

= Mary Wollstonecraft =

Mary Wollstonecraft (/ ˈwʊlˌstɒn.kræft / ; 27 April 1759 – 10 September 1797) was an English writer , philosopher , and advocate of women 's rights . During her brief career , she wrote novels , treatises , a travel narrative , a history of the French Revolution , a conduct book , and a children 's book . Wollstonecraft is best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) , in which she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men , but appear to be only because they lack education . She suggests that both men and women should be treated as rational beings and imagines a social order founded on reason .

Until the late 20th century , Wollstonecraft 's life , which encompassed several unconventional personal relationships , received more attention than her writing . After two ill -fated affairs , with Henry Fuseli and Gilbert Imlay (by whom she had a daughter , Fanny Imlay) , Wollstonecraft married the philosopher William Godwin , one of the forefathers of the anarchist movement . Wollstonecraft died at the age of 38 , eleven days after giving birth to her second daughter , leaving behind several unfinished manuscripts . This daughter , Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin , became an accomplished writer herself , as Mary Shelley , the author of *Frankenstein* .

After Wollstonecraft 's death , her widower published a *Memoir* (1798) of her life , revealing her unorthodox lifestyle , which inadvertently destroyed her reputation for almost a century . However , with the emergence of the feminist movement at the turn of the twentieth century , Wollstonecraft 's advocacy of women 's equality and critiques of conventional femininity became increasingly important . Today Wollstonecraft is regarded as one of the founding feminist philosophers , and feminists often cite both her life and work as important influences .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Wollstonecraft was born on 27 April 1759 in Spitalfields , London . She was the second of the seven children of Edward John Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Dixon . Although her family had a comfortable income when she was a child , her father gradually squandered it on speculative projects . Consequently , the family became financially unstable and they were frequently forced to move during Wollstonecraft 's youth . The family 's financial situation eventually became so dire that Wollstonecraft 's father compelled her to turn over money that she would have inherited at her maturity . Moreover , he was apparently a violent man who would beat his wife in drunken rages . As a teenager , Wollstonecraft used to lie outside the door of her mother 's bedroom to protect her . Wollstonecraft played a similar maternal role for her sisters , Everina and Eliza , throughout her life . For example , in a defining moment in 1784 , she convinced Eliza , who was suffering from what was probably postpartum depression , to leave her husband and infant ; Wollstonecraft made all of the arrangements for Eliza to flee , demonstrating her willingness to challenge social norms . The human costs , however , were severe : her sister suffered social condemnation and , because she could not remarry , was doomed to a life of poverty and hard work .

Two friendships shaped Wollstonecraft 's early life . The first was with Jane Arden in Beverley . The two frequently read books together and attended lectures presented by Arden 's father , a self -styled philosopher and scientist . Wollstonecraft revelled in the intellectual atmosphere of the Arden household and valued her friendship with Arden greatly , sometimes to the point of being emotionally possessive . Wollstonecraft wrote to her : " I have formed romantic notions of friendship ... I am a little singular in my thoughts of love and friendship ; I must have the first place or none . " In some of Wollstonecraft 's letters to Arden , she reveals the volatile and depressive emotions that would haunt her throughout her life .

The second and more important friendship was with Fanny (Frances) Blood , introduced to Wollstonecraft by the Clares , a couple in Hoxton who became parental figures to her ; Wollstonecraft credited Blood with opening her mind . Unhappy with her home life , Wollstonecraft

struck out on her own in 1778 and accepted a job as a lady 's companion to Sarah Dawson , a widow living in Bath . However , Wollstonecraft had trouble getting along with the irascible woman (an experience she drew on when describing the drawbacks of such a position in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* , 1787) . In 1780 she returned home , called back to care for her dying mother . Rather than return to Dawson 's employ after the death of her mother , Wollstonecraft moved in with the Bloods . She realized during the two years she spent with the family that she had idealized Blood , who was more invested in traditional feminine values than was Wollstonecraft . But Wollstonecraft remained dedicated to her and her family throughout her life (she frequently gave pecuniary assistance to Blood 's brother , for example) .

