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ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Cresting the Wave: Bringing the Discourse of Women’s Rights Rhetoric to a New Equilibrium

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Article History: Submitted-17/01/2020, Revised-25/02/2020, Accepted-27/02/2020, Published-29/02/2020.

Abstract:

The rhetoric of the #MeToo! Movement is grounded in a long history of female rhetoric. Each generation of female rhetoricians--Margaret Fell, Mary Wollstonecraft, Sarah Grimke, and others--has made the way a little easier for the next. Yet what all of these women have in common is that they speak from the standpoint of the victim, perpetuating the helpless female stereotype. The crest of the wave will only come when women throw down the battle cry of “Poor Me!” and instead ask “What next?” The standpoint of women’s rhetoric must shift to a power position. When women speak out as victims, they are simply playing the role that is expected of them, so it is hardly revolutionary. Only when women refuse to be victims can they ever hope to be heard.

Keywords: #MeToo! Rhetoric, Standpoint Theory, Historical Criticism.

“We’ve come a long way, baby!” was the slogan of the Virginia Slims advertisements that dared to portray women smoking in 1967. Yet have we indeed come very far? Throughout history, women have had to justify their right to speak. In 1972, at the height of the women’s movement, Margaret Atwood published her novel, *Surfacing*, with the line: “This above all else: to refuse to be a victim.” Without Atwood’s intention, this became a slogan of the women’s movement. More recently, women rallied around the “Nasty Woman” slogan resulting from President Trump’s attempt to silence Hillary Clinton, the #MeToo movement, Oprah Winfrey’s Golden Globe acceptance speech, the adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* on Hulu, and finally, the election of a record number of women to Congress in 2018. Yet what all of

these women have in common over many years is that they speak from the voice of the victim. This only perpetuates the stereotype of the helpless female.

The crest of the current wave will only come when women throw down the battle cry of "Poor Me!" and instead ask "What next?" The standpoint of women's rhetoric must shift to a power position. This is not to discredit the suffering of women. But although women have suffered, continue to suffer, and will suffer, when women speak from the position of victims, they are simply playing the part of the damsel in distress. It is the role that is expected of them, so it is not surprising or revolutionary. Only when women throw off that role and refuse to be a victim can they ever hope to be heard.

The women's movement of today could not have happened without the stepping stones put in place by women of the past. To do them credit, let us go back in time to reexamine the early rhetoricians, beginning with Margaret Fell of the Renaissance period. In "Women's Speaking Justified, Proved, and Allowed by the Scriptures," published originally in 1666, Margaret Fell uses the doctrine that had been used to silence women--the Bible--to prove that women had the right to speak (Bizzell and Herzberg 750). She uses the very Genesis text that is usually meant to silence and shame women: the serpent tempts Eve by saying if she eats of this fruit, her eyes will be opened. Later in the same speech, she gives evidence that Jesus first appeared to women after he rose from the dead. After they saw him, he told the women to carry the message of his resurrection to the disciples. She continues to cite several more verses as evidence for the right of women to speak publicly, culminating in the evidence put forth in Revelations, which states that the Church is the Bride of Christ: "Is not the Bride the Church? And doth the Church only consist of Men? You that deny women speaking, answer" (760). Margaret Fell's voice helped legitimize women's right to speak, giving the female voice just a little more power in the male dominated hierarchy that was her audience.

Coincidentally born the same year that Margaret Fell published her speech, 1666, Mary Astell took up the baton in the relay. Although she herself never questioned patriarchal hierarchies, Astell is looked upon by modern rhetoricians as the first English feminist. In her best known book, she speaks out against abusive husbands: *Serious Proposal--Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700). She wrote, among other things, about the right of a woman to overthrow a tyrannical husband (Bizzell and Herzberg 842-3). Astell stated that "men and women were intellectually equal" (843). She advocated women's education so that they could be able to read

and understand the Bible and teach it to their children. Some modern readers may say that she didn't do enough, but she did what she could to empower women to educate themselves and use rhetoric in the only venue open to them: personal conversations. She bespoke of the need to be audience-centered with her rhetoric. She gained credibility not by trying to overthrow the patriarchal system, but by working within it and using women's influence to persuade, thereby eliciting change. It was a small but necessary step that paved the way for the women of the future.

