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Mary Wollstonecraft - II

Lead: For ten years after 1787, Mary Wollstonecraft, exercising a gentile emancipation, alternately affronted and fascinated a generation of literary cognoscenti. She helped inspire the women's rights movement.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: After a difficult childhood, Wollstonecraft enjoyed a decade of literary success and social notoriety. She broke into the wide public imagination with an angry polemic, a vigorous critique of

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. He had championed the American rebellion, she reasoned, and now was recanting his enthusiasm for liberty because of skepticism over the French experiment. She followed this *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, with her best known work, a companion volume, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, the core of which was an attack on the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He decreed that women were tools for pleasure, moral privilege, political deference and education were wasted on women. The rights of man should actually be the rights of humanity, she asserted, and the most supreme right is that of thinking. This work made

Wollstonecraft a European celebrity.

Her personal life was less successful. None of her professional colleagues seemed interested and so in 1792 she moved to Paris better to gauge the success of the Revolution, and there met Gilbert Imlay, an attractive American ex-patriot. They lived together and produced a child, but Imlay was a womanizer and in humiliation Wollstonecraft attempted suicide. Her second relationship with William Godwin was much happier, but she died after a troubled delivery in August 1797. She led the way for a host of modern women who prized the life of the mind and liberation of the spirit.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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<http://www.philosophypages.com/ph/woll.htm>

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