

History of English Language and Literature
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Lecture 13 c
The Rise of the Woman Writer in the 18th Century

Hello everyone. Let me welcome you yet again to this NPTEL course history of English language and literature. In today's session in the lecture titled The Rise of the Woman Writer in the 18th Century we shall particularly be looking at the increase in the writings by women in the 18th century.

This is something that we have already taken a look at in one of the previous sessions taking notice of the fact that many women writers love to professionally pursue writing and also there was an increased readership and also a demand for writings by women.

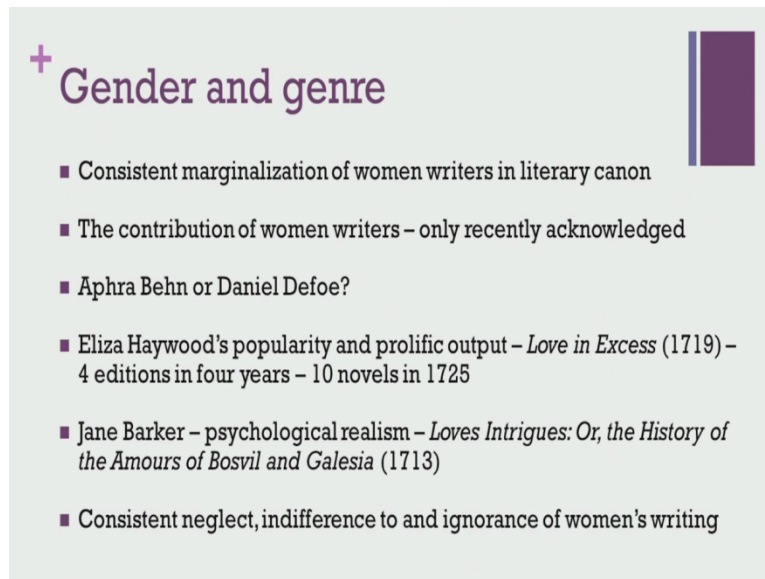
So unlike the earlier centuries we also know that England was getting more and more opened to this idea of women writing on their own and we also find that the 18th century does lay the foundations to greater sense of women writing which were to be made available in the coming centuries. So when we talk about gender and genre in literary history we have noticed multiple times that there was a consistent marginalization of women writers in literary canon.

We do not find them being particularly mentioned in literary histories of different ages and even when they are mentioned they are just a handful. We also had taken a look at some of the major writers of the renaissance period taking notice of the fact that they were heavily marginalized (medie) from the mediaeval period onwards.

And the contributions of women writers whether it was during the renaissance period or in the 17th and the early 18th century they began to be acknowledged only from the early 1900 onwards. And only in the recent times that the historians and literary critics have begin to pay a due attention to them as major writers who deserves serious academic and critical attention.

So if we look at one of the examples of the 18th century Aphra Behn was one of the earliest forerunners of novelist like Daniel Defoe was.

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The slide features a purple plus sign icon to the left of the title 'Gender and genre'. To the right of the title is a vertical purple bar. The main content is a list of six bullet points, each preceded by a small purple square. The text is as follows:

- Consistent marginalization of women writers in literary canon
- The contribution of women writers – only recently acknowledged
- Aphra Behn or Daniel Defoe?
- Eliza Haywood's popularity and prolific output – *Love in Excess* (1719) – 4 editions in four years – 10 novels in 1725
- Jane Barker – psychological realism – *Loves Intrigues: Or, the History of the Amours of Bosvil and Galesia* (1713)
- Consistent neglect, indifference to and ignorance of women's writing

But however when we serve the history of English literature we notice that the kind of status which has been accorded to Daniel Defoe is quite of a stellar nature in comparison with the marginal presence that has been accorded to Aphra Behn. And we also noticed that Aphra Behn also deserves only a certain compartmentalized kind of mention in terms of a women writer in particular.