Wollstonecraft had envisioned living in a female utopia with Blood ; they made plans to rent rooms together and support each other emotionally and financially , but this dream collapsed under economic realities . In order to make a living , Wollstonecraft , her sisters , and Blood set up a school together in Newington Green , a Dissenting community . Blood soon became engaged and after their marriage her husband , Hugh Skeys , took her to Lisbon , Portugal , to improve her health , which had always been precarious . Despite the change of surroundings Blood 's health further deteriorated when she became pregnant , and in 1785 Wollstonecraft left the school and followed Blood to nurse her , but to no avail . Moreover , her abandonment of the school led to its failure . Blood 's death devastated Wollstonecraft and was part of the inspiration for her first novel , *Mary : A Fiction* (1788) .

= = = " The first of a new genus " = = =

After Blood 's death , Wollstonecraft 's friends helped her obtain a position as governess to the daughters of the Anglo @-@ Irish Kingsborough family in Ireland . Although she could not get along with Lady Kingsborough , the children found her an inspiring instructor ; Margaret King would later say she " had freed her mind from all superstitions " . Some of Wollstonecraft 's experiences during this year would make their way into her only children 's book , *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) .

Frustrated by the limited career options open to respectable yet poor women ? an impediment which Wollstonecraft eloquently describes in the chapter of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* entitled " Unfortunate Situation of Females , Fashionably Educated , and Left Without a Fortune " ? she decided , after only a year as a governess , to embark upon a career as an author . This was a radical choice , since , at the time , few women could support themselves by writing . As she wrote to her sister Everina in 1787 , she was trying to become " the first of a new genus " . She moved to London and , assisted by the liberal publisher Joseph Johnson , found a place to live and work to support herself . She learned French and German and translated texts , most notably *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions* by Jacques Necker and *Elements of Morality* , for the Use of Children by Christian Gotthilf Salzmann . She also wrote reviews , primarily of novels , for Johnson 's periodical , the *Analytical Review* . Wollstonecraft 's intellectual universe expanded during this time , not only from the reading that she did for her reviews but also from the company she kept : she attended Johnson 's famous dinners and met such luminaries as the radical pamphleteer Thomas Paine and the philosopher William Godwin . The first time Godwin and Wollstonecraft met , they were both disappointed in each other . Godwin had come to hear Paine , but Wollstonecraft assailed him all night long , disagreeing with him on nearly every subject . Johnson himself , however , became much more than a friend ; she described him in her letters as a father and a brother .

While in London , Wollstonecraft pursued a relationship with the artist Henry Fuseli , even though he was already married . She was , she wrote , enraptured by his genius , " the grandeur of his soul , that quickness of comprehension , and lovely sympathy " . She proposed a platonic living arrangement with Fuseli and his wife , but Fuseli 's wife was appalled , and he broke off the relationship with Wollstonecraft . After Fuseli 's rejection , Wollstonecraft decided to travel to France to escape the humiliation of the incident , and to participate in the revolutionary events that she had just celebrated in her recent *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) . She had written the *Rights of*

Men in response to Edmund Burke 's conservative critique of the French Revolution in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) and it made her famous overnight . She was compared with such leading lights as the theologian and controversialist Joseph Priestley and Paine , whose Rights of Man (1791) would prove to be the most popular of the responses to Burke . She pursued the ideas she had outlined in Rights of Men in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) , her most famous and influential work .

= = = France and Gilbert Imlay = = =

Wollstonecraft left for Paris in December 1792 and arrived about a month before Louis XVI was guillotined . France was in turmoil . She sought out other British visitors such as Helen Maria Williams and joined the circle of expatriates then in the city . Having just written the Rights of Woman , Wollstonecraft was determined to put her ideas to the test , and in the stimulating intellectual atmosphere of the French revolution she attempted her most experimental romantic attachment yet : she met and fell passionately in love with Gilbert Imlay , an American adventurer . Whether or not she was interested in marriage , he was not , and she appears to have fallen in love with an idealized portrait of the man . While Wollstonecraft had rejected the sexual component of relationships in the Rights of Woman , Imlay awakened her passions and her interest in sex . She soon became pregnant , and on 14 May 1794 she gave birth to her first child , Fanny , naming her after perhaps her closest friend . Wollstonecraft was overjoyed ; she wrote to a friend : " My little Girl begins to suck so MANFULLY that her father reckons saucily on her writing the second part of the R [igh] ts of Woman " (emphasis hers) . She continued to write avidly , despite not only her pregnancy and the burdens of being a new mother alone in a foreign country , but also the growing tumult of the French Revolution . While at Le Havre in northern France , she wrote a history of the early revolution , An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution , which was published in London in December 1794 .

