

= A Vindication of the Rights of Woman =

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman : with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects (1792) , written by the 18th @-@ century British proto @-@ feminist Mary Wollstonecraft , is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy . In it , Wollstonecraft responds to those educational and political theorists of the 18th century who did not believe women should have an education . She argues that women ought to have an education commensurate with their position in society , claiming that women are essential to the nation because they educate its children and because they could be " companions " to their husbands , rather than mere wives . Instead of viewing women as ornaments to society or property to be traded in marriage , Wollstonecraft maintains that they are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men .

Wollstonecraft was prompted to write the Rights of Woman after reading Charles Maurice de Talleyrand @-@ Périgord 's 1791 report to the French National Assembly , which stated that women should only receive a domestic education ; she used her commentary on this specific event to launch a broad attack against sexual double standards and to indict men for encouraging women to indulge in excessive emotion . Wollstonecraft wrote the Rights of Woman hurriedly to respond directly to ongoing events ; she intended to write a more thoughtful second volume but died before completing it .

While Wollstonecraft does call for equality between the sexes in particular areas of life , such as morality , she does not explicitly state that men and women are equal . Her ambiguous statements regarding the equality of the sexes have since made it difficult to classify Wollstonecraft as a modern feminist , particularly since the word and the concept were unavailable to her . Although it is commonly assumed now that the Rights of Woman was unfavourably received , this is a modern misconception based on the belief that Wollstonecraft was as reviled during her lifetime as she became after the publication of William Godwin 's Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798) . The Rights of Woman was actually well received when it was first published in 1792 . One biographer has called it " perhaps the most original book of [Wollstonecraft 's] century " .

= = Historical context = =

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was written against the tumultuous background of the French Revolution and the debates that it spawned in Britain . In a lively and sometimes vicious pamphlet war , now referred to as the Revolution Controversy , British political commentators addressed topics ranging from representative government to human rights to the separation of church and state , many of these issues having been raised in France first . Wollstonecraft first entered this fray in 1790 with A Vindication of the Rights of Men , a response to Edmund Burke 's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) . In his Reflections , Burke criticised the view of many British thinkers and writers who had welcomed the early stages of the French revolution . While they saw the revolution as analogous to Britain 's own Glorious Revolution in 1688 , which had restricted the powers of the monarchy , Burke argued that the appropriate historical analogy was the English Civil War (1642 ? 1651) in which Charles I had been executed in 1649 . He viewed the French revolution as the violent overthrow of a legitimate government . In Reflections he argues that citizens do not have the right to revolt against their government because civilisation is the result of social and political consensus ; its traditions cannot be continually challenged ? the result would be anarchy . One of the key arguments of Wollstonecraft 's Rights of Men , published just six weeks after Burke 's Reflections , is that rights cannot be based on tradition ; rights , she argues , should be conferred because they are reasonable and just , regardless of their basis in tradition .

When Charles Maurice de Talleyrand @-@ Périgord presented his Rapport sur l 'instruction publique (1791) to the National Assembly in France , Wollstonecraft was galvanised to respond . In his recommendations for a national system of education , Talleyrand had written :

Let us bring up women , not to aspire to advantages which the Constitution denies them , but to know and appreciate those which it guarantees them . . . Men are destined to live on the stage of

the world . A public education suits them : it early places before their eyes all the scenes of life : only the proportions are different . The paternal home is better for the education of women ; they have less need to learn to deal with the interests of others , than to accustom themselves to a calm and secluded life .

Wollstonecraft dedicated the Rights of Woman to Talleyrand : " Having read with great pleasure a pamphlet which you have lately published , I dedicate this volume to you ; to induce you to reconsider the subject , and maturely weigh what I have advanced respecting the rights of woman and national education . " At the end of 1791 , French feminist Olympe de Gouges had published her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen , and the question of women 's rights became central to political debates in both France and Britain .

The Rights of Woman is an extension of Wollstonecraft 's arguments in the Rights of Men . In the Rights of Men , as the title suggests , she is concerned with the rights of particular men (18th @-@ century British men) while in the Rights of Woman , she is concerned with the rights afforded to " woman " , an abstract category . She does not isolate her argument to 18th @-@ century women or British women . The first chapter of the Rights of Woman addresses the issue of natural rights and asks who has those inalienable rights and on what grounds . She answers that since natural rights are given by God , for one segment of society to deny them to another segment is a sin . The Rights of Woman thus engages not only specific events in France and in Britain but also larger questions being raised by political philosophers such as John Locke and Jean @-@ Jacques Rousseau .

