

Mary Wollstonecraft's life has tended to overshadow her writing. Not only was her life romantically short and dramatically ended, but it was crammed with varied and often melodramatic incident. She was a mistress and a mother before she was a wife; she saw and survived the French Revolution; and she was admired by a number of leading politicians, artists, and thinkers of the day. But it is not her varied experience or her vibrant milieu which make her of enduring interest; it is, rather, her powerful and original imagination, shaping experience and hard-won knowledge into the ardent radical philosophy which lay behind all her writing.

Both the pre-revolutionary *Mary* (1788) and *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) are autobiographical, but in the later work the theme is broadened into a tale of universal human relevance, transcending the local and individual.