As the political situation worsened , Britain declared war on France , placing all British subjects in France in considerable danger . To protect Wollstonecraft , Imlay registered her as his wife in 1793 , even though they were not married . Some of her friends were not so lucky ; many , like Thomas Paine , were arrested , and some were even guillotined . (Wollstonecraft 's sisters believed she had been imprisoned .) After she left France , she continued to refer to herself as " Mrs Imlay " , even to her sisters , in order to bestow legitimacy upon her child .

Imlay , unhappy with the domestic @-@ minded and maternal Wollstonecraft , eventually left her . He promised that he would return to Le Havre where she went to give birth to her child , but his delays in writing to her and his long absences convinced Wollstonecraft that he had found another woman . Her letters to him are full of needy expostulations , explained by most critics as the expressions of a deeply depressed woman but by some as a result of her circumstances ? alone with an infant in the middle of a revolution .

= = = England and William Godwin = = =

Seeking Imlay , Wollstonecraft returned to London in April 1795 , but he rejected her . In May 1795 she attempted to commit suicide , probably with laudanum , but Imlay saved her life (although it is unclear how) . In a last attempt to win back Imlay , she embarked upon some business negotiations for him in Scandinavia , trying to recoup some of his losses . Wollstonecraft undertook this hazardous trip with only her young daughter and a maid . She recounted her travels and thoughts in letters to Imlay , many of which were eventually published as Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden , Norway , and Denmark in 1796 . When she returned to England and came to the full realisation that her relationship with Imlay was over , she attempted suicide for the second time , leaving a note for Imlay :

Let my wrongs sleep with me ! Soon , very soon , I shall be at peace . When you receive this , my burning head will be cold ... I shall plunge into the Thames where there is least chance of my being snatched from the death I seek . God bless you ! May you never know by experience what you have

made me endure . Should your sensibility ever awake , remorse will find its way to your heart ; and , in the midst of business and sensual pleasure , I shall appear before you , the victim of your deviation from rectitude .

She then went out on a rainy night and " to make her clothes heavy with water , she walked up and down about half an hour " before jumping into the River Thames , but a stranger saw her jump and rescued her . Wollstonecraft considered her suicide attempt deeply rational , writing after her rescue

' I have only to lament , that , when the bitterness of death was past , I was inhumanly brought back to life and misery . But a fixed determination is not to be baffled by disappointment ; nor will I allow that to be a frantic attempt , which was one of the calmest acts of reason . In this respect , I am only accountable to myself . Did I care for what is termed reputation , it is by other circumstances that I should be dishonoured .

Gradually , Wollstonecraft returned to her literary life , becoming involved with Joseph Johnson 's circle again , in particular with Mary Hays , Elizabeth Inchbald , and Sarah Siddons through William Godwin . Godwin and Wollstonecraft 's unique courtship began slowly , but it eventually became a passionate love affair . Godwin had read her Letters Written in Sweden , Norway , and Denmark and later wrote that " If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author , this appears to me to be the book . She speaks of her sorrows , in a way that fills us with melancholy , and dissolves us in tenderness , at the same time that she displays a genius which commands all our admiration . " Once Wollstonecraft became pregnant , they decided to marry so that their child would be legitimate . Their marriage revealed the fact that Wollstonecraft had never been married to Imlay , and as a result she and Godwin lost many friends . Godwin received further criticism because he had advocated the abolition of marriage in his philosophical treatise Political Justice . After their marriage on 29 March 1797 , they moved into two adjoining houses , known as The Polygon , so that they could both still retain their independence ; they often communicated by letter . By all accounts , theirs was a happy and stable , though brief , relationship .