Going forward into the 17th and 18th centuries brought about the rise of the novel in English literature. It is interesting that one of the earliest novels was *Pamela, Or Virtue, Rewarded*, by Samuel Richardson in 1740, which is the ultimate victim's story. A young maidservant tries to remain chaste in a household where her master continually tries to seduce and/ or rape her. She is ultimately "rewarded" for her chastity by being proposed marriage to by the same Mr. B who repeatedly attempted to rape her. For the time period it was written, this was considered a happy ending because Pamela got to marry "up" by marrying above her class. This is the historical context into which the novel was born. Many early novels were written as allegories to teach people the standards of society. *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, published in 1678, is a well-known example of the novel as a teaching model for societal expectations. The novel as a form gained popularity among women, who then embraced the novel as a way of telling women's stories, which would later lead to such greats as Emily Bronte and Jane Austen.

Mary Wollstonecraft was a feminist, philosopher, and rhetorician. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is still read today in order to understand the history of the feminist movement. Wollstonecraft argued that the capacity of the female brain was no less than the male brain, but from a young age, girls were taught to care about outward appearances, and not given the education needed. She believed women should be educated commensurate with their stations in life. She also criticized the double standard by which women lose their good reputations from only one lapse in judgment, while men keep their good reputations through many indiscretions: "It has long since occurred to me, that advice respecting behaviour, and all the various modes of preserving a good reputation, which have been so strenuously inculcated on the female world, were specious poisons." Women such as Jane Austen, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Virginia

Woolf, among many others, read Wollstonecraft's work and found it influential (Monroe 143). Wollstonecraft clearly paved the way for the next generation of female rhetoricians.

Across the ocean, in the United States, Sarah Grimke spoke up for the rights of women in 1840 in her "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman": "Now I believe it will be impossible for women to fill the station assigned her by God, until her brethren mingle with her as an equal, as a moral being" (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg). She believed that male-dominated society led to a misinterpretation of the bible that perpetuated the unfair subordination of women. "Grimke resolutely combats the idea that women persuade via sexuality. She denounces men's insistence on seeing women always as sexual beings and argues that women's eloquence arises not from sex but from spiritual and mental powers that they share equally with men and that they must be allowed to exercise" (Bizzell and Herzberg 1048). In this vein, she echoes the arguments of Margaret Fell with uncanny precision 174 years later. To say that nothing changed within that time span would be unfair, but it is safe to say that not enough did. To put this into perspective, it has been another 178 years since Grimke's work was published, almost the same amount of time. How much has changed since then?

Not enough.

Are women still struggling for the right to speak and be listened to in the public sphere? Just ask Hillary Clinton, who was interrupted 51 times during the first presidential debate in 2016; Trump's distracting interruptions increased in venom until he interrupted to call her a "Nasty woman" during the last few minutes of the third presidential debate (Lush). The historic silencing of women's rhetoric continues today, showing that in reality, very little has changed in the 178 years since Sarah Grimke and her sister were effectively silenced after accusations of being "unwomanly" and "unchaste;" nineteenth-century synonyms for "nasty."

This is just one more example of the power differential that has existed for centuries between men and women:

Unlike previous presidential debates, where there has been a thin veneer of respectful discourse between two men, this was a stark conversational divide. And, some said, a gender divide, one that's all too familiar to women. "It's frustrating in women's lives," said Deborah Tannen, a linguistics professor at Georgetown University who has written several books about how conversation

affects relationships. “And to see it up there in a dramatic way, it’s a little bit of PTSD. You’re seeing the things you suffered from. It brings it back.” (Lush)

If this were a one time situation, that would be bad enough, but it has been studied that women typically get interrupted more than men in all walks of life. One such study from George Washington University found that men interrupt women 33% more often than they interrupt other men (“How Often Are Women Interrupted By Men?”). The privileged gender typically takes control of the conversation when in mixed company.

