

## Writing the Roaming Female Self: Identity and Romantic Selfhood in Mary Wollstonecraft's Letters Written during a Short Stay in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway (1796)

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**Abstract :** The eighteenth century in Britain saw a great burst of activity in writing (letters, journals, newspapers, essays); often these modes of writing had a public-spirited bent in-step with the prevailing intellectual atmosphere. Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the leading intellectuals of that period who utilized letter writing to convey her thoughts on the exciting political developments of the late eighteenth century. Fusing together her anxieties and concerns about humanity in general and herself in particular, Wollstonecraft's views of the world around her are filtered through the lens of her subjectivity. Thus, Wollstonecraft's letters covered a wide range of topics on both the personal and political level (for the two are often entwined in Wollstonecraft's characteristic style of analysis) such as sentiment, gender, nature, peasantry, the class system, the legal system, political duties and rights of both rulers and subjects, death, immortality, religion, family and education. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the manner in which Wollstonecraft utilizes letter-writing to constitute and develop Romantic selfhood, understand the world around her and illustrate her ideas on the political and social happenings in Europe. The primary text analyzed will be Mary Wollstonecraft's Letters Written During a Short Stay in Sweden, Denmark and Norway (1796) and the analysis of this text will be supplemented by researching 18th-century British letter writing culture, with a special emphasis on the epistolary habits of women. Within this larger framework, this paper intends to examine the manner in which this hybrid of travel and epistolary writing aided Mary Wollstonecraft's expression on Romantic selfhood and how it was complicated by ideas of gender. This paper reveals Wollstonecraft's text to be wrought with anxiety about the world around her and within her; thus, the personal-public nature of the epistolary format particularly suits her characteristic point of view that looks within and without. That is to say, Wollstonecraft's anxieties about gender and self, are as much about the women she sees in the world around her as much as they are about her young daughter and herself. Wollstonecraft constantly explores and examines this anxiety within the different but interconnected realms of politics, economics, history and society. In fact, it is her complex technique of entwining these aforementioned concerns with a closer look at interpersonal relationships among men and women (she often mentions specific anecdotes and instances) that make Wollstonecraft's Letters so engaging and insightful. Thus, Wollstonecraft's Letters is an exemplar of British Romantic writing due to the manner in which it explores the bond between the individual and society. Mary Wollstonecraft's nuances this exploration by incorporating her concerns about women and the playing out of gender in society. Thus, Wollstonecraft's Letters is an invaluable contribution to the field of British Romanticism, particularly as it offers crucial insight on female Romantic writing that can broaden and enrich the current academic understanding of the field.

**Keywords :** British romanticism, letters, feminism, travel writing

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