= = = Death and Godwin 's Memoirs = = =

On 30 August 1797 , Wollstonecraft gave birth to her second daughter , Mary . Although the delivery seemed to go well initially , the placenta broke apart during the birth and became infected ; puerperal (childbed) fever was a common and often fatal occurrence in the eighteenth century . After several days of agony , Wollstonecraft died of septicaemia on 10 September . Godwin was devastated : he wrote to his friend Thomas Holcroft , " I firmly believe there does not exist her equal in the world . I know from experience we were formed to make each other happy . I have not the least expectation that I can now ever know happiness again . " She was buried at Old Saint Pancras Churchyard , where her tombstone reads , " Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin , Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman : Born 27 April 1759 : Died 10 September 1797 . " (In 1851 , her remains were moved by her grandson Percy Florence Shelley to his family tomb in St Peter 's Church , Bournemouth .) Her monument in the churchyard lies to the north @-@ east of the church just north of Sir John Soane 's grave . Her husband was buried with her on his death in 1836 , as was his second wife , Mary Jane Godwin (1766 ? 1841) .

In January 1798 Godwin published his Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman . Although Godwin felt that he was portraying his wife with love , compassion , and sincerity , many readers were shocked that he would reveal Wollstonecraft 's illegitimate children , love affairs , and suicide attempts . The Romantic poet Robert Southey accused him of " the want of all feeling in stripping his dead wife naked " and vicious satires such as The Unsex 'd Females were published . Godwin 's Memoirs portrays Wollstonecraft as a woman deeply invested in feeling who was balanced by his reason and as more of a religious sceptic than her own writings suggest . Godwin 's views of Wollstonecraft were perpetuated throughout the nineteenth century and resulted in poems such as " Wollstonecraft and Fuseli " by British poet Robert Browning and that by William Roscoe which includes the lines :

= = Legacy = =

Wollstonecraft has what scholar Cora Kaplan labelled in 2002 a " curious " legacy that has evolved over time : " for an author @-@ activist adept in many genres ... up until the last quarter @-@ century Wollstonecraft 's life has been read much more closely than her writing " . After the devastating effect of Godwin 's *Memoirs* , Wollstonecraft 's reputation lay in tatters for a century ; she was pilloried by such writers as Maria Edgeworth , who patterned the " freakish " Harriet Freke in *Belinda* (1801) after her . Other novelists such as Mary Hays , Charlotte Turner Smith , Fanny Burney , and Jane West created similar figures , all to teach a " moral lesson " to their readers . (Hays had been a close friend , and helped nurse her in her dying days .) Scholar Virginia Sapiro states that few read Wollstonecraft 's works during the nineteenth century as " her attackers implied or stated that no self @-@ respecting woman would read her work " . (In fact , as Craciun points out , new editions of *Rights of Woman* appeared in the UK in the 1840s , and in the US in the 1830s , 1840s , and 1850s .) One of those few was Elizabeth Barrett Browning , who read *Rights of Woman* at the age of 12 , and whose poem *Aurora Leigh* reflected " Wollstonecraft 's unwavering focus on education " . Lucretia Mott , a Quaker minister , and Elizabeth Cady Stanton , Americans who met at the World Anti @-@ Slavery Convention in London , discovered they had both read Wollstonecraft , and agreed the need for what became the Seneca Falls Convention , an influential women 's rights meeting held in 1848 . Another who read Wollstonecraft was George Eliot , a prolific writer of reviews , articles , novels , and translations . In 1855 , she devoted an essay to the roles and rights of women , comparing Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller . Fuller was an American journalist , critic , and women 's right activist who , like Wollstonecraft , had travelled to the Continent , been involved in the struggle for reform (in this case the Roman Republic) , and had a child by a man without marrying him . Wollstonecraft 's children 's work was adapted by Charlotte Mary Yonge in 1870 .

