

Chancellor's Lectures 2011

Books that Shook the World - from the *King James Bible* to *Wealth of Nations*

Lecture Two, Thursday 12 May

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the second in this year's series of Chancellor's lectures, *Books that Shook the World – from the King James Bible to Wealth of Nations*.

Last week we looked at the King James Bible, which gave me the opportunity to pay tribute to William Tyndale – and to quote some choice Jacobean insults. This week we are in the eighteenth century, when the influence of the KJB is at its height. I am considering someone whom Horace Walpole memorably called a 'hyena in petticoats': Mary Wollstonecraft, and her most famous and influential book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

On the 8th March this year, the philosopher Mary Warnock, Frank Field MP, Baroness Susan Greenfield and more than sixty others sent a joint letter to the *Guardian*. It began as follows: 'On the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day, it is surprising to realise that there is still no significant memorial to Mary Wollstonecraft, author of the groundbreaking *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and founder of the campaign for the freedom and equality of women.' The letter went on to say, 'Newington Green is the natural home for a sculpture to honour this pioneer feminist, educator and political philosopher. We urge you to support the Mary on the Green campaign for a long-overdue commemoration to Mary Wollstonecraft.'

If you are not already familiar with Wollstonecraft's work and legacy, I hope that whatever else this lecture does, it will enable you to see why such a campaign has been launched, why in Newington Green, why she has not already been honoured in the way envisaged, and why her own life, and the issues she wrote about, remain controversial and pertinent more than two hundred years later.

In each of this year's lectures, I'm going to say something about the life of the author as well as their work. In Wollstonecraft's case it's particularly important to do so. For more than a century her work was judged in the light of her life, or least an interpretation of it which portrayed her as an immoral, irreligious, fanatic. This kept many from proper engagement with her writings, and arguably it's only in the last forty or fifty years that her true importance has been widely recognized.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born on the 27th of April 1759 in Spitalfields, London. Her father Edward worked in the family's silk weaving business, but really wanted to be a gentleman farmer. In the early 1760s, he took his wife Elizabeth and their young family to live on a farm in Epping. They moved on six occasions in Wollstonecraft's childhood, their situation becoming more financially precarious every time. Edward, it appeared, had little talent for farming – and no other apparent gifts either. Mary had to intervene to protect her mother from drunken abuse. She later told her husband William Godwin she considered her father a childish bully. 'Mary was not formed to be the contented and unresisting subject of a despot,' Godwin wrote in his memoirs of his wife, published after her death.

There were seven children, three girls and four boys. Mary was the eldest daughter, born second after her older brother Edward, usually known as Ned. Ned was the apple of his parents eye (to quote the KJB) and the only one to receive what might be called a 'gentleman's education'. 'Such indeed is the force of prejudice,' Wollstonecraft later wrote, 'that what was called *spirit* and *wit* in him, was cruelly repressed as *forwardness* in me.'

Like the other six children, Mary received little formal education. She did have a few years at a day school in Beverley, Yorkshire, but that was it. She at least learned to read and write there, but in everything subsequently she was self taught. Her facility with foreign languages, and impressive stock of learning, were acquired through her own efforts and with great difficulty. The indignation with which she later criticized the disparity between educational opportunities for boys and girls, men and women, was born of personal experience.

By the 1770s the Wollstonecrafts were enduring hard times. Poverty reduced the possibilities of marriage for a middle class woman, and employment opportunities were few. Teaching was one possibility, or being a governess, or a lady's companion, or needlework. By the 1780s Mary had tried all of these, hating most of them. She attempted to start a school in Islington, and when this came to nothing, she tried again in Newington Green, a dissenting community north of London. This was a joint venture with her friend Fanny Blood, and sister Eliza. In 1786, after just two years, she had to close the school because of financial difficulties.

Nonetheless the people she met at Newington Green were formative in her subsequent career. They were the rational dissenters, later known as Unitarians, a liberal offshoot of Presbyterianism. It was a middle class, optimistic, humanistic, intellectual, and progressive movement. Its leading figures were Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, both political reformers. Price was the minister at Newington

Green, and became Wollstonecraft's friend and mentor. While she held back from joining the dissenters, she was influenced by their views; as they supported women's equality, this was a supportive and encouraging environment. She was introduced to the official publisher of rational dissent, Joseph Johnson, and this was perhaps the most important connection of all.

