of self-expression. The problem with Western women who can afford it, she says, is that dressing well becomes a form of rivalry, in the great competition for superlative physical beauty.

Wollstonecraft asks then if women, not educated to be morally aware, are fit to raise their own young: for they are unstable and whimsical, and often model vanity, volatility, and servant abuse. She concludes this chapter, and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, by projecting the middle- and upper-class woman, through an education that promotes her interests in gaining genuine virtue and wisdom beyond the domestic sphere, into the public sector—where both her liberty and her responsibilities lie. "Private duties," the author concludes, "are never properly fulfilled unless ... understanding enlarges the heart; and ... public virtue is only an aggregate of private." All the faults of women, so comprehensively discussed up till now in the book, are "the

natural consequence of their education and station in society." Therefore, if their education and station are improved, women will rise from their vices and folly to virtue and wisdom. Conversely, if enlightened men refuse to allow women to become their partners in reason, they must bear responsibility for being slave masters.



Plot Summary

In 1792, all eyes in the Western world were on the French Revolution. Wollstonecraft writes her introduction in response to Talleyrand, who has reviewed a new version of the French Constitution and agrees that girls should be educated with boys, but only until the age of eight. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* vehemently defends females as full human beings, who for several reasons deserve the same education that men receive. Wollstonecraft intends to persuade readers that serious social harm can come from limiting women's mental and moral abilities.

In Chapter I, Wollstonecraft asserts that only reason lifts humans above the animal kingdom, and invites readers to get back to basics. She poses three questions, giving clear, concise answers in the style of a catechism. First, what entitles humans to dominate animals and the earth? The answer is reason. Second, what does a human gain throughout life that can improve his goodness or value? The answer is virtue. Third, why does God allow humans to feel various passions, when these have the power to lead them astray? The answer is that they might have experiences. Experiences lead people, through reason, to attain knowledge. Wollstonecraft sees these three activities as the dynamic links through which humans can perfect their natures, move closer to God, and create earthly happiness. All human beings-male and female-have the right to take part in the process by which they can refine their understanding. For only by this route can they learn to make moral choices and put their virtues into action. Enlightenment-seeking societies must be careful that men do not stop this process, which leads to goodness, by creating professions that rest first on privilege and later on tyranny.



Themes

Gender

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman dismisses the Eve of the Bible and of Milton's *Paradise Lost* as the kind of woman patriarchy longs for. (In a patriarchy, society is organized around male supremacy, the dependence of wives and children on fathers, and legal descent/inheritance through the male line. In such a setup, males control most social power.) According to Wollstonecraft, the myths and behaviors of males in Western societies (especially the rich) produce power relationships that squeeze women into a desired mold, preventing them from developing their full human potential. Men are able to establish patriarchies even in relatively liberal Western societies through laws and customs, lack of access for women to public spheres like politics and education, and female economic dependence.

Gender is the set of behavioral, cultural, and psychological qualities typically associated with a sex (sex being determined by biological evidence). For example, as Wollstonecraft points out, females were encouraged to behave with childlike obedience, docility, gentleness, and patience, and to exhibit sexual innocence through modesty (or as Wollstonecraft charges, ignorance). Of course, poor and working-class women had to toil beside men of their class to survive, so they had little time to spend on such elegant behaviors. The author writes that, culturally, females were expected to demonstrate vanity, interests in clothes and adornments, and a "spaniel-like affection" for the men in their world. Physically, they were to cultivate bodily weakness (a sign of delicacy) and carry the burden of extreme emotion—which caused their judgments to be based on prejudice, and made them both unstable mothers and easy victims.

Wollstonecraft acknowledges that the women of her social class have been taught to fulfill the twisted gender expectations, which serve the patriarchy well. These women have become adept at manipulating their way through a society that would not let them live as equals. In addition to displaying subservient qualities, they are competitive, selfish, flirtatious, and insincere as they struggle to win male attention. They hide behind appearances in order to survive, and take their shallow pleasures as they can. Such is the design of patriarchy:

Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavor to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing.

If women are given a full, equal education, claims the author, they will not only be able to support themselves through a career in times of need, but will occupy their minds with important matters. They will become more interesting partners in marriage (for the best marriage is a lifelong friendship—the sensual aspect of love inevitably fades) and be able to perfect their souls.



