

Mary wollstonecraft: the greatest contributions

Literature



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Mary Wollstonecraft – Feminism Criticism

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in London the year 1759. Her family moved many times during her childhood, and each was a financial burden. Only one of seven Wollstonecraft children received a formal education. However, even without a formal education, Mary was familiar with the Bible and the works of many great philosophers. Wollstonecraft spent much of her life caring for others, including her mother and many of her grown sisters. Together some of the Wollstonecraft sisters established a school, but that endeavor was short lived and unsuccessful. Mary went on to write for the Analytical Review, which helped in expanding her education. It was through this experience that Wollstonecraft came to write “ A Vindication of the Rights of Men,” and later, “ A Vindication of the Rights of Women.” Shortly after, Wollstonecraft travelled to France where she met American author Gilbert Imlay. The two began a long and turbulent relationship which ultimately resulted in heartbreak and an illegitimate child. Wollstonecraft became suicidal during this time before finally breaking things off with Imlay. She later married William Godwin and the two had another daughter who would grow up to become Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein. Little Mary’s birth came with complications, which resulted in Wollstonecraft’s death just ten days later at the age of 38.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s greatest work was entitled “ A Vindication of the Rights of Women,” which first established her as a political writer. While writing for the Analytical Review, Wollstonecraft reviewed a speech given by her friend Richard Price entitled A Discourse on the Love of our Country. In response to this speech, Edmund Burke wrote Reflections on the Revolution

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in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event, which criticized Price's speech. Wollstonecraft's publisher then encourages her to defend her friend, which resulted in her anonymous publication of "A Vindication of the Rights of Men." Only a month later, Wollstonecraft published the second piece, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women." This time, she published the work with her name attached, establishing herself as a political writer. According to a Stanford University page,

"In September 1791, Wollstonecraft began A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects, which elaborated a number of points made in the previous Vindication, namely, that in most cases, marriage was nothing but a property relation, and that the education women received ensured that they could not meet the expectations society had of them and almost certainly guaranteed them an unhappy life." (Tomaselli).

This quote seems important because it provides important insight into Wollstonecraft's key values, which are instrumental in deeming her a "Feminist." Given this quote, I expected that Wollstonecraft would never be married. I was not surprised that she had a serious relationship with Gilbert Imlay; after all, everyone needs companionship. However, I was surprised that given her views on marriage and her rocky relationship with Imlay, she married William Godwin.

What really impressed me about Mary Wollstonecraft was that she did so much in her short life. Even though she was scarcely educated, she learned

through reading many classical works in order to better herself. Even though Wollstonecraft was a good political writer, I think her greatest contribution was to the field of education. Even without the same opportunities that men had, she was able to become an intelligent, well-read individual. She used these skills to advocate for women's right to education, claiming that the current system was designed to keep women in their place so that they wouldn't surpass the men. This was an important milestone for early women's rights movements.