= = Themes of writings = =

Wollstonecraft did not employ the formal argumentation or logical prose style common to 18th @-@ century philosophical writing when composing her own works . The Rights of Woman is a long essay that introduces all of its major topics in the opening chapters and then repeatedly returns to them , each time from a different point of view . It also adopts a hybrid tone that combines rational argument with the fervent rhetoric of sensibility .

In the 18th century , sensibility was a physical phenomenon that came to be attached to a specific set of moral beliefs . Physicians and anatomists believed that the more sensitive people 's nerves , the more emotionally affected they would be by their surroundings . Since women were thought to have keener nerves than men , it was also believed that women were more emotional than men . The emotional excess associated with sensibility also theoretically produced an ethic of compassion : those with sensibility could easily sympathise with people in pain . Thus historians have credited the discourse of sensibility and those who promoted it with the increased humanitarian efforts , such as the movement to abolish the slave trade . But sensibility also paralysed those who had too much of it ; as scholar G. J. Barker @-@ Benfield explains , " an innate refinement of nerves was also identifiable with greater suffering , with weakness , and a susceptibility to disorder " .

By the time Wollstonecraft was writing the Rights of Woman , sensibility had already been under sustained attack for a number of years . Sensibility , which had initially promised to draw individuals together through sympathy , was now viewed as " profoundly separatist " ; novels , plays , and poems that employed the language of sensibility asserted individual rights , sexual freedom , and unconventional familial relationships based only upon feeling . Furthermore , as Janet Todd , another scholar of sensibility , argues , " to many in Britain the cult of sensibility seemed to have feminized the nation , given women undue prominence , and emasculated men . "

= = Rational education = =

One of Wollstonecraft 's central arguments in the Rights of Woman is that women should be educated rationally to give them the opportunity to contribute to society . In the 18th century , it was often assumed by both educational philosophers and conduct book writers , who wrote what one might think of as early self @-@ help books , that women were incapable of rational or abstract thought . Women , it was believed , were too susceptible to sensibility and too fragile to be able to think clearly . Wollstonecraft , along with other female reformers such as Catharine Macaulay and

Hester Chapone , maintained that women were indeed capable of rational thought and deserved to be educated . She argued this point in her own conduct book , *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) , in her children 's book , *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) , as well as in the *Rights of Woman* .

Stating in her preface that " my main argument is built on this simple principle , that if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man , she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue ; for truth must be common to all " , Wollstonecraft contends that society will degenerate without educated women , particularly because mothers are the primary educators of young children . She attributes the problem of uneducated women to men and " a false system of education , gathered from the books written on this subject by men who [consider] females rather as women than human creatures " . Women are capable of rationality ; it only appears that they are not , because men have refused to educate them and encouraged them to be frivolous (Wollstonecraft describes silly women as " spaniels " and " toys ") . While stressing it is of the same kind , she entertains the notion that women might not be able to attain the same degree of knowledge that men do .

Wollstonecraft attacks conduct book writers such as James Fordyce and John Gregory as well as educational philosophers such as Jean @-@ Jacques Rousseau who argue that a woman does not need a rational education . (Rousseau famously argues in *Emile* (1762) that women should be educated for the pleasure of men ; Wollstonecraft , infuriated by this argument , attacks not only it but also Rousseau himself .) Intent on illustrating the limitations that contemporary educational theory placed upon women , Wollstonecraft writes , " taught from their infancy that beauty is woman 's sceptre , the mind shapes itself to the body , and , roaming round its gilt cage , only seeks to adorn its prison " , implying that without this damaging ideology , which encourages young women to focus their attention on beauty and outward accomplishments , they could achieve much more . Wives could be the rational " companions " of their husbands and even pursue careers should they so choose : " women might certainly study the art of healing , and be physicians as well as nurses . And midwifery , decency seems to allot to them . . . they might , also , study politics . . . Business of various kinds , they might likewise pursue . "

For Wollstonecraft , " the most perfect education " is " an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart . Or , in other words , to enable the individual to attach such habits of virtue as will render it independent . " In addition to her broad philosophical arguments , Wollstonecraft lays out a specific plan for national education to counter Talleyrand 's . In Chapter 12 , " On National Education , " she proposes that children be sent to day schools as well as given some education at home " to inspire a love of home and domestic pleasures , " and that such schools be free for children " five to nine years of age . " She also maintains that schooling should be co @-@ educational , contending that men and women , whose marriages are " the cement of society , " should be " educated after the same model . "

