Amalia Holst

This element offers the first comprehensive study of Amalia Holst’s writings. More broadly, it will give readers a fascinating insight into the German Enlightenment from the vantage of someone who was squarely excluded from the scope of freedom advanced by its major figures, such as Kant and Fichte.

Holst lived through a period of enormous change; the rapid expansion of the middle class led to unprecedented opportunities for women to read, write, and engage in public discussions about the matters that affected their lives.

In the midst of this instability, Holst established several progressive schools for girls in Hamburg and surrounding towns, where she sought to train young women to become equal participants in society. Yet as the Revolution unfolded in France, the male scholars of Germany staged a conservative backlash, reinforcing a gendered conception of the family as the basic social unit. They pigeonholed women into narrow domestic roles and confined women’s education to subjects that will help them to keep their houses in good order.

Holst rails against this restriction, demanding that men justify their self-appointed position as gatekeepers of women’s minds.

I’ve arranged the Element around Holst’s three major writings: an anonymously authored book on modern pedagogy, a series of letters on women’s fiction, and her major feminist work, *On the Vocation of Woman to Higher Intellectual Education*.

Throughout the study, you’ll encounter a woman who was fascinated by the potential of philosophical argument to bring social change. Holst experiments with parody, polemic, and critique to trouble the reader’s preconceived ideas and open new possibilities. She interrogates the personal lives of celebrated Enlightenment philosophers, including Leibniz, Rousseau, and Kant. She explores the power of the novel to help women imagine alternative visions of marriage and the state.

This study will be interesting to scholars of German philosophy seeking a richer understanding of their field, and also to students and researchers working on the history of feminism and, in particular, feminist pedagogy and historiography.

There’s so much still to be known about Amalia Holst and other women writers in the German tradition. I hope you’ll dip into this Element and join me in the exciting task of reimagining the philosophical tradition by returning to overlooked voices in its unfinished history.