Following the 2016 presidential debate, “Nasty Woman!” became the newest slogan in the women’s rights movement. However, it is simply more of the same argument that has been made throughout history. Women need to do more than wear the “Nasty Woman” t-shirts as they congregate in various protests. That is an important step in the process, but what is next? Throw off the cloak of victimhood and speak out as equal, moral human beings. What will this look like? I wish I knew. But I do know that even though all of this rallying together, speaking out as victims of sexual harassment and abuse may be empowering, it is not changing anything. If anything, we are still Pamela, fighting off lechery and being rewarded by that same aggressor. Or the heroines of Austen’s novels, who complain about the unfairness of the marriage economy system, yet still get married in the end.

After the “Nasty Woman” comment, feminists took it up as a rallying cry. This is the first step among many in which women are refusing to be victims. Although it felt like a below the belt blow to feminism, Trump’s election might have been the very catalyst that the women’s movement needed. If Hillary Clinton would have been elected, the undercurrent of racism and sexism that has been just below the surface for so many years would have simply continued, unchecked. Things have to get worse before they can get better. It is the same with any revolution throughout history. The American Revolution could not have happened without the exorbitant taxing of the American colonists, the Civil War wouldn’t have happened without the horrors of slavery, and the Civil Rights Movement could not have happened without segregation and brutality toward African Americans. If things are unfair, but tolerable, they will never change. Like a boil under one’s skin: if it never erupts, then it will simply continue to fester, not heal. The ugliness needs to rise to the surface and be seen before positive change can occur.

After Trump’s inauguration, women protesters erupted like a geyser. Chris Morris wrote in *Fortune Magazine* about the size of the women’s movement: “The 2017 women’s marches

were one of, it not the largest protests in American history, drawing crowds of over three million nationwide." Many carried cleverly phrased signs, such as "Love Trumps Hate," "Our Arms are Tired From Holding These Signs Since the 1920's" and, my favorite, "Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again" (qtd. in Hartocollis and Alcindor). Those old enough to remember likened it to marching in Washington D.C. for the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s:

One of the women, Roberta Safer, explains why they drove together from Maryland for the march. "I demonstrated in 1957 for Civil Rights," she says. "It's still the same problems, and Donald Trump's cabinet picks are going to reverse many of the things that we've had. ... It just upsets me to see us go backwards."
(Stuart)

Consider this: perhaps the defeat of Hillary Clinton was just what the women's movement needed to invigorate the masses to move forward, rather than maintain the status quo of implicit sexism. Did the first African American president reduce racism in America? No, the innate racism was simply driven (barely) beneath the surface, where it festered until it could rear its ugly head once he was no longer in office. The same would have been true if Hillary Clinton had been elected as the first female president. The innate sexism in American popular culture would have simply gone under the radar, but it would still be part of the fabric of society, based on years of historical subjection.

As it happened, the election of Donald Trump set in motion a snowball that has grown in size and volume and has not stopped yet. Senator Elizabeth Warren was silenced when she dared to read a letter from Coretta Scott King, the wife of the iconic civil rights leader, disparaging Senator Jeff Sessions. Mitch McConnell could not have realized that his words would soon become memes for the women's rights movement when he said, "She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted." Even if he had wanted to, he could not have motivated the women's movement any better than he did. "She persisted" became the slogan used to liken Warren to women of the past, such as Rosa Parks, Susan B. Anthony, and others (Victor). Warren persisted, yet she was ultimately silenced. Again, the strong woman is a victim of male domination.

With these two powerful women being publicly shamed and silenced by the powerful white males who still could do so, female victims everywhere felt kinship as they recognized the pattern of silencing women's rhetoric. Victims of sexual harassment in the workplace responded

with the #MeToo movement. They used the power in numbers to shake up the power differential that has been in place for too long.

