



Women Writers in the Romantic Age: The example of Mary Wollstonecraft

Liwanag Hüttenmüller

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Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Literature, grade: 2,0, Ruhr-University of Bochum (Englisches Seminar), course: Romanticism in the Light of Cultural Studies, language: English, abstract: The time of Romanticism is historically regarded as a masculine phenomenon. As Anne K. Mellor pointed out, Romanticism as a literary movement was constructed and defined by a masculine discourse and ideology, a “masculine Romanticism”. This masculine Romanticism is the traditional understanding of the literary movement – based on the writings and thoughts of the five canonical writers Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Mellor suggests that “feminine Romanticism” occurs to recover the erased and neglected voices of women writers within this movement. To understand these differences of masculine and feminine Romanticism, one has to realize that both terms serve as an ideological gender construction, not in terms of the author’s sex. To analyse female romantic literature also means to consider the division of ‘private’ and ‘public’ sphere occurring in the eighteenth century, a phenomenon that should be discussed in the following chapter.

This paper aims to show how women writers could make a career in the male-dominated time of Romanticism. In order to show the problems they experienced within a patriarchal society, I will explore the subordination of women by a construction of femininity which did not grant them the status of rational thinking subjects. For this purpose I have chosen the example of Mary Wollstonecraft, the revolutionary founder of feminism. Wollstonecraft was not only a writer herself, but she was also the wife of the well-known political philosopher, William Godwin, and she gave birth to Mary Godwin Shelley, the famous author of *Frankenstein*. As a member of the literary circle around Joseph Johnson, she was surrounded by famous contemporary writers and was involved in literary relationships within her own family circle.

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