

A WOMAN IMAGE IN ENGLISH ENLIGHTENMENT PERIOD

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Annotation: This article mainly focuses on how Enlightenment period influenced women's way of life in the 18th century. Social classification and gender inequality were the biggest barriers for women preventing their participation in society. The reflection of innumerable injustices suffered by women of Enlightenment period can be seen in the books of D. Defo and S. Richardson.

Key words: enlightenment, dignity, inequality, stereotype, freedom, labour, feminism, advocate, participation, chastity

Introduction.

During the enlightenment period (1700-1850) the whole world especially European countries experienced radical changes in almost every sphere of the society. Science, literature, art, medicine and industry developed rapidly and new theories, terms, works of art, scientific and medical discoveries were made. Women also started to demand their civil rights. Before the Enlightenment period, value and role of women was unbearable: they were considered as a property of their husband, no rights to work and study, to vote for an election, to make a decision about their life and even to walk in the street. Therefore, it was the highest time for women to find their place and dignity in the society.

Materials and Methods.

Since there was the stereotype that "men are far more intelligent than women", it was not an easy task for women to gain freedom, happiness and family peace in a short period of time. There were so many long struggles which deprived those women of their family members and home. Even one of the famous thinkers of that period, Immanuel Kant felt women were like incomplete men, stating, "[M]an should become more perfect as a man, and the woman as a wife." To belittle women further, he added, "[Women] need to know nothing more of the cosmos than is necessary to make the appearance of the heavens on a beautiful evening a stimulating sight to them". In addition to this, German philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, said, "[A woman's] dignity requires that she should give herself entirely as she is [to her husband] and . . . utterly lose herself in him. The least consequence is that she should renounce to him all her property and her rights. Henceforth, she has life and activity only under his eyes and in his business. She has ceased to live the life of an individual; her life has become

a part of the life of her lover... Woman . . . cannot and shall not go beyond the limits of her feeling.”¹

The representatives of the English enlightenment literature, such as D.Defoe, S.Richardson, G.Fild and J.Milton truly reflected the world of women, their dignity and spiritual values in their works. Anne Conway, Mary Wollstonecraft and Emilie du Chatelet were also women writers and philosophers of that period who contributed a lot to spread of the concept "feminism". Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, stated her strong opinions against the nobility, social inequality and unfair treatment to women in her book called "Vindication of the Rights of Men"²

And is the human heart falsified in turning the poor over to another world, to receive the blessings this could afford if society was regulated on a more enlarged plan; if man was contented to be the friend of man, and did not seek to bury the sympathies of humanity in the servile appellation of master; if, turning his eyes from ideal regions of taste and elegance, he laboured to give the earth he inhabited all the beauty it is capable of receiving, and was ever on the watch to shed abroad all the happiness which human nature can enjoy;—he who, respecting the rights of men, wishes to convince or persuade society that this is true happiness and dignity, is not the cruel oppressor of the poor, nor a short-sighted philosopher—He fears God and loves his fellow-creatures.—Behold the whole duty of man!—the citizen who acts differently is a sophisticated being . (Mary Wollstonecraft Cowen Tracts, 1790). In short, Mary Waltoncraft is the person who first coined the term "feminism" and advocated for the notion that women should be seen as rational beings and capable of intellectual pursuits and active participation in society.

The book "Moll Flender" of Daniel Defo is recognized to be a real description of the life in the 1700-1800s. There was nothing more important than wealth, social status and reputation of people, so Moll's fate goes around money. Initially, despite being abandoned by her mother, she has a nice childhood in a public charity. She is raised by a kind-hearted women who teaches her to behave well and other necessary skills, such as sewing. However, once she starts a new life with her husband, everything turned upside down: she is cheated again and again, ill-treated, expelled from the country and even sentenced to death. Meanwhile, these hardships turns Moll into an expert thief. Unlike women of upper class who only thinks about their beauty, diet, upbringing of their children, Moll is overwhelmed by accumulating wealth, finding food and accommodation. It is clear that bourgeois regime urges Moll Flender to make a living by stealing, but in the last stages of her life, she repentes and chooses the right path.

¹ <https://www.remedialherstory.com/22-1700-1850-enlightenment.html#/>

² <https://daily.jstor.org/3-women-philosophers-of-the-enlightenment/>

"As for Women that do not think their own Safety worth their Thought, that impatient of their present State, resolve as they call it to take the first good Christian that comes, that run into Matrimony, as a Horse rushes into the Battle, I can say nothing to them, but thus, that they are a Sort of Ladies that are to be pray'd for among the rest of distemper'd People...(Daniel Defoe, Moll Flander).

Another representative of English Enlightenment period Samuel Richardson, innovator writer, stepped into new genre "epistolary novel" in "Pamela or the Virtue Rewarded". Its main feature is portraying main characters' emotional experiences in a wider scale with the help of letters and documents. Pamela's spiritual word is also shown to the reader through her diary and letters to her parents. Pamela's and Moll Flender's fate is totally different: while Moll chooses the way of being thief because of poverty and life hardships, Pamela never changes her mind and does the best to protect her chastity. Even When Pamela is kidnapped, threatened and raped by her mistress' son Mr.B, she never loses belief in God and eventually due to her honesty and courage, she earns respect and true love of Mr.B.

"God, whose graciousness to us we have so often experienced at a pinch, put it into my good lady's heart, on her death-bed, just an hour before she expired, to recommend to my young master all her servants, one by one; and when it came to my turn to be recommended(for I was sobbing and crying at her pillow) she could only say, My dear son!- and so broke off a little; and then recovering- Remember my poor Pamela- And these were some of her last words! O how my eyes run- Don't wonder to see paper so blotted.

Conclusion.

To conclude, Feminism is not about "women should rule the world, not looking down on women, they should also find their place in society".³ This is exactly what representatives and leaders of English Enlightenment period was going to say. However, the image of women during the Enlightenment was complex: there were still strict restrictions on women's opportunities and involvement in society, on the other hand, there were some women leaders of that period stood on their dignity, emerging feminist ideas and actively participating in intellectual circles. The Enlightenment period was the beginning stage for later waves of feminism, inspiring future generations to support women's rights and equality.

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