In Wollstonecraft's time, a final employment opportunity for a woman confident enough, or desperate enough, was writing. As her school was failing, she began her first book: *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. This was published in 1787 by Joseph Johnson, earning her ten guineas. After a shortlived post as governess for the Viscount Kingsborough family in County Cork, from which she was dismissed, she returned to London to work for her publisher as a reader and translator. This was a formative move. Through Joseph Johnson she was introduced to a wide circle of progressive artists and writers. And through him her writing career was enabled to develop, as over the next ten years a string of translations and original works appeared.

Johnson was both friend and patron; he also saw his publishing profits boosted by someone who by her death only a decade after her first book, was the best-known female political writer in Europe. To begin with though, there was little to separate Wollstonecraft from a number of other women working away at the lower end of the publishing business, churning out anthologies, stories and translations for the popular market, and wading her way through book after book for the *Analytical Review*.

If she hadn't moved away from her early style, we would probably not be talking about her this evening. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* has a didactic, hectoring tone. It exhorts her readers in cultivating reason and duty, so that their brute impulses will not run wild. She warns against card-playing and the theatre. Servants are to be treated with a firm hand, as they are, 'in general, ignorant and cunning.' This kind of moral didacticism persisted in a book of stories for children in 1788, *Original Stories from Real Life*, and her 1789 anthology *The Female Reader*.

Throughout this period Wollstonecraft was testing out a very different role for herself. This was, as her biographer Barbara Taylor puts it, 'that of an impoverished bohemian forsaking the temptations of the world for the higher claims of mind and spirit.' She was seeking an authentic subjectivity, that is a way of writing that would help readers to see what was in her heart and mind, doing away with prescribed rules and conventions about what women *ought* to be thinking or doing.

In a way it was the French Revolution that enabled her breakthrough. For in 1789 the Bastille had fallen, and just a year later Edmund Burke published his famous repudiation of all that had taken place: *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

English radicals, including Wollstonecraft, were outraged by what Burke had written, with his justification of the old order, and his argument that overthrowing established authority was a sure way to disorder and chaos. Burke, Wollstonecraft said, was indifferent to the 'silent majesty of misery in France' and 'respect for rank [had] swallowed up common feelings of humanity.' Johnson encouraged her to write a refutation, and so she did. It was called *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, and was the instant hit that made her name. She was feted by radicals in both England and France, who saw her in the same light as Tom Paine, who published *The Rights of Man* in 1791.

Wollstonecraft was galvanized by the French revolution. She later wrote, '[A] new spirit has gone forth, to organize the body politic... Reason has, at last, shown her captivating face... and it will be impossible for the dark hand of despotism again to obscure its radiance.' With these new hopes, however, came renewed frustration. A new age might have dawned in France, but even there women were not achieving equal status as citizens. Wollstonecraft was exasperated enough to set to work on a new book. In three months she wrote over 300 pages. On the 3 January 1792 she wrote to a friend to say she'd just delivered the last page to the printer: 'I am dissatisfied with myself for not having done justice to the subject – Do not suspect me of false modesty – I mean to say, that had I allowed myself more time I could have written a better book.'

Wollstonecraft was referring to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It was an immediate bestseller. She had struck a chord, a nerve, and no-one could ignore her work. Horace Walpole, well known man of letters, art historian and politician, he of the 'hyena in petticoats' quote, wrote to the leading evangelical writer Hannah More to ask if she'd read it. 'Most certainly not', was the reply, as 'There is something fantastic and absurd in the very title.' More went on to explain that 'there is no animal so much indebted to subordination for its good behaviour as woman.' There was more of this sort of thing, favouring insults over actually addressing her arguments, such as the following rhyme published in a magazine: 'For Mary verily would wear the breeches, God help poor silly men from such usurping b*****s' (I leave you to fill in the asterisks). But it's also true that *Rights of Woman* was well received in many places, because it soberly and authoritatively articulated arguments already familiar to men and women of progressive views. It was rapidly translated into French and German, with an American edition the following year, 1793.