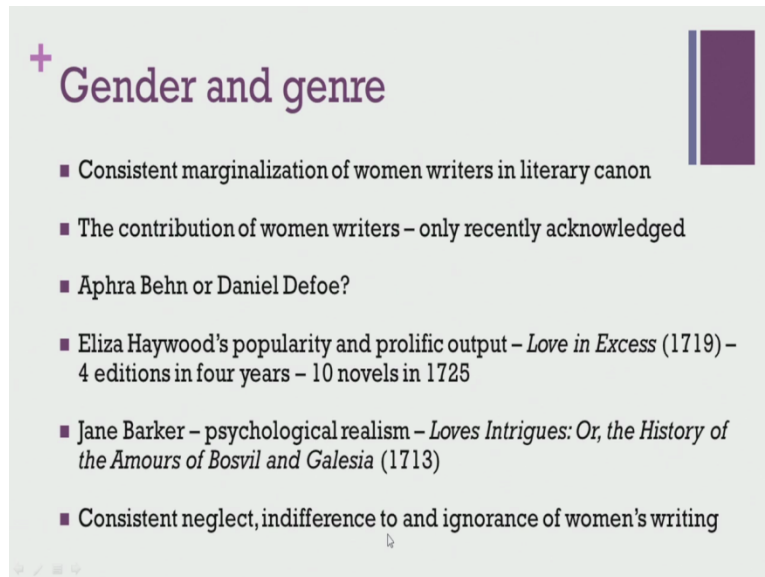
And Daniel Defoe irrespective of the gender that is assigned to him we noticed that he is more or less regarded as the father of English novel itself. And also if we look at another stunning example that of Eliza Haywood. How popularity and prolific output in 18th century could be compared with any other male writer? For (in) instance her work which was published in 1719, *Love in Excess* which was also composes an erotic fiction.

It ran the four different editions within 4 years and she also had published about 10 novels in just one year, the 1725. But we do know that she has not been talked about as one of the prolific writers of the 18th century when we talk about conventional and mainstream literary history. And another woman writer Jane Barker also had suffered some kind of marginalization in terms of canon and literary history. She was one of the earlier novelists who dared to venture into areas such as psychological realism.

Her major work published in 1713, *Loves Intrigues Or the History of Amours of Bosvil and Galesia*. It was quite well appreciated during those times. But we do know that she has not been given due attention like any other male writer. And consistently we can see that they

have suffered neglect to the hands of historians, the canon has been quite unkind to them and there has been always a sense of indifference to and ignorance of women's writing in general.

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+ Gender and genre

- Consistent marginalization of women writers in literary canon
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And we talked about women's writers of the 18th century. From the early 18th century onwards there is enough evidence to prove that women started writing and publishing and also in certain sense of commercial and professional interest in writing also had come into place by then. But nevertheless it needs to be reiterated that several of these works by the women writers have been lost and many of them have not been able to be recovered also.

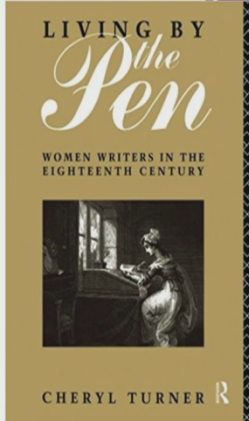
But of late there are many women historians and a lot of feminist archivers who have taken a lot of interest in retrieving these works. And the absence of any comprehensive bibliography of these women writers especially of the 18th and the early 19th century also led to the fact that these works were almost forgotten or irrecoverably lost.

By 1960s we find a renewed interest in recovering many of these writings by women. One of the major works includes the work by Cheryl Turner titled *Living by the Pen*. It was published in 1992. In her work Cheryl Turner notes that there were about 176 female authors who published about 446 works in the years between 1696 and 1796.

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+ Women writers?

- Several works have been lost
- No comprehensive bibliography of early writing by women
- 1960s – feminist archivists, literary historians
- Cheryl Turner (*Living by the Pen*, 1992) – 176 authors, 446 works between 1696 and 1796)

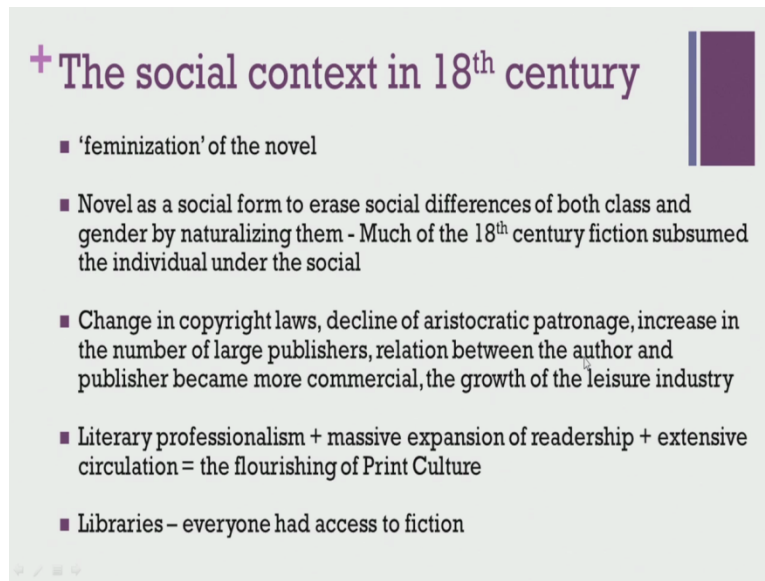


But however when we talk about conventional literary history, when we talk about the ways in which they have been recorded by critics and historians we do know that even today we only talk about a handful of these women writers when we talk about the prolific output of the 18th century. This also leads us to a need to take a relook at the social context of the 18th century which also had led to a certain kind of feminization of one particular genre namely the novel.