= = = Feminism writings = = =

It is debatable to what extent the *Rights of Woman* is a feminist text ; because the definitions of feminist vary , different scholars have come to different conclusions . Wollstonecraft would never have referred to her text as feminist because the words feminist and feminism were not coined until the 1890s . Moreover , there was no feminist movement to speak of during Wollstonecraft 's lifetime . In the introduction to her seminal work on Wollstonecraft 's thought , Barbara Taylor writes :

Describing [Wollstonecraft 's philosophy] as feminist is problematic , and I do it only after much consideration . The label is of course anachronistic . . . Treating Wollstonecraft 's thought as an anticipation of nineteenth and twentieth @-@ century feminist argument has meant sacrificing or distorting some of its key elements . Leading examples of this . . . have been the widespread neglect of her religious beliefs , and the misrepresentation of her as a bourgeois liberal , which together have resulted in the displacement of a religiously inspired utopian radicalism by a secular , class @-@ partisan reformism as alien to Wollstonecraft 's political project as her dream of a divinely promised age of universal happiness is to our own . Even more important however has been

the imposition on Wollstonecraft of a heroic @-@ individualist brand of politics utterly at odds with her own ethically driven case for women 's emancipation . Wollstonecraft 's leading ambition for women was that they should attain virtue , and it was to this end that she sought their liberation .

In the Rights of Woman , Wollstonecraft does not make the claim for gender equality using the same arguments or the same language that late 19th- and 20th century feminists later would . For instance , rather than unequivocally stating that men and women are equal , Wollstonecraft contends that men and women are equal in the eyes of God , which means that they are both subject to the same moral law . For Wollstonecraft , men and women are equal in the most important areas of life . While such an idea may not seem revolutionary to 21st @-@ century readers , its implications were revolutionary during the 18th century . For example , it implied that both men and women ? not just women ? should be modest and respect the sanctity of marriage . Wollstonecraft 's argument exposed the sexual double standard of the late 18th century and demanded that men adhere to the same virtues demanded of women .

However , Wollstonecraft 's arguments for equality stand in contrast to her statements respecting the superiority of masculine strength and valour . Wollstonecraft famously and ambiguously states :

Let it not be concluded , that I wish to invert the order of things ; I have already granted , that , from the constitution of their bodies , men seem to be designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue . I speak collectively of the whole sex ; but I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in respect to their nature . In fact , how can they , if virtue has only one eternal standard ? I must therefore , if I reason consequentially , as strenuously maintain that they have the same simple direction , as that there is a God .

Moreover , Wollstonecraft calls on men , rather than women , to initiate the social and political changes she outlines in the Rights of Woman . Because women are uneducated , they cannot alter their own situation ? men must come to their aid . Wollstonecraft writes at the end of her chapter " Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society " :

I then would fain convince reasonable men of the importance of some of my remarks ; and prevail on them to weigh dispassionately the whole tenor of my observations . ? I appeal to their understandings ; and , as a fellow @-@ creature , claim , in the name of my sex , some interest in their hearts . I entreat them to assist to emancipate their companion , to make her a help meet for them ! Would men but generously snap our chains , and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience , they would find us more observant daughters , more affectionate sisters , more faithful wives , more reasonable mothers ? in a word , better citizens .

It is Wollstonecraft 's last novel , Maria : or , The Wrongs of Woman (1798) , the fictionalised sequel to the Rights of Woman , that is usually considered her most radical feminist work .

= = = Sensibility = = =

One of Wollstonecraft 's most scathing criticisms in the Rights of Woman is against false and excessive sensibility , particularly in women . She argues that women who succumb to sensibility are " blown about by every momentary gust of feeling " ; because these women are " the prey of their senses " , they cannot think rationally . In fact , not only do they do harm to themselves but they also do harm to all of civilisation : these are not women who can refine civilisation ? these are women who will destroy it . But reason and feeling are not independent for Wollstonecraft ; rather , she believes that they should inform each other . For Wollstonecraft , as for the important 18th @-@ century philosopher David Hume , the passions underpin all reason . This was a theme that she would return to throughout her career , but particularly in her novels Mary : A Fiction (1788) and Maria : or , The Wrongs of Woman .