Up until this point, women have had to justify their right to speak, and sometimes their voices have come across as abrasive because they did not sit quietly by as “good girls.” Women who dared to speak up were vilified throughout history, as we have seen. Those who chose to speak up were called the contemporary version of “nasty,” and silenced by the male dominated rhetoric in which they lived. The name calling of women rhetoricians brings to the forefront the good girl/ bad girl false dichotomy that is part of the literary tradition. Margaret Atwood begins her 1994 speech “Spotty Handed Villainesses” with the nursery rhyme “There was a little girl/ Who had a little curl/ Right in the middle of her forehead./ And when she was good, she was very very good./ But when she was bad, she was horrid.” This good girl/ bad girl false dichotomy has been going on since Eve first took the bite of the apple, which has justified female victim-blaming ever since.

Early female rhetoricians had to try to prove that they were “good girls” in order to justify their right to speak. Margaret Fell and Mary Astell appealed to Christian ideals and morality. The Grimke sisters were accused of being “unchaste” and had to cease their public speaking events because of the negative publicity that hurt their cause more than helped it (Bizzell and Herzberg 1046-7). The “good girls” could never be good enough to speak out publicly, because if they were very, very good girls, they would hide their tears, put on lipstick, and grin and bear it silently.

In 1994, when Atwood gave her “Spotty Handed Villainesses” speech, she was referring to the need for female characters in fiction who exhibit all of the characteristics of humanity--both the good and the bad. She speaks of feminist writers who tend to depict all women characters as good, and all male characters as evil: “as with any political movement which comes out of real oppression--and I do emphasize the real--there was also . . . a tendency to cookie-cut; that is, to write to a pattern and to oversugar on one side.” The “spotty handed villainesses” is a reference to Lady Macbeth, who is a strong, independent woman, but also manipulative, selfish, evil, and weak. She is a fully-fleshed-out human character whose guilty conscience is her own downfall: “Out, damned spot!” she cries as she tries to wipe away the bloody spot on her hand. Atwood isn’t claiming that such fully-fleshed out female characters don’t exist in literature, just that there aren’t enough of them:

Did we face a situation in which women could do no wrong, but could only have wrong done to them? Were women being confined yet again to that alabaster pedestal so beloved of the Victorian age, when Woman as better than man gave men a licence to be gleefully and enjoyably worse than women?. . . Were women to be condemned to virtue for life, slaves in the salt-mines of goodness? How intolerable. (Atwood, "Spotty Handed Villainesses")

As long as women characters in books, and women in real life, continue to intentionally play the "good girl" role, then they will always fall short. Victims by definition must have a victimizer, and often, a hero who rescues them. In the classic fairy tales told to young girls, a damsel in distress (Snow White, Cinderella, Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, etc.) is rescued by a handsome (male) stranger, who she then marries and lives happily ever after. This pattern of good girl who has evil done to her, followed by a manly rescue is modeled after the male narrative paradigm, that itself is patterned after the male sexual experience of tension, climax, and release.

Many classic literary heroines who have dared to break out of the societal role end up dead: Anna Karenina, Catherine Earnshaw, Edna Pontellier, even Hester Prynne died in the end, after a long life of isolation and pain. Strong women who dare to defy the male narrative paradigm do not have much precedence for denouement in literature. This is a model that has been passed down since before the rise of the novel. Think *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson. The "good girl" wins, while "bad girls" like Hester Prynne, die lonely and alone. In literature, the helpless females who allow themselves to be rescued end up living happily ever after. The females who dare to save themselves end up dead more often than not.

The "good girl" role of women in literature has ancient origins. In Homer's ancient classic, *The Odyssey*, Odysseus worries that Penelope has been untrue to him, even while he is in the arms of Circe, the seductress witch. Because Penelope remained true to her husband for twenty years, amidst much persuasion by the one hundred suitors who were attempting to win her hand, she is rewarded. Her virtue is her chastity, even when tempted by rich and powerful men. Odysseus's infidelity is part of the narrative, but not a deciding factor in the happy reunion.

In the same epic poem, the Sirens sang so beautifully that any man who heard them jumped overboard to death. Anybody who has ever heard it is dead, so what is that song?