With the rise of the movement to give women a political voice , Wollstonecraft 's work was exhumed . The first full @-@ length biography , by Elizabeth Robins Pennell , appeared in 1884 as part of a series by the Roberts Brothers on famous women . This followed an attempt at rehabilitation in 1879 , with the publication of Wollstonecraft 's *Letters to Imlay* , with prefatory memoir by C. Kegan Paul . Millicent Garrett Fawcett , a suffragist and later president of the National Union of Women 's Suffrage Societies , wrote the introduction to the centenary edition (i.e. 1892) of the *Rights of Woman* , cleansing the memory of Wollstonecraft and claiming her as the foremother of the struggle for the vote . As early as 1898 , Wollstonecraft was the subject of a doctoral thesis and its resulting book .

With the advent of the modern feminist movement , women as politically dissimilar from each other as Virginia Woolf and Emma Goldman embraced Wollstonecraft 's life story . By 1929 Woolf described Wollstonecraft ? her writing , arguments , and " experiments in living " ? as immortal : " she is alive and active , she argues and experiments , we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living " . Others , however , continued to decry Wollstonecraft 's lifestyle . A biography published in 1932 refers to recent reprints of her works , incorporating new research , and to a " study " in 1911 , a play in 1922 , and another biography in 1924 . Interest in her never completely died , with full @-@ length biographies in 1937 and 1951

With the emergence of feminist criticism in academia in the 1960s and 1970s , Wollstonecraft 's works returned to prominence . Their fortunes reflected that of the second wave of the North American feminist movement itself ; for example , in the early 1970s , six major biographies of Wollstonecraft were published that presented her " passionate life in apposition to [her] radical and rationalist agenda " . The feminist artwork *The Dinner Party* , first exhibited in 1979 , features a place setting for Wollstonecraft . In the 1980s and 1990s , yet another image of Wollstonecraft emerged , one which described her as much more a creature of her time ; scholars such as Claudia Johnson , Gary Kelly , and Virginia Sapiro demonstrated the continuity between Wollstonecraft 's thought and other important eighteenth @-@ century ideas regarding topics such as sensibility , economics , and political theory .

Wollstonecraft 's work has also had an effect on feminism outside the academy in recent years . Ayaan Hirsi Ali , a political writer and former Muslim who is critical of Islam in general and its dictates

regarding women in particular , cited the Rights of Woman in her autobiography *Infidel* and wrote 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 " . British writer Caitlin Moran , author of the best @-@ selling *How to Be a Woman* , described herself as " half Wollstonecraft " to the *New Yorker* . She has also inspired more widely . Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen , the Indian economist and philosopher who first identified the missing women of Asia , draws repeatedly on Wollstonecraft as a political philosopher in *The Idea of Justice* .

= = Major works = =

= = = Educational works = = =

The majority of Wollstonecraft 's early productions are about education ; she assembled an anthology of literary extracts " for the improvement of young women " entitled *The Female Reader* and she translated two children 's works , Maria Geertruida van de Werken de Cambon 's *Young Grandison* and Christian Gotthilf Salzmann 's *Elements of Morality* . Her own writings also addressed the topic . In both her conduct book *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and her children 's book *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) , Wollstonecraft advocates educating children into the emerging middle @-@ class ethos : self @-@ discipline , honesty , frugality , and social contentment . Both books also emphasise the importance of teaching children to reason , revealing Wollstonecraft 's intellectual debt to the important seventeenth @-@ century educational philosopher John Locke . However , the prominence she affords religious faith and innate feeling distinguishes her work from his and links it to the discourse of sensibility popular at the end of the eighteenth century . Both texts also advocate the education of women , a controversial topic at the time and one which she would return to throughout her career , most notably in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* . Wollstonecraft argues that well @-@ educated women will be good wives and mothers and ultimately contribute positively to the nation .

= = = Vindications = = =

= = = = Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) = = = =

Published in response to Edmund Burke 's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) , which was a defence of constitutional monarchy , aristocracy , and the Church of England , and an attack on Wollstonecraft 's friend , the Rev Richard Price at the Newington Green Unitarian Church , Wollstonecraft 's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) attacks aristocracy and advocates republicanism . Hers was the first response in a pamphlet war that subsequently became known as the Revolution Controversy , in which Thomas Paine 's *Rights of Man* (1792) became the rallying cry for reformers and radicals .