We noted in one of the earlier session that some of the writers male novelist were also described as being more feminine in terms of their technique and treatment because of the kind of subject to matter and the kind of treatment which were more appealing to the women or women readers. So in general this was also in addition to the fact that novel as a social form had begun to erase social differences of both the class and gender.

There was a way in which all of these social and constructed differences were getting naturalized in the form of a novel. And much of the 18th century fiction notably also had subsumed the individual under the social. Many other changes also have led to a phenomenal change in terms of erasing the differences between gender and genre. We find that was an increased change in the copyright laws, there was decline of aristocratic patronage.

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+ The social context in 18th century

- 'feminization' of the novel
- Novel as a social form to erase social differences of both class and gender by naturalizing them - Much of the 18th century fiction subsumed the individual under the social
- Change in copyright laws, decline of aristocratic patronage, increase in the number of large publishers, relation between the author and publisher became more commercial, the growth of the leisure industry
- Literary professionalism + massive expansion of readership + extensive circulation = the flourishing of Print Culture
- Libraries – everyone had access to fiction

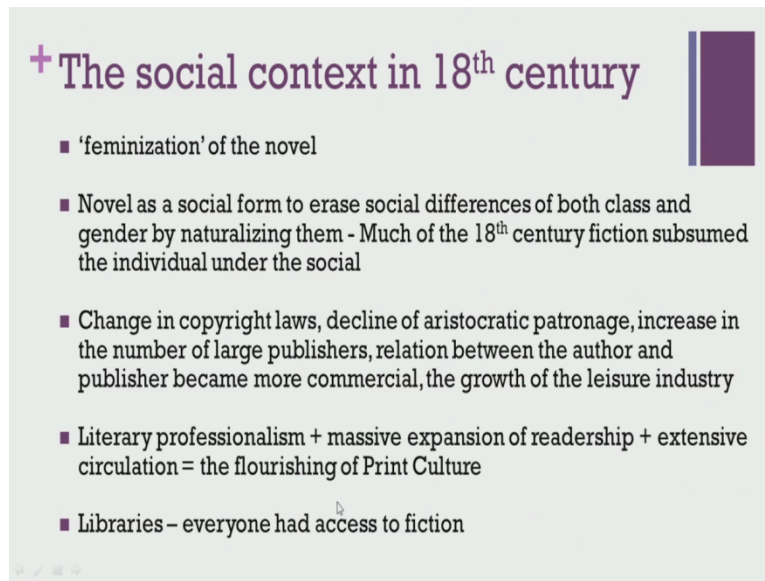
We also noticed that through multiple events which also led to a shift in the patronage system altogether which also gave more independence and more liberty and more autonomy to the writer. And there was also an increase in the number of large publishers which also ensure that the books could be made available to the common public in a more economical fashion. And also the relation between the writer and the publisher became a more of a commercial one.

This did have a lot of disadvantages alongside the advantages. But however in a certain way it would be safe to assume that the advantages in many ways outdid the disadvantages because earlier when the writers were under the mercy of a particular patrons they also have to cater to the political and the ideological interest of the one who was patronizing them.

So the writers under this commercial framework were freer to explore newer subjects and also independent to announce their particular affiliations which even when it did not go very well with the powerful few of the nation. And all together a new kind of leisure industry was getting formed in which women also got to play a major part.

In general it would be easy to say that literary professionalism along with massive expansion of readership coupled with an extensive circulation led to the flourishing of print culture right in the 18th century itself. It was alongside the foundations of this print culture that the newer kinds of writings were also freer to circulate.

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+ The social context in 18th century