It is hard to assess the vision and courage of a woman who, in 1792, wrote, "Is one half of the human species, like the poor African, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them?" Repeatedly in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft alludes to the pampered slave position of British women, underscoring the assertion that the affluent men who oppress the slaves are as degraded by the oppression as the slaves themselves. Equating women to slaves in an era that was becoming increasingly abolitionist may have, in fact, aided in Wollstonecraft's argument.

Sexuality

Gender is naturalized (made to seem part of what creation intended) by rooting it partly in sexuality. Wollstonecraft tries to tackle aspects of gendered sexuality by touching on the double standard that condemns seduced women, while rewarding male seducers. In an age when few career options existed for well-bred women, she asks readers to reconsider financial and ethical pressures that forced women into the "refuge" of prostitution in order to survive. She offers the solution of education to expand female career options. An entire chapter is dedicated to reconsidering modesty, which Wollstonecraft observes is not about a lowered gaze, or blushing to indicate one's worldly "innocence." Rather, it is a proper self-perspective in relation to one's gifts and one's social duties.

She addresses in various ways the rationale that females are hypersensual, easily tempted, overemotional beings; therefore men must control women's sexuality for their own good. Yet while Wollstonecraft chastises the male with no interest in his own chastity and calls him a "lustful prowler," she attests that good wives have the right to their husbands' caresses and urges parents not to teach daughters that the "common appetites" of human nature that women feel are immodest.

Wollstonecraft is writing to a heterosexual audience in the conservative eighteenth century. Many of her ideas about gender and sexuality are radical and liberal for the time, though she strives to reassure readers that a woman's best place is as wife and mother. It is in these roles (rooted in parental friendship and equality) that she hopes women will best develop virtue, knowledge, and purpose.

Social Stigma

Wollstonecraft warns her readers that the perks of rank and privilege that the coddled "fair defect" enjoys will have to be given up in favor of the deep pleasures of reason. She addresses the general fear (promoted for another century) that "a sensible woman" who engages in such pursuits for reason and knowledge may be stigmatized as "an unnatural mother." She freely admits that rationality in women will often induce the "severest censure." But in the end, if women are to rise above a slave mentality, they—and the good men who support them—must press toward competence and freedom.



Historical Context

Historical Philosophies on Women

Aristotle predated the Christian West, but was the most esteemed of its philosophers from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment. He contended that God created males with more life force and heat than females. In procreation, therefore, males were the agents of life, while females merely furnished growth materials. Male energy always intended to reproduce itself, but sometimes something went wrong. Then, because of a defect or weakness, a female was conceived (hence Wollstonecraft's reference to women as not being merely "fair defects").

Aristotle announced *Femina est mas occasionatus*—the female is an accident. He took the implications of the "defect" in female nature further, to examine its social implications. He claimed that whenever humans engaged in politics, the soul's qualities were called into play, and women's souls were not equipped for the public sphere. Aristotle repeatedly likened women to slaves, in that both groups were found to be lacking and needed control by men. Therefore, he deduced, a woman could not make sound judgments. She could neither direct nor lead people, and she lacked virtue, too. Aristotle insisted the courage in a man's soul was best seen when he commanded, while the courage in the inferior soul of a woman was best seen when she obeyed.

The early Christian philosophers who developed their own interpretations of what God intended drew heavily on Aristotle. With subtle refinements and changes, thinkers like Augustine, Tertullian, and Thomas Aquinas also concluded that women had not been created equal to men. These beliefs were commonplace in Wollstonecraft's day, enforced by both religion and the state. They even continue to find adherents in some areas of the modern world.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century intellectual movement in Western Europe and North America. Many events, such as the rise of a large middle class, exposure to various civilizations as a result of colonialism, and the increasing gap between rich (nobles) and poor (peasants), helped it develop. In the words of humanist scholar Paul Brians in "The Enlightenment":

[Enlightenment philosophers] believed that human reason could be used to combat ignorance, superstition, and tyranny and to build a better world. Their principal targets were religion ... and the domination of society by a hereditary aristocracy.