Margaret Atwood's poem "Siren Song" uses the voice of the Siren to surmise the content: "I will tell the secret to you,/ to you, only to you./Come closer. This song/ is a cry for help: Help me!/ Only you, only you can,/ you are unique/ at last. Alas/ it is a boring song/ but it works every time." Atwood, a modern writer, is clearly making the social commentary here that the cry for help by a female victim is universally irresistible to men, not just men from ancient Greece. In other words, it is the voice of the helpless female crying for help that is irresistible to men who hear it. Therefore, playing the role of victim is only going to strengthen the power differential between genders, not weaken it. The #MeToo movement does not solve the problem of male/female inequity because it is essentially a cry for help, which simply deepens the power divide rather than bridging it.

If it is true that male dominance is perpetuated by the cries of helpless females, then those females, whether "good girls" or "bad girls," need to find themselves a different rallying cry than #MeToo! or any cry for help that places them in the position of the victim. Margaret Atwood interestingly found herself regaled as a feminist writer, since her book *Surfacing* in 1972 supplied the slogan: "refuse to be a victim." In the same year, Margaret Atwood's book of literary criticism, *Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, follows the theme of survival that is predominant in Canadian literature. She posits that there are four victim positions: 1. To deny that one is a victim. 2. To acknowledge that one is a victim, but that it is a result of some larger power that can't be controlled. 3. To acknowledge that one is a victim, but refuse to accept the role as inevitable 4. To be a creative non-victim. Although she was writing about Canada itself and about themes in Canadian literature, her paradigm has been adapted and used to describe victims of all kinds.

If we were to look at these victim positions and use them as a yardstick by which to measure women rhetoricians throughout history, we can see that we have been stuck in the third position for a very long time. Margaret Fell, Mary Astell, Sarah Grimke, Virginia Woolf, and even Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Warren and all of the women who say #MeToo speak as victims who refuse to accept the role. If, as Margaret Atwood suggests, the final stage is to become a creative non-victim, then what does that look like?

First, the victim must cease identifying as a victim, which does not mean to deny the pain, but to acknowledge it and move on. The victims of the #MeToo movement have endured real humiliation, pain, silence, and unfairness. Speaking out and joining in solidarity with other

victims is an important step. However, to get to the next step, the creative non-victim, means dropping the victim's cry for help. Because it is an aphrodisiac to the power-hungry, it further solidifies the stereotype of the helpless female who needs rescuing. Women have to cease trying to be the "good girl." Notice, that does not necessarily mean that they must become "horrid," or "nasty," or "evil." To do so merely subscribes to the good girl/ bad girl false dichotomy. The highest stage of the victims positions is not to become a victimizer, but to become a creative non-victim, which is a completely different thing.

One modern woman speaker who fits the description of the creative non-victim is Oprah Winfrey. Oprah herself is no stranger to abuse by men. She was first raped when she was nine years old, and would be again several times throughout her childhood ("Short Biography of Oprah Winfrey"). Unfortunately, this is not unusual for black women in the United States. According to The Institute for Women's Policy Research, forty percent of black women will experience violence from an intimate partner in their lifetimes, and twenty percent will experience rape. This is much higher than any other subgroup in the United States (Green). However, while Oprah Winfrey does not deny this part of her past, she also does not let it define her. She first read Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* when she was sixteen and found it to be life changing. Angelou writes of her own victimization as a young girl, and how it silenced her for many years, until she found her voice. Oprah Winfrey saw many of her own experiences validated in Angelou, whom she later went on to befriend ("Short Biography of Oprah Winfrey").

Oprah Winfrey's life is so well known that there is no need to summarize it here. She is the epitome of the "Rags to Riches" American dream. She has gone through all four stages of the victims' positions, from denying that she was a victim by keeping silent about her childhood rapes, to becoming the creative non-victim that we saw at the 2018 Golden Globes Awards.