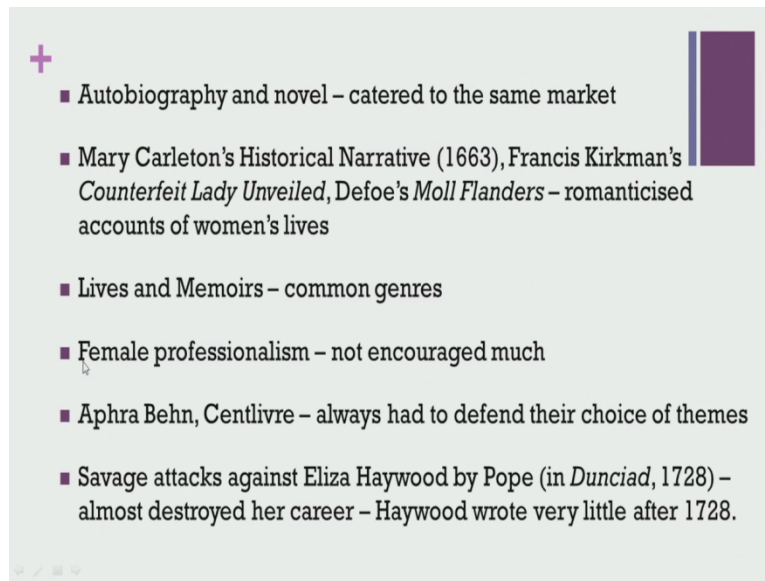
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There was also renewed sense of acceptance irrespective of the class differences or gender differences. In addition to this, libraries were getting established in every nook and corner of England. This also ensured that everyone had access to the reading material which was getting published and which were getting printed and published in the country during that time.

And if you look at the kind of genres which dominated the 18th century publishing scenario, it is interesting to note that autobiography and novel they catered to the same market and also dominated the reading material in England in 18th century. Some of the major works which catered to be fancy of the common readers during those times were Mary Carleton's Historical Narrative published in 1663.

It was republished as well in the 18th century. Francis Kirkman's Counterfeit Lady Unveiled, Defoe's Moll Flanders and all of them if we look at this they have a certain elements in common, particularly the romanticized accounts of women's lives. And this was increasingly consumed with a lot of interest and a lot of even at the point of addiction in the 18th century.

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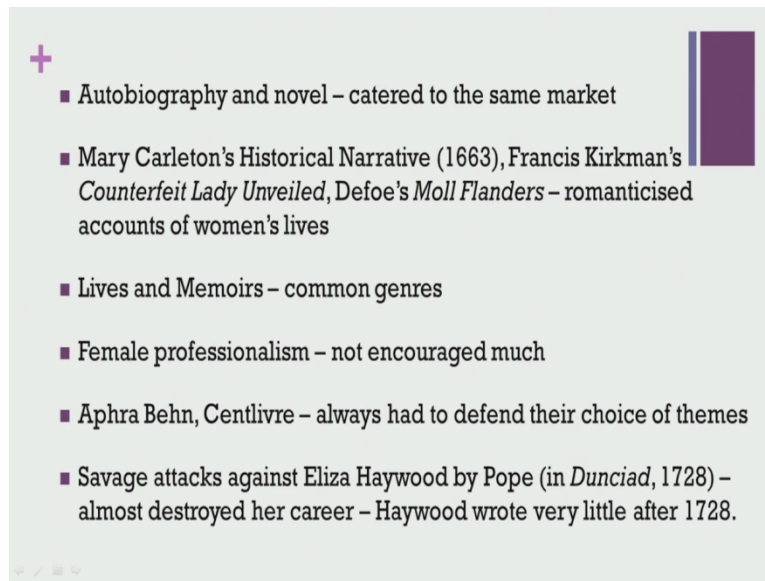
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- Autobiography and novel – catered to the same market
 - Mary Carleton's *Historical Narrative* (1663), Francis Kirkman's *Counterfeit Lady Unveiled*, Defoe's *Moll Flanders* – romanticised accounts of women's lives
 - Lives and Memoirs – common genres
 - Female professionalism – not encouraged much
 - Aphra Behn, Centlivre – always had to defend their choice of themes
 - Savage attacks against Eliza Haywood by Pope (in *Dunciad*, 1728) – almost destroyed her career – Haywood wrote very little after 1728.

Along that it was only natural for genre such as lives and memoirs to emerge as more common and popular. And at the same time though there was more space for women writers, there was more acceptance for the women writers we also notice that female professionalism was not encouraged as much as the male professionalism was (en) encouraged. And in that sense it is useful to remember how Aphra Behn and Mrs Centlivre, they also had to defend their choice of themes.

We also find that some of the women writers were forced to mellow down their treatment, mellow down their subject to matter in order to gain more acceptance and to gain more respectability. And it is also useful to remember the savage attacks made against Eliza Haywood by Pope in his (10:40) work the *Dunciad* published in 1728.

And this attack by Pope it is said that it almost destroyed Haywood's career. And we noticed that Eliza Haywood wrote very little after 1728. It is again useful to reiterate this point that Haywood in terms of her prolific output was one of the most notable writers of those times.