Enlightenment thinkers believed that people, through hard work and personal merit, could use their scientific reason to improve their lot in life, rather than obeying church or state laws. Brians writes that "individualism, freedom and change replaced community, authority, and tradition as core European values." In fact, human beings' essential rights



of liberty, and an ongoing quest to keep on bettering their lives, became the international hot topic. The main seats of Enlightenment thought were Paris and London, although the American colonies contributed actively, too. In Europe, perhaps the two most revered and influential thinkers for enlightened social change were Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Voltaire hoped that educated aristocrats could leave behind despotism and dogma. Rousseau, however, distrusted the upper classes. He pinned his hopes on an educated middle class, stating that the moment of birth is when one becomes a citizen, and as such, one should exercise that duty immediately. In his still-studied book *Émile* (1762), Rousseau outlines the sort of education that could create a free man. He writes that nature and experience are part of the education that makes man whole.

Revolutionary Rights

More than a century before Wollstonecraft's birth, there was the British revolution of 1688. By 1690, King James II had been ousted from power along with his leading nobles. William of Orange, his Dutch son-in-law, was invited to ascend the throne after he accepted the English Bill of Rights (1689). These rights guaranteed free, fair elections; the right to free speech through debates in Parliament; and the need to obtain Parliament's consent before the king could levy a tax or maintain a standing army. This revolution was relatively bloodless, and although it fostered the growth of English democracy, it also left the rural and urban poor without recourse while allowing most aristocrats to retain their wealth.

Nearly a century later, the American Revolution (1775–1783), which rejected unfair taxation and with it the control of the British monarchy, served as a huge inspiration to Europeans discontented with their own hereditary governments. The American Declaration of Independence led off with a list of "inalienable rights" of men. A vibrant exchange of visits and ideas flowed between American and European philosophers from the 1770s onward. The successful revolution and establishment of self-rule in the New World inspired Europeans. Wollstonecraft refers to the American Revolution several times in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

The French Revolution (1789–1799) was in its fourth year when *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published. This was to be the last year of its moderate phase. The values of the Enlightenment had chipped away at church authority and toppled the concept of the divine right of kings. No longer were people too intimidated to defy the lavish abuses of their hereditary rulers. Both the poor and the middle class (the bourgeoisie) objected to overwhelming taxes, high food prices, and enormous public debt. As a result, King Louis XVI convened the Estates-General for the first time in almost two centuries, but a faction of this emergency law-making body, drawn from commoners, low-ranking clergy, and a few nobles, rebelled and declared themselves a new National Assembly and vowed not to disband until a new French constitution had been written. The Assembly drafted a constitution in 1791 that created a limited (rather than absolute, divine-right) monarchy, with a legislature to be voted in by property-



owning men. The Constitution started with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*.

Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* partly in response to what social activists on all sides of the question had said about the French Revolution. She critiques the remarks British conservative Edmund Burke made in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and refers to Thomas Paine, the radical author of *The Rights of Man* (1791). She was also inspired by the French revolutionary Olympe de Gouges, who wrote *Declaration of the Rights of Women* in 1791. De Gouges, a Parisian playwright, objected to the status of women as passive citizens with restricted rights, no matter their class background. As historian Jenifer D. Clark notes in "Women in the French Revolution: the Failure of the Parisian Women's Movement in Relation to the Theories of Feminism of Rousseau and Condorcet," de Gouges argued the need to fully endorse the "'natural, inalienable rights' of women"—including "wide job opportunities ... [and] schooling for girls." De Gouges also demanded free speech for women, and like Wollstonecraft, insisted "if the grounds for universal human rights are to be meaningful ... they must apply to all sentient beings without exception" (quoted in Clark).



Critical Overview

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was first printed in 1792 by Joseph Johnson in London. Later that same year, it was reprinted in England and published in the United States and France. Heather E. Wallace, in "Sophie: Women's Education According to Rousseau and Wollstonecraft," reports, "Contemporary reactions ranged from shock to amusement to enthusiasm." The treatise was indeed shocking and revolutionary, and while some forward thinkers embraced and even tried to adopt its principles, the most famous conservatives of the day, such as Horace Walpole and Hannah More, considered it dangerous to social order. On the other hand, though, several famous humanists applauded the book, and the American advocates of "Republican Motherhood" echoed Wollstonecraft's argument that mothers of able citizens needed to be educated in order to parent well.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was printed in 1796 for the last time for almost fifty years. William Godwin, Wollstonecraft's widower, produced the infamous *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1798. Godwin revealed intimate details of his wife's emotional and sexual behavior. Soon the world knew that she had lovers, bore an illegitimate child, and attempted suicide. This information clouded the public's opinion of Wollstonecraft, and according to Janet Todd in "Mary Wollstonecraft: A 'Speculative and Dissenting Spirit,'" she became "hugely reviled as a 'prostitute' and 'unsex'd female.'" In a subtle yet also damaging way, Godwin reinforced the gender roles his wife had railed against, claiming the voice of reason for himself, while attributing a highly passionate sensibility to Wollstonecraft.

