

Reflections on Inequality, Respect, and Love in the Political Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft

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The paper

Beginning with a survey of her pronouncements on inequality (Section 1.1), this paper traces the course of Wollstonecraft's thoughts on love and respect, shaped as they were by Edmund Burke's observations on these subjects (Section 1.2). The Wollstonecraft that emerges from this perspective is a more insightful thinker and, one might add, a more perplexing and perplexed one than she might at first appear, one whose philosophical meditations provide a strong basis from which to consider some of the difficulties attending our expectations of one another as lovers, parents, and citizens (Section 1.3). The relevance of her writings rests not in identifying the nature of the condition of women, though she clearly did this most cogently, nor in calling for a revolution in manners, though she did that no less vigorously, but in her efforts to think through human emotions and the tensions inherent in our desire to be desired, valued, esteemed, and respected. The idea behind the paper is to come to understand the shape of her thoughts on these subjects for the sake of knowing her better, but also to reflect on our own conceptual arsenal.