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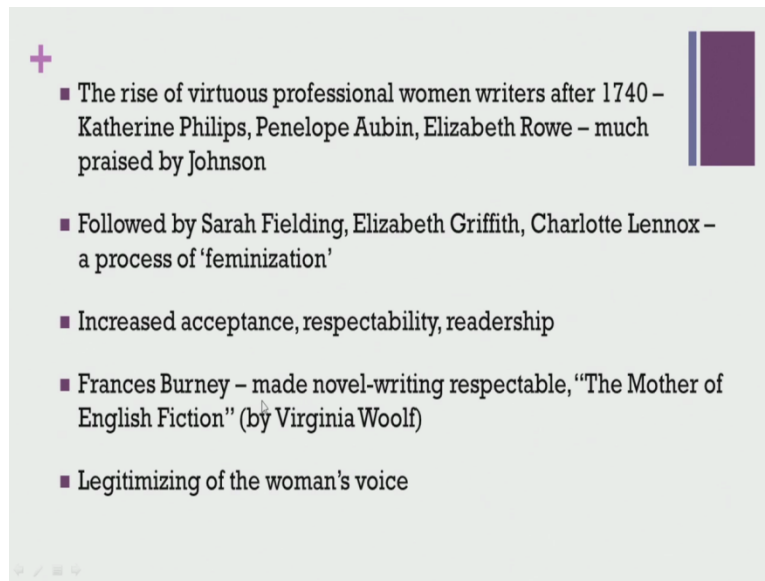
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But when we talk about the general output of the 18th century now her contribution is mostly mentioned in terms of a very marginalized account. So from the mid 18th century onwards we also noticed that many of the women they changed the way in which they approach their writing career in order to gain more acceptance. We also find in that sense the rise of virtuous professional women writers for instance we have the cases of Katherine Philips, Penelope Aubin, Elizabeth Rowe.

All of these writers were extensively (and) praised by the major male literary figures of those times. Particularly Philips, Aubin and Rowe got much praise from Samuel Johnson. And this and these set of writers were followed by writers such as Sarah Fielding, Elizabeth Griffith and Charlotte Lennox.

So this also led to an increased process of feminization when it came to particularly the novel. But nevertheless this also led to increased acceptance, respectability and readership which was indeed a very good thing in terms of the acceptance of writings irrespective of gender.

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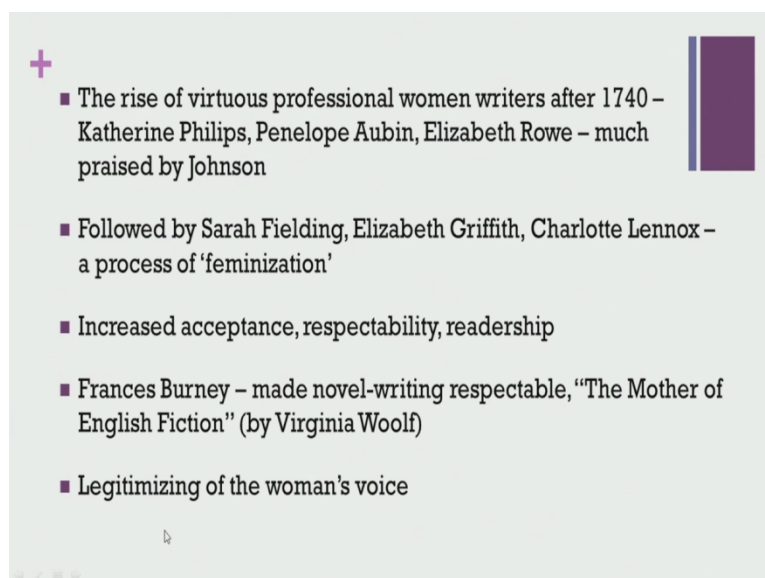


- The rise of virtuous professional women writers after 1740 – Katherine Philips, Penelope Aubin, Elizabeth Rowe – much praised by Johnson
- Followed by Sarah Fielding, Elizabeth Griffith, Charlotte Lennox – a process of ‘feminization’
- Increased acceptance, respectability, readership
- Frances Burney – made novel-writing respectable, “The Mother of English Fiction” (by Virginia Woolf)
- Legitimizing of the woman's voice

And this (12:15) it is again useful to remember Frances Burney about whom we have discussed in one of the earlier sessions. She was one of the foremost women writers who made the process of novel writing more acceptable in England. She was also praised at the later point by Virginia Woolf as The Mother of English Fiction. All together many of these women together and the social political context of those times, everything together it led to the legitimising of woman's voice in the 18th century.

This is not to say that the women writers were accepted without any kind of problem. But however this paved the way for the later 19th and the 20th century women writers to establish themselves without much of a trouble.