Public outcry was intense. Wollstonecraft was denounced as a monster, a prostitute, and as philosopher Karen Green writes in "For Wollstonecraft (Obituary)," a "hyena in petticoats." Writing on the 1997 publication of her collected works, Green notes, "Like other women thinkers, her works have languished in relative obscurity for want of ... institutional support." Victorian feminists tried to distance themselves from Wollstonecraft because of her scandalous personal life. Dr. Barbara Caine, in "Victorian Feminism and the Ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft," tells readers that while Wollstonecraft's work went unacknowledged, her life "served as a constant and sometimes unwelcome reminder of the ways in which personal rebellion and feminist commitment were connected" in the conservative mind. Because Victorian feminists, desperately seeking the vote, were rarely wealthy or high wage earners, they could not afford to alienate male mentors. It was crucial to their struggle to uphold the image of a female voter who would be sober, chaste, nurturing, and unthreatening.

The few Victorian feminists who mentioned Wollstonecraft were dismissive (her interests were too narrow; her personal life denied her philosophy, etc.). But Caine reports that George Eliot did write an essay for *The Leader* in 1855 that supported *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Caine relays Eliot's feelings about the book:

In some quarters a vague prejudice against the *Rights of Woman* as in some way or other a reprehensible book, but readers who go to it with this impression will be

surprised to find it eminently serious [and] severely moral.... [with its author exhibiting] the brave bearing of a strong and truthful nature, the beating of a loving woman's heart.

However, until the 1890s, when Wollstonecraft's embrace of social "duty" was rediscovered, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was abandoned by feminists, despite its courageous ideas. Not until the 1920s, with women's suffrage and concerns about female economic and cultural oppression once again in the foreground, was Wollstonecraft's unraveling of the double moral standard, with its attendant evils, taken to heart. Since then, several waves of modern feminists have identified with a variety of her concerns, finding her work ahead of its time and immense in its applications. Scholars in a number of fields are currently plumbing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to extract connections Wollstonecraft made between gender and racial oppression; gender and class inequities; critiques of the traditional nuclear family; links between state and domestic tyranny; and other pertinent topics. As Green notes, in addition to holding its own as the fundamental Western feminist text, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* deserves to be "seriously studied as one of the foundational political texts of modern democratic thought."

In 1986, Knowledge Products of Boston released a two-cassette set of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* along with *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mills. Scripted by Wendy McElroy and narrated by Craig Deitschman, with voice characterizations by several guest readers. It was re-released in 2006.

Selections from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* read by Shirley Williams appear on the cassette entitled *Classic Politics*, produced by Politico's Media in 2000.

British media outlet ITV produced twelve-part miniseries, including a segment on *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in 2006. The program, authored and presented by Melvyn Bragg, examines twelve English-language books Bragg believes have changed the world.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2



Critical Essay #1

In the following excerpt, Taylor writes about why feminists, from Wollstonecraft's time to today, have feared romantic love. While noting some startling dangers that have not changed much over time, she repeats Wollstonecraft's words: "Suppressing the demands of the heart ... is no liberation."

Loving men, feminists have argued, women become bound to the oppressor by the ties of their own hearts; refusing that love, heterosexual feminists have often disavowed desire tout court—a repudiation whose costs are felt in both their lives and politics. The conundrum is as old as feminism itself.

In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the founding text of modern western feminism.

If one reads Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* on its own, the impression is of a dour puritanism reminiscent of today's moral conservatives. Sexual feelings, she argues, are "bestial" and "degraded", and those who indulge in them are "debauched." Men are particularly condemned for their "animal lust", while women are chastised for romantic sentimentalism. Outside marriage, she claims, erotic passion is particularly invidious in its effects on women, who become the mere sexual "playthings" of men. But even inside marriage sexual lust erodes domestic morality and encourages adultery. "In order to fulfil the duties of life ... which form the moral character, a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion. I mean to say that they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society ..."