As part of her argument that women should not be overly influenced by their feelings , Wollstonecraft emphasises that they should not be constrained by or made slaves to their bodies or their sexual feelings . This particular argument has led many modern feminists to suggest that Wollstonecraft intentionally avoids granting women any sexual desire . Cora Kaplan argues that the " negative and prescriptive assault on female sexuality " is a " leitmotif " of the Rights of Woman . For example , Wollstonecraft advises her readers to " calmly let passion subside into friendship " in

the ideal companionate marriage (that is , in the ideal of a love @-@ based marriage that was developing at the time) . It would be better , she writes , when " two virtuous young people marry . . . if some circumstances checked their passion " . According to Wollstonecraft , " love and friendship cannot subsist in the same bosom " . As Mary Poovey explains , " Wollstonecraft betrays her fear that female desire might in fact court man 's lascivious and degrading attentions , that the subordinate position women have been given might even be deserved . Until women can transcend their fleshly desires and fleshly forms , they will be hostage to the body . " If women are not interested in sexuality , they cannot be dominated by men . Wollstonecraft worries that women are consumed with " romantic wavering " , that is , they are interested only in satisfying their lusts . Because the Rights of Woman eliminates sexuality from a woman 's life , Kaplan contends , it " expresses a violent antagonism to the sexual " while at the same time " exaggerat [ing] the importance of the sensual in the everyday life of women " . Wollstonecraft was so determined to wipe sexuality from her picture of the ideal woman that she ended up foregrounding it by insisting upon its absence . But as Kaplan and others have remarked , Wollstonecraft may have been forced to make this sacrifice : " it is important to remember that the notion of woman as politically enabled and independent [was] fatally linked [during the eighteenth century] to the unrestrained and vicious exercise of her sexuality . "

= = = Republicanism = = =

Claudia Johnson , a prominent Wollstonecraft scholar , has called the Rights of Woman " a republican manifesto " . Johnson contends that Wollstonecraft is hearkening back to the Commonwealth tradition of the 17th century and attempting to reestablish a republican ethos . In Wollstonecraft 's version , there would be strong , but separate , masculine and feminine roles for citizens . According to Johnson , Wollstonecraft " denounces the collapse of proper sexual distinction as the leading feature of her age , and as the grievous consequence of sentimentality itself . The problem undermining society in her view is feminized men " . If men feel free to adopt both the masculine position and the sentimental feminine position , she argues , women have no position open to them in society . Johnson therefore sees Wollstonecraft as a critic , in both the Rights of Men and the Rights of Woman , of the " masculinization of sensitivity " in such works as Edmund Burke 's Reflections on the Revolution in France .

In the Rights of Woman Wollstonecraft adheres to a version of republicanism that includes a belief in the eventual overthrow of all titles , including the monarchy . She also briefly suggests that all men and women should be represented in government . But the bulk of her " political criticism , " as Chris Jones , a Wollstonecraft scholar , explains , " is couched predominantly in terms of morality " . Her definition of virtue focuses on the individual 's happiness rather than , for example , the good of the entire society . This is reflected in her explanation of natural rights . Because rights ultimately proceed from God , Wollstonecraft maintains that there are duties , tied to those rights , incumbent upon each and every person . For Wollstonecraft , the individual is taught republicanism and benevolence within the family ; domestic relations and familial ties are crucial to her understanding of social cohesion and patriotism .

= = = Class = = =

In many ways the Rights of Woman is inflected by a bourgeois view of the world , as is its direct predecessor the Rights of Men . Wollstonecraft addresses her text to the middle class , which she calls the " most natural state " . She also frequently praises modesty and industry , virtues which , at the time , were associated with the middle class . From her position as a middle @-@ class writer arguing for a middle @-@ class ethos , Wollstonecraft also attacks the wealthy , criticising them using the same arguments she employs against women . She points out the " false @-@ refinement , immorality , and vanity " of the rich , calling them " weak , artificial beings , raised above the common wants and affections of their race , in a premature unnatural manner [who] undermine the very foundation of virtue , and spread corruption through the whole mass of society " .

But Wollstonecraft 's criticisms of the wealthy do not necessarily reflect a concomitant sympathy for the poor . For her , the poor are fortunate because they will never be trapped by the snares of wealth : " Happy is it when people have the cares of life to struggle with ; for these struggles prevent their becoming a prey to enervating vices , merely from idleness ! " Moreover , she contends that charity has only negative consequences because , as Jones puts it , she " sees it as sustaining an unequal society while giving the appearance of virtue to the rich " .

