

Rethinking Intellectuality from Medea to Gloria Steinem

This paper explores the dynamics of gender through a combined lens of ancient literature and contemporary women's rights movements. Starting with figures like Medea and Antigone, it builds on and moves beyond traditional gender studies. It explores the social positionality of women vis à vis personhood and rationality in connection with similar apprehensions of women in later literature and culture (Nussbaum 2011, Taylor 1985).

Specifically, the paper looks into Medea's narrative as not only a tale of personal vengeance but also a profound commentary on the societal limitations imposed on women (Claus 1999), particularly regarding their autonomy and rationality. Similarly, Antigone's defiance of Creon's authority can be interpreted as a symbolic challenge to male-dominated governance (Butler 2000, Honig 2013) and a broader statement on the moral and ethical reasoning attributed to women (Beard 2017, Foley 2001, Rabinowitz 1993, Zeitlin 1982).

The study then discusses these ancient female figures in conjunction with Sojourner Truth, a well-known American abolitionist, who proclaimed, "Ain't I a woman?" focusing on men's attack on female rationality (Hooks 1981, Painter 1996). Continuing with 20th-century laws and medical studies that curtailed and marginalized women's sexuality, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Golden 1992, Treichler 1984), and Gloria Steinem's *My Life on the Road*, it seeks to map, subsequently un-map, and re-map the female portrait. I argue that in these works, the female portrait is repeatedly revised, challenging earlier depictions that linked women's intellectual interests with instability and instead reclaiming their autonomy and rationality. Ultimately, I propose a counter-narrative that highlights how such diagnoses were

used to stifle and control women, weaponizing their intellectual standing against them in the process.

Male perspectives often posit that women's emotional nature superseded their capacity for rational thought, with the assumption that women were driven by hysteria, irrationality, or sentimentality. These attitudes were used to justify limitations on women's intellectual and social participation, explaining their intellectual pursuits or dissatisfaction with domestic roles as expressions of mental disorder or moral deficiency (Eilberg-Schwartz et al. 1995).

Conversely, these ancient and modern works invite a reassessment of who has the authority to define intellect and underscore the need to diversify and democratize this space to include voices historically marginalized by their gender.

Overall, this paper seeks to prove that defining intellect cannot be separated from broader social and cultural forces that influence whose knowledge is valued and whose is dismissed. It serves as a call to action for continuous reflection and resistance against entrenched biases that limit the full participation of all genders in shaping society's intellectual and cultural fabric.

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