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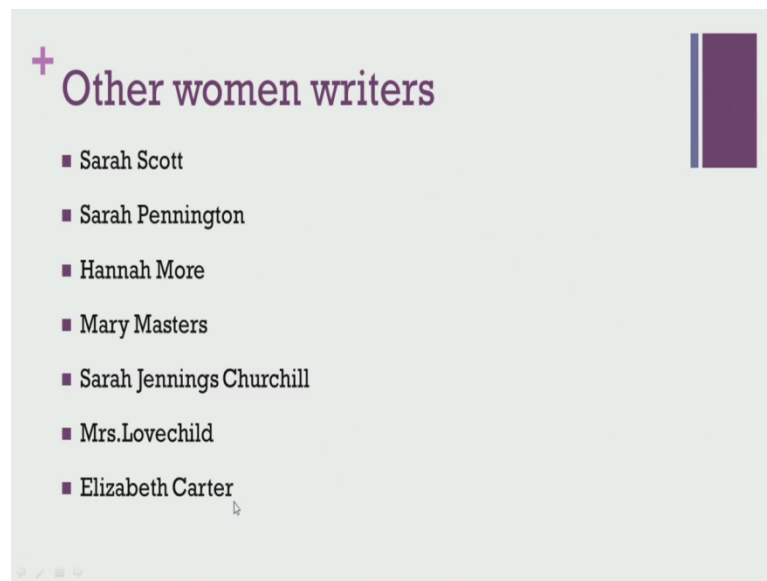


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The other major writers of this period include Sarah Scott, Sarah Pennington, Hannah More, Mary Masters, Sarah Jennings Churchill, Mrs. Lovechild and Elizabeth Carter. some of them wrote very prolifically, some of had produced just a couple of text.

But however they all together laid the foundations of the 18th century writings by a woman and their individual writings were not worthy enough to be discussed in many of the little critical circles and due to paucity of time we shall not be engaging with the individual works of these writers.

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But how about one particular writer Mary Wollstonecraft? She cannot be brushed aside alongside the other writers of the 18th century. Mary Wollstonecraft lived from 1759 till 1797 and she is best known even in the 21st century as the author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman published in 1792. This was one work which pressed for educational reforms for women in the 18th century.

And this work also had rise from this general assumption that woman were inferior to man in many respects and this work try to contest this assumption by arguing for equal educational opportunities for women which Wollstonecraft felt that would also ensure more equality and more sense of secularism when it came to gender.

And this work particularly is important because it left a lasting impact on future women writers and thinkers and it also is now seen as one of the seminal foundational text of a feminist writing.

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+ Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)



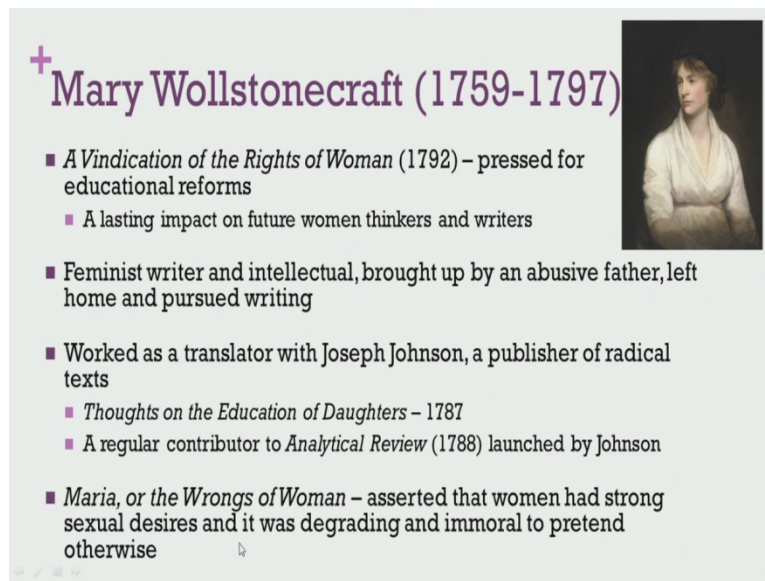
- *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) – pressed for educational reforms
 - A lasting impact on future women thinkers and writers
- Feminist writer and intellectual, brought up by an abusive father, left home and pursued writing
- Worked as a translator with Joseph Johnson, a publisher of radical texts
 - *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* – 1787
 - A regular contributor to *Analytical Review* (1788) launched by Johnson
- *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* – asserted that women had strong sexual desires and it was degrading and immoral to pretend otherwise

Wollstonecraft who lived in the 18th century was a feminist writer and intellectual. She was brought up by an abusive father and hence had very unhappy childhood. She was forced to leave home at a very early age and she pursued writing and also successfully made a career out of it. She for a brief time worked as a translator with Joseph Johnson who was a publisher of radical text during those times. So in that sense she had a very controversial beginning in terms of her professional career.