The book later gained a reputation as amoral and libertarian, but this was posthumous – when her husband William Godwin published his scandalous *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. I will say more about the actual content of *Rights of Woman* once I have completed Wollstonecraft's story.

Godwin was her third or fourth serious relationship; fourth if you include her ardent friendship over ten years with Fanny Blood, whom she'd met at sixteen.

Wollstonecraft was devastated by Fanny's death in childbirth, and named her own first daughter after her. Three years after that trauma, she met Henry Fuseli at her publisher's home. This was in 1788, when Fuseli was 47 and she 29. Fuseli was a well known painter and literary figure; a 'small, self-important dandy' with a temper. Wollstonecraft adored him, nonetheless. She knew he was married, but probably not that he was bisexual. Fuseli encouraged her affections, although he had no intention of leaving his wife Sophia. Plans for all three to travel together to France in 1792, with Joseph Johnson her publisher also, came to nothing. This may have had something to do with Wollstonecraft's unusual tactics: she went to see Sophia Fuseli with a proposal that she be recognized as her husband's 'spiritual spouse' and all three live together. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Sophia was both astounded and furious, and threw her out.

Humiliated and unhappy, Wollstonecraft went to Paris alone. There she joined an expatriate band of British and American radicals, including the American soldier turned adventurer Captain Gilbert Imlay. She fell in love, and within six months was pregnant. In 1793 Paris was becoming dangerous, with the so-called 'Reign of Terror' underway. France declared war on England, and English nationals came under suspicion. America was considered an ally, however, and so Imlay registered Wollstonecraft as his wife at the American embassy, although they never actually married. He then, charming man that he was, abandoned her. Mary followed him to Le Havre, where her daughter Fanny was born in 1794, and then to London, and even also to Norway. She was a determined woman.

During this period, learning of Imlay's various infidelities, she attempted suicide twice, once with an overdose of opium, then a leap into the Thames from Putney Bridge. In the end she realized there was no hope for her relationship with Imlay. 'I part with you in peace' she wrote to him in March 1796.

In *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft had criticized women's enslavement to love; something she now knew about firsthand. And even through all the traumas I've just described, she retained her poise as a writer. She made of her troubles with

Imlay a book of imaginary correspondence, published as *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, reckoned by many to be her best work.

William Godwin had met Wollstonecraft in 1791, at (you won't be surprised to hear) the publisher Joseph Johnson's. He was the best known radical philosopher of his day. Within months of the final parting with Imlay in 1796, she called on him, ostensibly to lend him a novel by Rousseau. Even nowadays it's often thought that a man should make the first move, but boldness was never a problem for Wollstonecraft. Soon she and Godwin were lovers. Finally Wollstonecraft had found the kind of relationship she had always yearned for. 'I am never so well pleased with myself, as when I please you' she told him, and yes, that is an euphemism!

As Barbara Taylor puts it, their fourteen month correspondence 'pulses with erotic delight.' Last week, I judged some of James I's more fruity insults just about acceptable for a pre-watershed audience, and I hope I can similarly get away with this letter of 13 November 1796: 'If the felicity of last night has had the same effect on your health as on my countenance, you have no cause to lament... For I have seldom seen so much live fire running about my features as this morning when recollections – very dear, called forth the blush of pleasure, as I adjusted my hair.'

Less than a year later Wollstonecraft was dead. She and Godwin never intended to marry. Godwin was well known for his opposition to marriage, and Wollstonecraft was wrongly thought to be married to Imlay. When she found she was pregnant, however, they did get married, in March 1797. Only five months later, in the early hours of 30 August, Wollstonecraft went into labour, and gave birth to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (later, of course, Mary Shelley, wife of the poet, and author of *Frankenstein*). The birth itself was straightforward, but complications followed and she died of a fever eleven days later. 'I can never know happiness again,' Godwin wrote to a friend. Despite his own dislike of religion, he respected Wollstonecraft's piety and she received a Christian burial. She was just 38 years old.