In her national plan for education , she retains class distinctions (with an exception for the intelligent) , suggesting that : " After the age of nine , girls and boys , intended for domestic employments , or mechanical trades , ought to be removed to other schools , and receive instruction , in some measure appropriated to the destination of each individual . . . The young people of superior abilities , or fortune , might now be taught , in another school , the dead and living languages , the elements of science , and continue the study of history and politics , on a more extensive scale , which would not exclude polite literature . "

= = Rhetoric and style = =

In attempting to navigate the cultural expectations of female writers and the generic conventions of political and philosophical discourse , Wollstonecraft , as she does throughout her oeuvre , constructs a unique blend of masculine and feminine styles in the Rights of Woman . She utilises the language of philosophy , referring to her work as a " treatise " with " arguments " and " principles " . However , Wollstonecraft also uses a personal tone , employing " I " and " you " , dashes and exclamation marks , and autobiographical references to create a distinctly feminine voice in the text . The Rights of Woman further hybridizes its genre by weaving together elements of the conduct book , the short essay , and the novel , genres often associated with women , while at the same time claiming that these genres could be used to discuss philosophical topics such as rights .

Although Wollstonecraft argues against excessive sensibility , the rhetoric of the Rights of Woman is at times heated and attempts to provoke the reader . Many of the most emotional comments in the book are directed at Rousseau . For example , after excerpting a long passage from Emile (1762) , Wollstonecraft pithily states , " I shall make no other comments on this ingenious passage , than just to observe , that it is the philosophy of lasciviousness . " A mere page later , after indicting Rousseau 's plan for female education , she writes " I must relieve myself by drawing another picture . " These terse exclamations are meant to draw the reader to her side of the argument (it is assumed that the reader will agree with them) . While she claims to write in a plain style so that her ideas will reach the broadest possible audience , she actually combines the plain , rational language of the political treatise with the poetic , passionate language of sensibility to demonstrate that one can combine rationality and sensibility in the same self . Wollstonecraft defends her positions not only with reasoned argument but also with ardent rhetoric .

In her efforts to vividly describe the condition of women within society , Wollstonecraft employs several different analogies . She often compares women to slaves , arguing that their ignorance and powerlessness places them in that position . But at the same time , she also compares them to " capricious tyrants " who use cunning and deceit to manipulate the men around them . At one point , she reasons that a woman can become either a slave or tyrant , which she describes as two sides of the same coin . Wollstonecraft also compares women to soldiers ; like military men , they are valued only for their appearance . And like the rich , women 's " softness " has " debased mankind " .

= = Revision = =

Wollstonecraft was forced to write the Rights of Woman hurriedly to respond to Talleyrand and ongoing events . Upon completing the work , she wrote to her friend William Roscoe : " I am dissatisfied with myself for not having done justice to the subject . ? Do not suspect me of false modesty ? I mean to say that had I allowed myself more time I could have written a better book , in every sense of the word . . . I intend to finish the next volume before I begin to print , for it is not pleasant to have the Devil coming for the conclusion of a sheet fore it is written . " When

Wollstonecraft revised the Rights of Woman for the second edition , she took the opportunity not only to fix small spelling and grammar mistakes but also to bolster the feminist claims of her argument . She changed some of her statements regarding female and male difference to reflect a greater equality between the sexes .

Wollstonecraft never wrote the second part to the Rights of Woman , although William Godwin published her " Hints " , which were " chiefly designed to have been incorporated in the second part of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman " , in the posthumous collection of her works . However , she did begin writing the novel Maria : or , The Wrongs of Woman , which most scholars consider a fictionalised sequel to the Rights of Woman . It was unfinished at her death and also included in the Posthumous Works published by Godwin .

= = Reception and legacy = =

When it was first published in 1792 , the Rights of Woman was reviewed favourably by the Analytical Review , the General Magazine , the Literary Magazine , New York Magazine , and the Monthly Review , although the assumption persists even today that Rights of Woman received hostile reviews . It was almost immediately released in a second edition in 1792 , several American editions appeared , and it was translated into French . Taylor writes that " it was an immediate success " . Moreover , other writers such as Mary Hays and Mary Robinson specifically alluded to Wollstonecraft 's text in their own works . Hays cited the Rights of Woman in her novel Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796) and modelled her female characters after Wollstonecraft 's ideal woman . Although female conservatives such as Hannah More excoriated Wollstonecraft personally , they actually shared many of the same values . As the scholar Anne Mellor has shown , both More and Wollstonecraft wanted a society founded on " Christian virtues of rational benevolence , honesty , personal virtue , the fulfillment of social duty , thrift , sobriety , and hard work " . During the early 1790s , many writers within British society were engaged in an intense debate regarding the position of women in society . For example , the respected poet and essayist Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Wollstonecraft sparred back and forth ; Barbauld published several poems responding to Wollstonecraft 's work and Wollstonecraft commented on them in footnotes to the Rights of Woman . The work also provoked outright hostility . The bluestocking Elizabeth Carter was unimpressed with the work . Thomas Taylor , the Neoplatonist translator who had been a landlord to the Wollstonecraft family in the late 1770s , swiftly wrote a satire called A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes : if women have rights , why not animals too ?