As early as 1787 she published thoughts on education of daughters which again address the issues of female literacy which culminates in her seminal work of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She also became a regular contributor to *Analytical Review* launched in 1788 by Joseph Johnson and this periodical was quite popular during those times and she was a regular columnist. Another important work of hers titled *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, it asserted that women had strong sexual desires just like men and also that it was degrading

and immoral to pretend otherwise.

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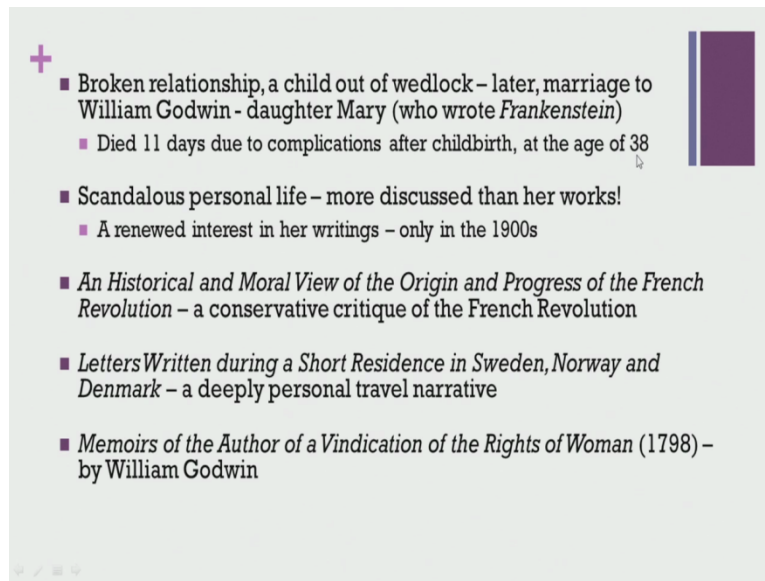
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This was one of the ways in which the women were also (15:50) into otherwise taboo subjects which they were not allowed to talk about. So Wollstonecraft through her writings we find her talking about things which were more important to women and also talking about them not just in the personal way but also in a major way which could impact the future social political context. Wollstonecraft's personal life was fraught with many troubles.

She was in a broken relationship out of which she also had a child out of wedlock. And however her later marriage to William Godwin which was quite successful. She had a daughter who was also named Mary and she was later famous as Mary Shelley and the author of *Frankenstein*. And we find that Mary Wollstonecraft she dies 11 days after childbirth due to certain complications that had arisen. She dies at a very young age of 38.

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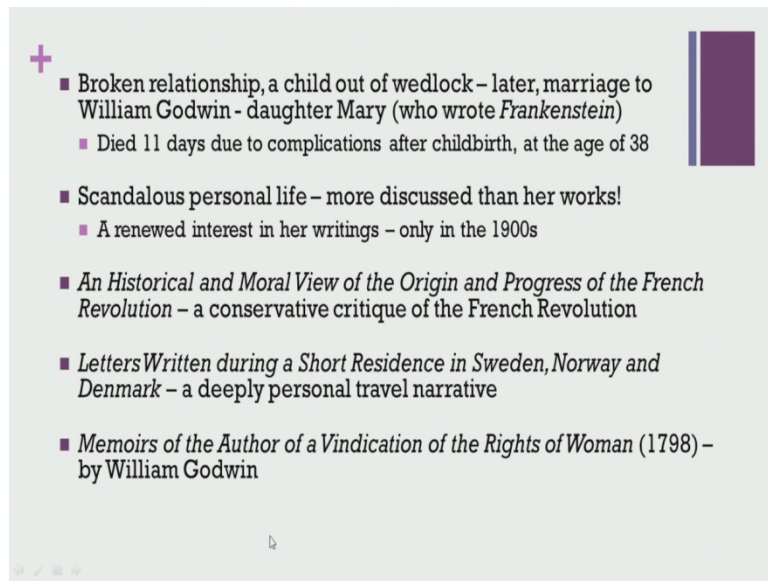
- Broken relationship, a child out of wedlock – later, marriage to William Godwin - daughter Mary (who wrote *Frankenstein*)
 - Died 11 days due to complications after childbirth, at the age of 38
- Scandalous personal life – more discussed than her works!
 - A renewed interest in her writings – only in the 1900s
- *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* – a conservative critique of the French Revolution
- *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* – a deeply personal travel narrative
- *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) – by William Godwin

Her (scandalous) personal life for it being quite scandalous it had gained more attention than her works especially in the 18th and even in the earlier 20th century. And we also found that most of the times her personal life was more than discussed than her works. But however only in the 20th century we find that a renewed interest in her writings had come about and she was even hailed as one of the founders of modern kind of feminist writing.