Oprah Winfrey begins her iconic acceptance speech by thanking many of the people who helped her along the way, as is typical of awards speeches like this. She grounds herself in the history of the award, and appeals to ethos by using a narrative of herself as a little girl, watching on television when Sidney Poitier won this very award, as the first African American male actor. She acknowledges the very real possibility that some little girl is probably watching her accept this speech right now and will be inspired by it, so she acknowledges her place in history, both past, present and future. She uses magnification when she tells the story of Recy Taylor whose

horrific story seems like it should be ancient history, but Oprah puts it in perspective when she says that Recy Taylor just died ten days previously:

She [Recy Taylor] lived as we all have lived, too many years in a culture broken by brutally powerful men. For too long, women have not been heard or believed if they dared to speak the truth to the power of those men. But their time is up. Their time is up. Their time is up.

Oprah uses repetition for emphasis. Her voice rises in power with each repetition, and she speaks with a cadence reminiscent of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. She acknowledges the victimhood of the past, but she declares an end to that pattern. The time of the female victim/ male victimizer is over. She claims that it is time for a new pattern of thinking, which does not involve dwelling on the the past, but instead on hope for the future:

So I want all the girls watching here, now, to know that a new day is on the horizon! And when that new day finally dawns, it will be because of a lot of magnificent women. . . and some pretty phenomenal men, fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say 'me too' again.

The crowd rose unanimously to their feet, wild with enthusiasm, tears in their eyes.

Oprah's use of the metaphor "a new day is on the horizon" echoes the voice of her mentor and friend, Maya Angelou, in "Still I Rise": "I rise/ Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear/ I rise/ Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,/ I am the dream and the hope of the slave./ I rise/ I rise/ I rise." Maya Angelou too acknowledges the victimhood of the past when she says that she is "the hope of the slave." The slave who toiled with no hope of ever seeing freedom, but who clung to the hope of the next generation. "I rise" is the chant of the creative non-victim.

Anyone who listened to Oprah Winfrey's Golden Globe speech could feel the power of her words, and a shift in the tide. As Eric Thomas wrote in "'Oprah's Speech Was the Most Public Declaration of Hope We've Seen in Over a Year,'" "Oprah has such a unique and masterful command of hope. . . . She has a way of holding past suffering without ever letting it define or overcome the person she is speaking with or herself. Of course, we want her to be president." So many people were moved by Oprah Winfrey's speech that many speculated that she should run for president. She has denied to consider it. However, she has paved the way for

the next generation of women, just like Maya Angelou did before her, and so many others did previously. "What this speech made clear is that she does believe that we have the power to save ourselves. We have to" (Thomas). The voices of all of the female rhetoricians throughout history have culminated in this moment. Oprah Winfrey could not have given her speech if not for the powerful rhetoricians who came before her who paved the way. Yet hers is not the last voice to speak. Future women rhetoricians will build on Oprah Winfrey's rhetoric and take the next bold move.

Hillary Clinton will not be our first female president, but she has helped make the climb up the ladder just a little bit easier for the next female presidential candidate who will have a better chance in a climate where all human rights matter. Cheryl Strayed said in *Nasty Woman: Feminism, Resistance and Revolution in Trump's America*: "Hillary Clinton made the world ready for Hillary Clinton. . . I recognized her as a woman who had whacked the weeds to blaze her own trail. . . a woman like this was finally going to win. Someday she will." As we have seen throughout this survey of women's rhetoric over time, we have come a long way, and we may have a long way to go, but as Oprah Winfrey says, "a new day is on the horizon."

What will that new day look like? Well, if we've been following Monroe's motivated sequence, we have defined the problem of female victimization, proposed a solution, and now we are at the visualization step. Oprah Winfrey portrays a positive visualization of the future, with hope for a new day. Margaret Atwood, on the other hand, portrays a negative visualization, in the form of a dystopian future, depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Ironically written in 1984, the year of George Orwell's iconic dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood, portrays a dystopic future that no one would care to imagine, where the subjugation of women becomes formalized. Even so, the novel has recently seen a resurgence in popularity, due to its being made into a Hulu television series. Margaret Atwood herself was part of the rewrite that modernized the novel, including cell phones and other modernizations that did not exist when the novel was first written. Generally, dystopias are generally written as warnings of what could happen in the future, if people do not take care and change their ways in the present. Yet Margaret Atwood has said that she did not put anything in *The Handmaid's Tale* that has not already happened in history. She wanted to make a believable futuristic tale: what has happened in the past could happen in the future, if we are not careful to learn our history lessons. As Atwood herself says, "With any cultural change there is a push and a pushback.