The following year, 1798, Godwin published his *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which included a candid account of her sexual history. This did nothing to help the posthumous reception of her work, for as I indicated earlier, opponents branded her an irreligious, immoral fanatic. A hundred years later her scandalous reputation was still being cited, now by opponents of those working for women's suffrage. We will come back to the Wollstonecraft legacy, but for now let's turn our attention to what the *Rights of Woman* actually said.

The reason I've included it in 'Books that Shook the World' is because it's the first great feminist work, a key foundation in the women's movement, so that now we can take for granted what was not so even a century ago: that in this country at least, women can vote, receive the same educational opportunities as men, etc.

At the heart of Wollstonecraft's argument was the importance of education. She had a 'profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore.' Intriguingly, she seeks to make this point only to *middle class* women. This is because, 'they appear to be in the most natural state' (p13). Upper class 'ladies' she says, only live to amuse themselves, and are vain and helpless, dissipated by wealth. The poor, on the other hand, are too often too taken over by drudgery, brutalized by poverty, for it to be very likely they can act on her advice.

Even with middle class women, Wollstonecraft did not have high expectations for her book. For, she thought, such women were too often in situations which discouraged reason, education and independence. So by 'education' she did not simply mean what girls learnt in school, if indeed they went to school, but also what the whole of society taught girls and women, explicitly and implicitly, about their identity and role. Wollstonecraft did hope to persuade at least some women to 'endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness.'

She wanted to liberate womankind. 'Women are everywhere in this deplorable state, for, in order to preserve their *innocence*, as *ignorance* is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. Taught from their infancy that beauty is a woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison.' *Rights of Woman* attacked the 'system of dissimulation' by which women were 'always to seem to be this and that... leveled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance.' Wollstonecraft's refusal to conform to the conventional womanliness of her era was at the heart of her radicalism.

Rights of Woman is dedicated to the French statesman Talleyrand, who Wollstonecraft had met in London. He proposed a new constitution for France, and in her Dedication Wollstonecraft exhorts him to ensure that women can participate fully in the new society being created. The first three chapters of *Rights of Woman* set out the principles on which the case for the rights of women is made. Chapters

four and six describe how women are shaped by their early influences. Chapter five analyses notable eighteenth century authors and their attitudes to women, particularly Rousseau. Chapters seven to twelve discuss a number of ethical issues relating to love, marriage, property, sex, family, education and the need for men as well as women to change. The final chapter gives some examples of the folly which the ignorance of women generates, such as susceptibility to confidence tricksters and fortune tellers.

In her opening chapters Wollstonecraft has a one word response to those who argue God created women inferior to men: *nonsense*. Both men and women are created with an innate capacity for reason, so that through the acquisition of knowledge, they may perfect themselves. A just God would not create a woman, and then deny her the rational capacity to become virtuous. She criticizes the monarchy, the army, the church, and all coercive authority, saying that reform for women will not happen without the reformation of society as a whole.

Such is Wollstonecraft's argument, but the style is discursive and rambling at times. To modern ears much of it doesn't sound particularly radical or scandalous, but often downright moralistic, even misogynistic. Women are described in various places as vain, fickle, superstitious, frivolous, irrational, cunning and infantile. Her point, however, is that if this is sometimes the reality, it is not because women are *naturally* such, but because culture and society have made them to be so. In particular the problem is the attitudes and actions of men, who 'considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers'.

Both men and women, however, share in the corruption of all human beings through rank and privilege. Here you can see her affinity with the aims of the French Revolution, with her added emphasis: if you want virtuous equality, you will not get it while one-half of the human race remains in subjection. 'Let woman share the rights', she wrote, 'and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated.' Equality between the sexes is in fact for the benefit of *all* humanity.

When you actually read *Rights of Women*, the idea that it is irreligious and immoral is easily dismissed, and seen to be based on prejudice by those disapproving of Wollstonecraft's lifestyle. On the other hand, simply to see her as a liberal thinker, an out and out rationalist, is to misread her also. Like Tom Paine and William Blake, contemporaries both, she is a *visionary* and a *utopian*. And in her case a key source for her views is her religious faith.

Rights of Woman is peppered with biblical references, all of course from the King James Bible. Like the rest of her family, Wollstonecraft was originally Anglican. She was also shaped by the rational dissenters at Newington Green, and by aspects of Rousseau, in particular his vision of authentic moral existence – life lived in attunement to ‘God within’. All this reinforced her own convictions about the natural equality of all God’s children, whatever their status in society.