Her writing also had a political angle to it. We find her writing and publishing, historical and moral view of the origin and the progress of the French Revolution. It was a conservative critique of the French Revolution. She also had published a very deeply personal travel narrative titled *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*.

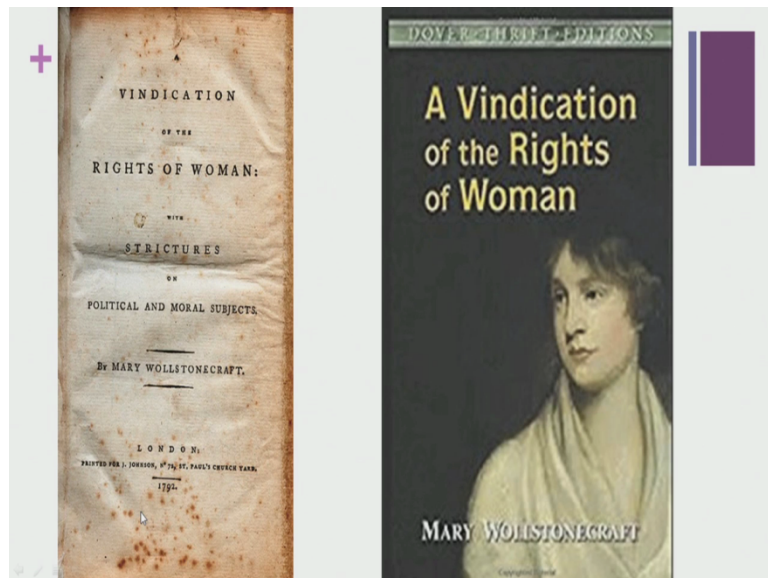
Later after her death her husband he had published *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1798 which also had given certain insights into the kind of a person and the kind of writer that Mary Wollstonecraft really was.

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This work of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, this continues to be hailed as one of the most important text produced by the 18th century. This is seen not just as a singular work by a woman writer. This is seen as a political treaties which altered the ways in which gender began to be viewed even in the 20th century.

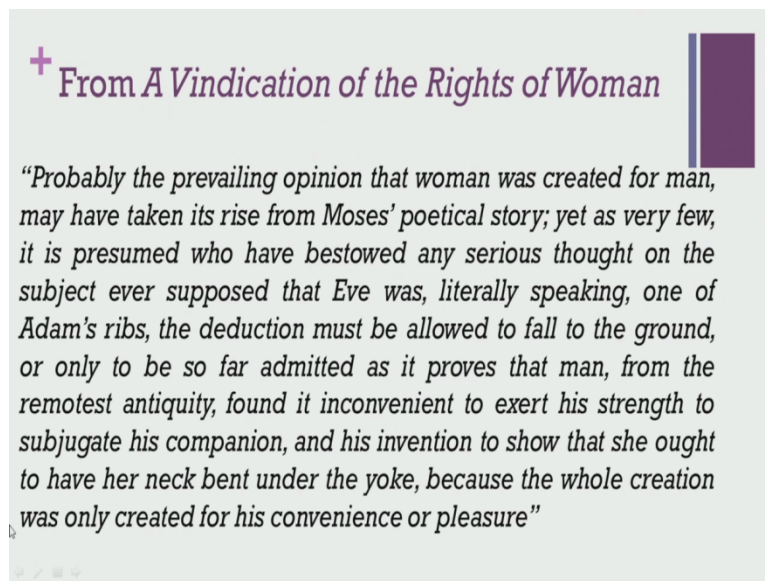
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Allow me to read a passage from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. And even in today in academic circles this text continues to be of supreme importance due to the kind of radical views that it had proposed even in the 18th century. Reading from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Probably the prevailing opinion that woman was created for men may have taken its rise from Moses' poetical story, yet as very few, it is presumed to have bestowed any serious thought on the subject ever supposed that Eve was, literally speaking one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground, or only to be so far admitted as it proves that man, from the remotest antiquity, found it inconvenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to show that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure.

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Here we find that Mary Wollstonecraft that enough not just to challenge the social conventions of the time but even to challenge the ways in which the moral being itself was getting defined by theocentric approach. We find her taking on most of the conventional beliefs of those times and even challenging the political and the theological ideology of those times. So rightly or so she is even today considered as one of the foremost influences behind women's writings not just in 18th century but also in the later centuries.

So on this positive note we also begin to wrap up today's session and it is very important for this to continue to remember that many of the influencers they all came together not just to revolutionize the ways of writing but also to revolutionize the ways in which thinking itself was being fashioned.

And also to revolutionize the ways in which mankind itself was to take its strides forward irrespective of class differences, gender differences and even later on we would begin to see

nationalist differences. So with this we wind up today's lecture. Thank you for listening and look forward to seeing you in the next session.