



# Rebel Writer: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Politics

*Wendy Gunther-Canada*

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Blending biography, gender theory, and political analysis, Gunther-Canada charts Mary Wollstonecraft's transformation from female reader to pioneer feminist author. She shows how Wollstonecraft's pathbreaking *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and other works confronted traditional notions of femininity and authority and provided the first systematic argument for women's political rights.

Wollstonecraft's writings represent a rebellion against Jean-Jacques Rousseau's portrayal of women as dangerous coquettes and Edmund Burke's vision of women as beautiful and apolitical weaklings. Her revolutionary political theory challenged the separation of public and private spheres by insisting that women could be rational players in the Enlightenment's script of liberty and individualism. Gunther-Canada gives us a Wollstonecraft who forthrightly confronted the politics of gender and genre and incited revolt against the prevailing view of women as creatures born only to "propagate and rot."

*Rebel Writer* shows how Wollstonecraft's political ideology guided her personal life—she bore a child out of wedlock and later married amid scandal—and how her attempts to unite the personal and the political ended in 1797, with her tragic early death in childbed. For more than two hundred years Wollstonecraft's life has served as a cautionary tale of the dangers of women's participation in revolutionary politics. Now Gunther-Canada shows us how Wollstonecraft subverted the patriarchal plot of political theory and framed an alternative vision of women as citizens, making her truly a "rebel writer."

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