



Vindication

By Lyndall Gordon
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Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft was the founder of modern feminism -- and, in her time, the most famous woman in Europe and America. At each stage of her life -- as teacher, writer, lover, and traveler -- Mary Wollstonecraft was an original. She had advanced ideas about education, and views on single motherhood, family responsibilities, working life, domestic affections, friendships, and sexual relationships that now appear astonishingly modern. She tested new ways a man and a woman might come to know each other and live together.

Vindication is the first biography to show this remarkable woman at full strength and bring out the range as well as the reverberations of her genius. Here is the drama of Wollstonecraft's life as a governess in an aristocratic family in Ireland, as an independent writer in London, as an on-the-scene observer of the French Revolution, and as a daring traveler to Scandinavia on the trail of an unsolved crime. *Vindication* measures Mary Wollstonecraft's life against her own strengths and reinterprets her for the twenty-first century.

Questions for Discussion

1. To what extent did Mary Wollstonecraft's unsheltered childhood prepare her to embrace views that were considered radical in her time?
2. How were women of Wollstonecraft's generation restricted in terms of their legal rights, and why did these restrictions have dramatic consequences for Wollstonecraft's immediate family?
3. How did the formation of the school at Newington Green affect Wollstonecraft's career as an intellectual and educator?
4. How did Mary Wollstonecraft's connection with the Reverend Dr. Price influence her politically, and to what extent did that relationship cement her alliance with other Dissenters in her society?
5. What do the views on education that Wollstonecraft expressed in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* reveal about her attitudes toward the home and the affections, and how are her views significant in terms of her own upbringing?
6. To what extent was Mary Wollstonecraft's success as a writer and independent thinker dependent on the generosity of benefactors?
7. How did Mary's time in Ireland as a governess to the King family qualify as a "double life," and how did the process of educating the children of aristocrats affect her?
8. How did the revolutions of this age -- the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 -- influence the political attitudes and opinions held by Wollstonecraft and her fellow Dissenters?
9. How did Wollstonecraft's romantic relationships with Gilbert Imlay and William Godwin relate to her ideas and theories about communication between the sexes?
10. How did her associations with the foremost English supporter of the American Revolution, the Reverend Dr. Price, and with Americans such as John and Abigail Adams, Joel and Ruth Barlow, and Gilbert Imlay influence Mary Wollstonecraft's views about America?

About the Author

Born in Cape Town, South Africa, Lyndall Gordon is the author of the highly acclaimed biographies of T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Brontë, and Henry James. Her work has won the John Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography and the Cheltenham Prize for Literature. She lives in Oxford, England, where she is a senior research fellow at St. Hilda's College.