After Wollstonecraft died in 1797 , her husband William Godwin published his Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798) . He revealed much about her private life that had previously not been known to the public : her illegitimate child , her love affairs , and her attempts at suicide . While Godwin believed he was portraying his wife with love , sincerity , and compassion , contemporary readers were shocked by Wollstonecraft 's unorthodox lifestyle and she became a reviled figure . Richard Polwhele targeted her in particular in his anonymous long poem The Unsex 'd Females (1798) , a defensive reaction to women 's literary self @-@ assertion : Hannah More is Christ to Wollstonecraft 's Satan . His poem was " well known " among the responses A Vindication . One reviewer comments this " ingenious poem " with its " playful sallies of sarcastic wit " against " our modern ladies , " though others found it " a tedious , lifeless piece of writing . " Critical responses largely fell along clear @-@ cut political lines .

Wollstonecraft 's ideas became associated with her life story and women writers felt that it was dangerous to mention her in their texts . Hays , who had previously been a close friend and an outspoken advocate for Wollstonecraft and her Rights of Woman , for example , did not include her in the collection of Illustrious and Celebrated Women she published in 1803 . Maria Edgeworth specifically distances herself from Wollstonecraft in her novel Belinda (1802) ; she caricatures Wollstonecraft as a radical feminist in the character of Harriet Freke . But , like Jane Austen , she does not reject Wollstonecraft 's ideas . Both Edgeworth and Austen argue that women are crucial to the development of the nation ; moreover , they portray women as rational beings who should choose companionate marriage .

The negative views towards Wollstonecraft persisted for over a century . The Rights of Woman was not reprinted until the middle of the 19th century and it still retained an aura of ill @-@ repute . George Eliot wrote " there is 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 , severely moral , and withal rather heavy " . The suffragist (i.e. moderate reformer , as opposed to suffragette) Millicent Garrett Fawcett wrote the introduction to the centenary edition of the Rights of Woman , cleansing the memory of Wollstonecraft and claiming her as the foremother of the struggle for the vote . While the Rights of Woman may have paved the way for feminist arguments , 20th century feminists have tended to use Wollstonecraft 's life story , rather than her texts , for inspiration ; her unorthodox lifestyle convinced them to try new " experiments in living " , as Virginia Woolf termed it in her famous essay on Wollstonecraft . However , there is some evidence that the Rights of Woman may be influencing current feminists . Ayaan Hirsi Ali , a feminist who is critical of Islam 's dictates regarding women , cites the Rights of Woman in her autobiography Infidel , writing that she was " inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft , the pioneering feminist thinker who told women they had the same ability to reason as men did and deserved the same rights " .

= = = Modern reprints = = =

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Wollstonecraft , Mary . The Vindications : The Rights of Men and The Rights of Woman . Eds . D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf . Toronto : Broadview Literary Texts , 1997 . ISBN 1 @-@ 55111 @-@ 088 @-@ 1

Wollstonecraft , Mary . A Vindication of the Rights of Woman . Ed . Miriam Brody Kramnick . Rev. ed . Harmondsworth : Penguin , 2004 . ISBN 0 @-@ 14 @-@ 144125 @-@ 9 .

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= = = Contemporary reviews = = =

Analytical Review 12 (1792) : 241 ? 249 ; 13 (1792) : 418 ? 489 .

Christian Miscellany 1 (1792) : 209 ? 212 .

Critical Review New Series 4 (1792) : 389 ? 398 ; 5 (1792) : 132 ? 141 .

General Magazine and Imperial Review 6 @. @ 2 (1792) : 187 ? 191 .

Literary Magazine and British Review 8 (1792) ; 133 ? 139 .

Monthly Review New Series 8 (1792) : 198 ? 209 .

New Annual Register 13 (1792) : 298 .

New @-@ York Magazine 4 (1793) : 77 ? 81 .

Scots Magazine 54 (1792) : 284 ? 290 .

Sentimental and Masonic Magazine 1 (1792) : 63 ? 72 .

Town and Country Magazine 24 (1792) : 279 .