Wollstonecraft attacked not only monarchy and hereditary privilege but also the language that Burke used to defend and elevate it . In a famous passage in the *Reflections* , Burke had lamented : " I had thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her [Marie Antoinette] with insult . ? But the age of chivalry is gone . " Most of Burke 's detractors deplored what they viewed as theatrical pity for the French queen ? a pity they felt was at the expense of the people . Wollstonecraft was unique in her attack on Burke 's gendered language . By redefining the sublime and the beautiful , terms first established by Burke himself in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) , she undermined his rhetoric as well as his argument . Burke had associated the beautiful with weakness and femininity and the sublime with strength and masculinity ; Wollstonecraft turns these definitions against him , arguing that his theatrical tableaux turn Burke 's readers ? the citizens ? into weak women who are swayed by show . In her first unabashedly feminist critique , which Wollstonecraft

scholar Claudia L. Johnson argues remains unsurpassed in its argumentative force , Wollstonecraft indicts Burke 's defence of an unequal society founded on the passivity of women .

In her arguments for republican virtue , Wollstonecraft invokes an emerging middle @-@ class ethos in opposition to what she views as the vice @-@ ridden aristocratic code of manners . Influenced by Enlightenment thinkers , she believed in progress and derides Burke for relying on tradition and custom . She argues for rationality , pointing out that Burke 's system would lead to the continuation of slavery , simply because it had been an ancestral tradition . She describes an idyllic country life in which each family can have a farm that will just suit its needs . Wollstonecraft contrasts her utopian picture of society , drawn with what she says is genuine feeling , to Burke 's false feeling .

The Rights of Men was Wollstonecraft 's first overtly political work , as well as her first feminist work ; as Johnson contends , " it seems that in the act of writing the later portions of Rights of Men she discovered the subject that would preoccupy her for the rest of her career " . It was this text that made her a well @-@ known writer .

= = = = Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) = = = =

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy . In it , Wollstonecraft argues that women ought to have an education commensurate with their position in society and then proceeds to redefine that position , 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 . Large sections of the Rights of Woman respond vitriolically to conduct book writers such as James Fordyce and John Gregory and educational philosophers such as Jean @-@ Jacques Rousseau , who wanted to deny women an education . (Rousseau famously argues in Émile (1762) that women should be educated for the pleasure of men .)

Wollstonecraft states that currently many women are silly and superficial (she refers to them , for example , as " spaniels " and " toys ") , but argues that this is not because of an innate deficiency of mind but rather because men have denied them access to education . Wollstonecraft is intent on illustrating the limitations that women 's deficient educations have placed on them ; she 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 . " She implies that , without the encouragement young women receive from an early age to focus their attention on beauty and outward accomplishments , women could achieve much more .

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 . What she does claim is that men and women are equal in the eyes of God . However , such claims of equality stand in contrast to her statements respecting the superiority of masculine strength and valour . Wollstonecraft famously and ambiguously writes : " 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 consequently , as strenuously maintain that they have the same simple direction , as that there is a God . " 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 .

One of Wollstonecraft 's most scathing critiques in the Rights of Woman is of false and excessive sensibility , particularly in women . She argues that women who succumb to sensibility are " blown about by every momentary gust of feeling " and because they are " the prey of their senses " they cannot think rationally . In fact , she claims , they do harm not only to themselves but to the entire civilization : these are not women who can help refine a civilization ? a popular eighteenth @-@

century idea ? but women who will destroy it . Wollstonecraft does not argue that reason and feeling should act independently of each other ; rather , she believes that they should inform each other .

In addition to her larger philosophical arguments , Wollstonecraft also lays out a specific educational plan . In the twelfth chapter of the Rights of Woman , " On National Education " , she argues that all children should be sent to a " country day school " as well as given some education at home " to inspire a love of home and domestic pleasures . " She also maintains that schooling should be co @-@ educational , arguing that men and women , whose marriages are " the cement of society " , should be " educated after the same model . "

Wollstonecraft addresses her text to the middle @-@ class , which she describes as the " most natural state " , and in many ways the Rights of Woman is inflected by a bourgeois view of the world . It encourages modesty and industry in its readers and attacks the uselessness of the aristocracy . But Wollstonecraft is not necessarily a friend to the poor ; for example , in her national plan for education , she suggests that , after the age of nine , the poor , except for those who are brilliant , should be separated from the rich and taught in another school .