Wollstonecraft’s faith was strong but idiosyncratic. Contemporary feminism is often hostile to religious faith, rather patronizingly viewing her religious views as ideological baggage foisted on her by the times she happened to live in, and having nothing to positively contribute to her views on women. Separating out Wollstonecraft’s faith from her radical message is not so easily done; indeed it is plain to me that it cannot be done.

Rights of Woman has at least fifty discussions of religious themes. She does indeed call for a ‘revolution of female manners’ but it turns out this means first and foremost a call to right relationship with God. ‘In treating... of the manners of women,’ she wrote, ‘let us, disregarding sensual arguments, trace what we should endeavour to make them in order to cooperate with the Supreme Being.’ And again, ‘These may be Utopian dreams... [but] thanks to that Being who impressed them on my soul, and gave me sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till, becoming dependent only on Him for the support of my virtue, I view with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex.’ Irritating as it may be to some feminists, and indeed to some Christians, it was because of *God* that Mary Wollstonecraft became a feminist.

Perhaps it isn’t surprising that, despite her Anglicanism, she was drawn to the dissenters. The radical Puritan groupings, of which we heard a little in my first lecture, had long emphasized the spiritual equality of women. These Puritans had a strong emphasis on the democracy of God’s grace, and bequeathed to women believers a spiritual language of self-assertion. But it was not *only* the Puritans - as one commentator puts it, ‘...even the Church of England... harboured godly feminists.’ By the time Wollstonecraft wrote *Rights of Woman*, however, it was the Puritan, dissenting voice that dominates: ‘I throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues... For man and woman, truth must be the same.’ Always, in making such statements, Wollstonecraft is seeking to liberate women, not so that they can go off and do their own thing, but rather to bind them more closely and faithfully to their God.

This is what she actually wrote. But her associations with Tom Paine and the increasingly feared nation of France, combined with the impact of Godwin’s

scandalous *Memoirs*, meant that few would read her in the face of widespread propaganda and denunciation. On her death, a writer in the *Historical Magazine* said her works would be read ‘with disgust by every female who has any pretensions to delicacy, with detestation by everyone attached to the interests of religion and morality, and with indignation by anyone who might feel any regard for the unhappy woman whose frailties should have been buried in oblivion.’ Charming.

Wollstonecraft’s reputation continued to be besmirched well into the nineteenth century. The suicide of her first daughter, Fanny Imlay, and the elopement of her second, Mary, with the married poet Percy Shelley, only added fuel to the flames. The fact that there was a swing to what Melvyn Bragg calls ‘public primness and the female domestic goddess in the long and big-breeding age of Victoria’ did not help. But there were those who kept Wollstonecraft’s work alive, such as the influential Welsh social reformer Robert Owen. The Owenite Society regularly published extracts from *Rights of Woman* between 1820 and 1845, which was part of the reason she was so well known to nineteenth century feminists. The Unitarians, as the rational dissenters came to be called, also kept her legacy alive. Octavia Hill, Barbara Leigh Smith, and Bessie Rayner Parkes, all from Unitarian families and so with ready access to Wollstonecraft’s work, emerged as the new wave of social reformers.

Few, however, wanted to directly quote her, because of her reputation as a scandalous bohemian. This changed only very slowly. The novelist George Eliot was one of the few prepared to publicly praise her, writing of her ‘strong and truthful nature’. Mary Shelley’s daughter-in-law Lady Shelley republished some of Wollstonecraft’s letters, along with a memoir saying she’d never lost her deep Anglican faith.

The tide was beginning to turn. Other books began to appear, and Wollstonecraft and her ideas began to reclaim their rightful place. In 1860 Josephine Butler declared that all women, even prostitutes, have rights. J.S. Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. As the Victorian age drew to a close, the suffragists campaigned not only for votes but for sexual freedom.