This highly censorious view of heterosexual love was to cast a long shadow over Wollstonecraft's feminist successors.

But to see Wollstonecraft and the feminist tradition that succeeded her as eternally locked into an anti-male, anti-sexual stance is much too simple. The anxiety about erotic love is certainly there, but so also—as voiced in Wollstonecraft's letters and fiction—is the passionate desire for what feminists have seen as an authentic form of female loving, one based on mutual affection and respect and, above all, on genuine equality. "Perfect love and perfect trust have never yet existed except between equals," as Wollstonecraft's great admirer, the suffragist Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, quoted at her readers in 1897, while a century earlier Wollstonecraft herself provided a model for such a "perfect" union. Once she had recovered from Imlay, she became the lover of England's best-known radical philosopher, William Godwin. She and Godwin argued about politics and religion, maintained separate homes (even after they finally wed), and had great sex: "When the heart and reason accord there is no flying from voluptuous sensations, I find, do what a woman can—Can a philosopher do more?" (13 September 1796).

These tensions in the relationship between "heart and reason" are at the centre of the feminist project as Wollstonecraft helped to define it. For Wollstonecraft herself, their



resolution was short-lived: she died only a year after she and Godwin became lovers. Nonetheless, for nearly two centuries her reputation as a theorist was overshadowed by her sexual history, which was construed as (in the words of the suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett) "irregular relations" which "sickened" the feminist mind. The overtly anti-erotic message of the *Rights of Woman* was largely forgotten, as its author came to symbolise uncontrolled female libidinalism. Feminist interpretations of her life became a barometer of their attitudes toward sexual love.

In 200 years, a lot has changed; a lot hasn't. For women of Wollstonecraft's day, and for more than 150 years afterwards, it was impossible to think about heterosexual love apart from sexual reproduction. Women's vulnerability—to men who might impregnate them, desert them, infect them with venereal disease—was enormous, as were the dangers of childbirth (Wollstonecraft, like so many women, died of complications following childbirth). The celebration of celibate unions found in much feminist writing, "marriages of true minds" involving only minimal sexual contact, needs to be seen in this context, as well as in terms of the dehumanising attitudes toward women prevalent among 18th- and 19th-century male sexual libertarians.

Two centuries later, both the practicalities and attitudes have changed: or have they? Fear of pregnancy, fear of Aids, fear of establishing families in an economic depression—the price for uninhibited passion can be very high. Even in the swinging sixties the feminist voice was a cautionary one, reminding women of these potential costs. Here is one latter-day Mary Wollstonecraft, Germaine Greer, in *The Female Eunuch*: "Women must recognise in the cheap ideology of being in love the essential persuasion to take an irrational and self-destructive step ... Sexual religion is the opiate of the supermenial." Libertarian radicals such as Greer might display a sexual flamboyance unimaginable in previous phases of feminism, but always with an anxious eye out for potential pain, humiliation, degradation. Poised between the recognition of women's own erotic desires and the culture that still demeans and exploits them, feminists tread carefully on love's wilder shores.

Suppressing the demands of the heart, as Wollstonecraft herself had discovered, is no liberation. Expecting those demands to be met easily, without pain or conflict, is empty utopianism. As another generation of Wollstonecraft's daughters, that's one difficult lesson we've begun to learn.

Source: Barbara Taylor, "Love and Trouble (Feminists Who Love Men)," in *New Statesman & Society*, Vol. 6, No. 239, February 12, 1993, pp. 35-36.



Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Murray refutes Wollstonecraft's claim that "the mind has no sex." Building his case on biological determinism, he asserts that males think more, especially about concrete problems; while females exhibit a more "empathetic" brain type.

Two centuries ago, protofeminist Mary Wollstonecraft wrote a treatise entitled "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" in which she theorized that men and women are essentially the same. The roles they play, she suggested, are merely social constructs. The buzz phrase since then has been that "the mind has no sex."

But there is growing scientific evidence that the mind does have a sex, and that other unexpected components of the body have a sex as well. There are significant differences between men and women in their brains and genes as well.