= = = Novels = = =

Both of Wollstonecraft 's novels criticize what she viewed as the patriarchal institution of marriage and its deleterious effects on women . In her first novel , Mary : A Fiction (1788) , the eponymous heroine is forced into a loveless marriage for economic reasons ; she fulfils her desire for love and affection outside of marriage with two passionate romantic friendships , one with a woman and one with a man . Maria : or , The Wrongs of Woman (1798) , an unfinished novel published posthumously and often considered Wollstonecraft 's most radical feminist work , revolves around the story of a woman imprisoned in an insane asylum by her husband ; like Mary , Maria also finds fulfilment outside of marriage , in an affair with a fellow inmate and a friendship with one of her keepers . Neither of Wollstonecraft 's novels depict successful marriages , although she posits such relationships in the Rights of Woman . At the end of Mary , the heroine believes she is going " to that world where there is neither marrying , nor giving in marriage " , presumably a positive state of affairs .

Both of Wollstonecraft 's novels also critique the discourse of sensibility , a moral philosophy and aesthetic that had become popular at the end of the eighteenth century . Mary is itself a novel of sensibility and Wollstonecraft attempts to use the tropes of that genre to undermine sentimentalism itself , a philosophy she believed was damaging to women because it encouraged them to rely overmuch on their emotions . In The Wrongs of Woman the heroine 's indulgence on romantic fantasies fostered by novels themselves is depicted as particularly detrimental .

Female friendships are central to both of Wollstonecraft 's novels , but it is the friendship between Maria and Jemima , the servant charged with watching over her in the insane asylum , that is the most historically significant . This friendship , based on a sympathetic bond of motherhood , between an upper @-@ class woman and a lower @-@ class woman is one of the first moments in the history of feminist literature that hints at a cross @-@ class argument , that is , that women of different economic positions have the same interests because they are women .

= = = Letters Written in Sweden , Norway , and Denmark (1796) = = =

Wollstonecraft 's Letters Written in Sweden , Norway , and Denmark is a deeply personal travel narrative . The twenty @-@ five letters cover a wide range of topics , from sociological reflections on Scandinavia and its peoples to philosophical questions regarding identity to musings on her relationship with Imlay (although he is not referred to by name in the text) . Using the rhetoric of the sublime , Wollstonecraft explores the relationship between the self and society . Reflecting the strong influence of Rousseau , Letters Written in Sweden , Norway , and Denmark shares the themes of the French philosopher 's Reveries of a Solitary Walker (1782) : " the search for the source of human happiness , the stoic rejection of material goods , the ecstatic embrace of nature , and the essential role of sentiment in understanding " . While Rousseau ultimately rejects society ,

however , Wollstonecraft celebrates domestic scenes and industrial progress in her text .

Wollstonecraft promotes subjective experience , particularly in relation to nature , exploring the connections between the sublime and sensibility . Many of the letters describe the breathtaking scenery of Scandinavia and Wollstonecraft 's desire to create an emotional connection to that natural world . In so doing , she gives greater value to the imagination than she had in previous works . As in her previous writings , she champions the liberation and education of women . In a change from her earlier works , however , she illustrates the detrimental effects of commerce on society , contrasting the imaginative connection to the world with a commercial and mercenary one , an attitude she associates with Imlay .

Letters Written in Sweden , Norway , and Denmark was Wollstonecraft 's most popular book in the 1790s . It sold well and was reviewed positively by most critics . Godwin wrote " if ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author , this appears to me to be the book . " It influenced Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge , who drew on its themes and its aesthetic .

= = List of works = =

This is a complete list of Mary Wollstonecraft 's works ; all works are the first edition and were authored by Wollstonecraft unless otherwise noted .

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