Into the twentieth century, votes for women were finally achieved in 1918 – for those over thirty, at least; parity with men took another ten years. George Bernard Shaw published *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* in 1928. In *The Common Reader*, second series (1932) Virginia Woolf wrote of Wollstonecraft thus: ‘Many millions have died and been forgotten in the hundred and thirty years that have passed since she was buried; and yet as we read her letters and listen to her arguments and consider her experiments, above all, that most

fruitful experiment, her relation with Godwin, and realise the high-handed and hot-blooded manner in which she cut her way to the quick of life, one form of immortality is hers undoubtedly: she is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living.’

In Woolf’s words is a further turning of the tide; the sense that in Wollstonecraft’s *life* as well as her works something of value can be found. Her persistent struggles to find a life and a voice could now also begin to win her respect, and increase interest in the writings themselves. And in the bicentenary of her birth, 1959, the floodgates opened, with detailed attention being given to Wollstonecraft and her ideas: not just in England, but internationally, and perhaps especially in America.

Like the impact of the King James Bible across the Atlantic, the impact of Wollstonecraft in America is a lecture in itself. All I can do this evening is mention the names of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, author of the *Women’s Bible*, and Lucretia Mott. They were the guiding personalities behind the so-called Seneca Falls Declaration, in New York in 1848. Stanton composed the Declaration, deliberately modeled on the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, proclaiming that men and women were created equal. Hundreds of delegates, men and women, heard this read at what was the first women’s rights convention of the modern era. Much of the inspiration for both Stanton and Mott was Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman*, much discussed in the correspondence between them.

By the two hundredth anniversary of the *Rights of Woman* in 1992 Wollstonecraft had become, as Barbara Taylor puts it, ‘the most discussed, admired, criticized, and mythologized feminist intellectual in history.’ This is likely to continue as long as the cause she held dear, complete equality between the sexes, remains unrealized.

No doubt there will be differing opinions amongst you on the current state of play in relation to gender equality. But wherever you think we’ve got to in this country, when you consider the world as a whole, it’s obvious that Wollstonecraft’s goals are far from achieved. Consider, for example, violence against women, including the use of rape as a weapon of war. Limited political representation. Unequal pay. The gender gap in education in many parts of the world. High maternal mortality rates in many countries. The way contentious issues are often focused on women, such as the wearing of the Islamic veil, recently outlawed in France. These are all huge and important topics, and all I can do this evening is name them, and wonder what Wollstonecraft would focus on in today’s world.

I’ve spoken about the centrality of faith in Wollstonecraft’s developing vision. Perhaps, then, it’s appropriate to end this lecture with a few brief remarks on gender

issues in Christianity today. I was at theological college in the late 1980s, when debates about the ordination of women to the priesthood were at their height. I heard all the arguments a thousand times, with Biblical texts extensively quoted by both those for and those against. Some, like Wollstonecraft, found and find in Christianity an affirming vision, challenging social and cultural prejudices debarring women first from the priesthood, and now from the episcopate. Others found and find the reverse: a distinctive Christian identity that shouldn't accept politically correct notions of gender equality, just because they're fashionable in society.

I tend to be wary of generalizations, but I'm going to risk one now. I suspect that the strongest arguments in favour of women priests and bishops are future-orientated or, to use the theological jargon, eschatological. I suspect the strongest arguments against, are to do with continuity with the past, with honouring tried and tested traditions that've stood the test of time. Wollstonecraft, no doubt about it, was future-oriented. She wasn't seeking to restore what once was, but rather to create what had never been. Her visionary hope was that women and men would one day discover the fullness of their life together, the mutual life which God intended for them. I think she would have appreciated the Bishop of London's royal wedding sermon, in which he spoke of men and women helping each other 'to become what God meant each one to be, their deepest and truest selves.'

On that note, I must draw things to a close. I suspect Wollstonecraft and her work will not have been as familiar to most of you as last week's topic, the *King James Bible*, nor next week's, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. So I hope I have given you a sense of her significance, and why the campaign for a public memorial at Newington Green is gathering a head of steam. Next week, possibly over-ambitiously, I am hoping to cover Darwin's life, the major themes of his work, and contemporary debates about evolution and religion. And more even than that, I want to examine a surprisingly neglected topic – what Darwin's religious beliefs actually were, and how they changed.

But that is next time. For now, thank you very much for your attention.