There are two strands to this data: animal research and human research. Among animals, it seems to be testosterone that is associated with "male" behavior.

Much the same is true in humans. One study Sullivan cited showed that men (and women) with high testosterone levels "experienced more arousal and tension than those low in testosterone ... They spent more time thinking, especially about concrete problems in the immediate present. They wanted to get things done and felt frustrated when they could not." Human studies show that our testosterone levels rise in response to confrontation and sexual situations. Athletes' testosterone rises in competition, and it remains high in the event of victory, but lowers in defeat. The same is true, interestingly, of the fans following the sport.

All this holds true for both men and women. The crucial difference is that men have 250 to 1,000 nanograms of testosterone per deciliter of blood plasma, while women have 15 to 70. Testosterone is crucial in making men men—literally. It is an infusion of testosterone around six weeks after conception that makes an embryo male (the default sex for humanity is female), and it is a further rush at puberty that lowers male voices, produces body hair and builds muscles. Testosterone is clearly associated with aggression and risk-taking.

We know, however, that testosterone levels can be influenced by the social environment. An Emory University study found that an alpha-male monkey had, as expected, high testosterone levels, but that placing him in an environment with hostile females lowered his testosterone levels to those of submissive males. His initially high testosterone levels did not protect him or maintain his dominance. So while testosterone is important, it does not seem to be the final determining factor in what makes men and women different.

What about genetics, then? Males possess a Y chromosome, which women do not. The role of genetics in sex is much deeper than that, though. It is now generally accepted,



for instance, that it is the father's genes that build the placenta. This is one aspect of a mysterious process known as "imprinting," whereby the genes of placental mammals seem to remember from which parent they come. This is why, so far, it has proved very difficult to create a functioning embryo from the genes of "parents" of the same sex (and why it proved so difficult to create a viable mammalian clone).

One of the most interesting aspects of imprinting is that, in mice, there is a gene that determines "good" motherhood. A female mouse who fails to have the gene imprinted is perfectly normal except that she will build a poor nest, allow her pups to wander off, and fail to keep them clean. Her pups, not surprisingly, usually die. The responsible gene is inherited from the father. The mother's gene never imprints.

Something similar may apply to humans. A study by researchers from the Institute of Child Health in London looked at "Turner's Syndrome" girls, who are missing the paternal X chromosome. These girls scored lower on recognizing other people's feelings, realizing the effect of their behavior on others, obeying commands, and interacting socially. They acted like geeky men.

Simon Baron-Cohen, a psychiatrist at Cambridge University, is one of the world's leading experts on autism, which affects boys more than girls by a factor of eight to one. Autistic children can be extremely withdrawn, but they are not stupid. Many are exceptionally good at certain tasks, generally involving systematizing. They are, however, exceptionally bad—to the point of being unable to function in society—at tasks that involve empathizing with others (just like the Turner's Syndrome girls).

Baron-Cohen has concluded that most people have a mixture of brain types: S for systematizing and E for empathizing. Men, however, are much more likely to lean toward the S-type brain, and women toward the E-type. In his new book *The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain*, Baron-Cohen concludes that autism is an example of the "extreme male brain." He provides evidence that sex differences in brain types show up again and again in tests, even in babies as young as one day old.

It should be stressed that not all men have male brains, and not all women have female brains. We are talking about general patterns here. In the case of hormones, genes, and brain architecture there is clear evidence that nature tends in different directions for men and women, but obviously individuals vary. And the way a person is raised—the nurture in addition to nature—plays a role in his or her sexual identity as well.

But most often, nature will win out.

And then there are the genetic revelations. Scientists have found that the Y chromosome is not as small and stunted as previously believed. Humans and chimpanzees famously share 98.5 percent of the same DNA. Judging by the new scientific discoveries, it appears that men and women differ genetically by up to 2 percent. So, genetically speaking, a man is as much like a woman as he is like a chimpanzee.

Source: Iain Murray, "The New Science of Sex," in *The American Enterprise*, Vol. 14, No. 6, September 2003, pp. 34-35.



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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's "For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently



studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as “The Narrator” and alphabetized as “Narrator.” If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name “Jean Louise Finch” would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname “Scout Finch.”
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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