Trump has brought out a huge pushback that was originally against immigrants. Now it has shifted to being very misogynistic, partly because of Hillary Clinton. You have not seen anything like this since the 17th century witch hunts, quite frankly” (qtd. in Higgins). When Atwood addressed the question of *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a feminist novel, she replied: “If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/ or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings--with all the variety of character and behavior that implies--and are also interesting and important. . . then yes” (Atwood: “The Handmaid’s Tale in the Age of Trump”). Atwood is pushing us to refuse to see women as victims, but as fully-fleshed out human beings. Elisabeth Moss, who plays the main character Offred in the Hulu adaptation, said this: “*The Handmaid’s Tale* is considered one of the great feminist novels. I actually consider it a human novel about human rights, not just women’s rights” To which Atwood replied: “Well, women’s rights are human rights unless you have decided that women aren’t human. So those are your choices. If women are human, then women’s rights are part of human rights” (qtd. in Dockterman). In true style, Atwood puts the argument simply, yet concisely.

As of this writing, the House of Representatives is being flooded with the largest wave of incoming women representatives in history. This is clearly a result of the angry wave of women that swept the nation in 2016 when Donald Trump was elected. Following the incredibly well attended Women’s March on Washington and across the country, the election of Trump was exactly the catalyst needed to energize women to action. This energy held sway in the 2018 elections, which saw the surgance of women running for office and winning. National Public Radio, their article “What it Looks Like to have a Record Number of Women in the House of Representatives” noted: “Starting in January 2017, it was abundantly clear that Democratic women were furious that Donald Trump had been elected president” (Kurtzleben et al). So while the election of Trump may have seemed a setback to the women’s movement, it actually fueled the movement more so than the election of Hillary Clinton would have done.

The newly elected women are not going to sit by quietly as “good girls.” Already, Representative Tlaib’s recent profanity-laced call for the impeachment of President Trump just shows the level of vigor with which these new female representatives speak. As Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said regarding this matter: “Words weigh a ton, and the president has to realize his words weigh a ton, too, and some of the words he uses have a direct impact on

people's lives," Pelosi said. "My colleague's comments do not have an impact on people's lives" (qtd in Edney et al). Upholding the constitutional right to freedom of speech, Pelosi quietly points out the hypocrisy of those who criticize Tlaib for using the very type of vulgarity that Trump himself uses. This new generation of women is not interested in playing the "good girl" role, which is hopeful for the ascension to the next level: the creative non-victim. The solution, however, is not to stoop to vulgar street talk, but to use logic, relying on the rhetorical prowess of an educated, well-reasoned argument, delivered with passion and credibility. Two such rhetoricians are Senator Amy Klobuchar and Senator Elizabeth Warren, who are both expected to run for president in the next election. Their skill at language, their use of logic, and their impassioned speech making may just bring us over the edge. The future woman president may still be in the wings, learning from the greats of the past, picking the right moment to have her say. In any case, this wave of women Congress members and the speculation of the next female presidential candidate is proof that Oprah Winfrey was absolutely correct when she declared, "Their time is up!" The time for change has come

We are nearing the crest of the wave of women's rhetoric that has been building in magnitude with each woman's voice--Margaret Fell, Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, Sarah Grimke, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood, Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Warren, Oprah Winfrey, and every woman who spoke up during the #MeToo movement or marched in one of the women's marches. The women of tomorrow will look back on this time as a pivotal moment in history. We have two visualizations of the future: we should heed Margaret Atwood's warning of a dystopian future that could happen if we continue on the path we are on now; we should also embrace Oprah Winfrey's hope for a new day. The time to take action is now. And we should do so not as victims speaking out against oppression, but as fully rational, multi-dimensional and equal human beings who have not only a legitimate right to speak, but also a responsibility to do so.

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