

sit in the front of the bus while black patrons sat in the back. If black riders were seated toward the front because all seats behind them were filled, they could be required to give up their seats and stand if white passengers boarded the bus. This pattern of segregation was enforced by the bus drivers, who could call on the city police to make arrests to uphold the segregation laws.

During 1953, three arrests had been made of Negroes who violated the segregation ban, but E. D. Nixon (1899-1987), a recognized leader of the black

community, had not chosen to make an issue of any of these because he believed that the people involved would not do well in court or because of personal problems in their backgrounds. Nixon wanted a plaintiff who would be beyond reproach.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks (1913-2005) boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus for her usual ride home. As the bus filled with riders, she was ordered by the driver to give up her seat and move to the rear. Not for the first time, she refused to obey an order based on upholding segregation. On prior occa-



Rosa Parks being fingerprinted on February 22, 1956, by Lieutenant D.H. Lackey after being arrested during the Montgomery bus boycott. Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

THE CULTURE OF THE HOME FOR WOMEN

Rise of Courtly Love

At the end of the eleventh century, courtly love appeared suddenly and unexpectedly in the south of France, a region historically and culturally distinct from the north. The sentiments that it fostered began a new concept of romantic love that remains embedded in the modern psyche.

Date: c. 1100

Locale: Provence (now in France)

KEY FIGURES

Eleanor of Aquitaine

Chrétien de Troyes

SUMMARY OF EVENT

The first known record of the sentiment now known as courtly love is in the form of eleven poems left by Guillaume IX, count of Poitiers and duke of Aquitaine, who died in 1127. Many important troubadour love poems were written in the “classic” period of the art, from about 1140 to about 1250. Guiraut Riquier of Narbonne, who died in 1294, saw himself appropriately as the last of the troubadours. In his verse, he deplored the passing of his noble public’s interest in his art. He wrote, “In noble courts no vocation is now less appreciated than the fine art of poetry; for men prefer to see and hear frivolities.”

Courtly love was, however, far from dead. Though abandoned in the Midi, the theme was carried throughout Europe by courtly singers to become a

powerful influence on the Western mind. According to scholar C. S. Lewis, the troubadours effected a change which left no corner of our ethics, our imagination, or our daily life untouched, and they erected impassable barriers between us and the classical past or the Oriental present. Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature.

It is as an aristocratic, aesthetic ideal, a strictly literary phenomenon divorced from visible, observable forms of life, that courtly love first spread throughout Europe. A lofty sentiment, it was refined still further in Italy, to which it was borne by the Provençal troubadours. Guido Cavalcanti and the Florentine writers of the “sweet new style,” the *dolce stil nuovo*, underwent its influence and themselves modified it. Dante swelled the chorus of voices raised in praise of love, celebrating the beauty and wisdom of Beatrice in his sonnets and his *canzoni*, *La vita nuova* (c. 1292; *Vita Nuova*, 1861; better known as *The New Life*), and finally in *La divina commedia* (c. 1320; *The Divine Comedy*, 1802).

Eleanor, daughter of the last duke of Aquitaine, helped to popularize courtly love in the north when she married first Louis VII, king of France, and later Henry Plantagenet, who became King Henry II of England. Her daughters, in turn, made the courts of Blois and Reims important centers for courtly poetry. The notion of total service in the name of socially illicit love was assimilated into the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and given its most complete ex-

At the conference, the delegates adopted the Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and Their Contribution to Development and Peace, and by the close of the conference, they also adopted the lengthy World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year. In addition, the delegates adopted a supplemental document consisting of thirty-four resolutions.

The Declaration of Mexico offered several conclusions and goals. In it, the delegates stated that the World Conference of the International Women's Year affirmed its faith in the objectives of the International Women's Year, which were equality, development, and peace; proclaimed its commitment to the achievement of such objectives; and strongly urged governments, the entire United Nations system, regional and international intergovernmental organizations, and the international community as a whole to dedicate themselves to the creation of a just society where women, men, and children can live in dignity, freedom, justice, and prosperity.

The World Plan of Action offered guidelines for the achievement of the stated goals. The plan suggested that in elaborating national strategies and development plans in which women should participate, measures should be adopted to ensure that any targets and priorities should fully take into account women's interests and needs. Strategies and development plans should also make provisions to improve the situation of women and increase their contribution to the development process. There should be equitable representation of women at all levels of policy making and decision making. Appropriate national machinery and procedures should be established if they do not already exist. National plans and strategies for the implementation of the plan of action should be sensitive to the needs and problems of different categories of women and of women of different age groups. Governments should pay special attention to improving the situation of women in areas

where they have been most disadvantaged, especially concentrating on women in rural and urban areas.

The resolutions targeted a wide range of concerns, illustrated by some selected examples. Resolution 32 called on South Africa to end its illegal occupation of Namibia. It also urged support for peoples of Southern Africa by measures including support for national liberation movements and for victims of apartheid and racial discrimination. Resolution 13 recommended social security and family security plans specifically for women, including the elderly and the disabled. Resolution 26 recommended the establishment under auspices of the United Nations of an international research and training institute for the promotion of women's rights.

Cultural, national, religious, and ideological differences among the delegates surfaced during many of the debates, but these differences did not prevent the majority of delegates from agreeing on the declaration, the world plan, or the resolutions. The delegates hoped the documents would guide governments and citizens in their treatment of women worldwide. Goals for women in health care, education, employment, political participation, and many other sectors were identified. The World Plan of Action and the resolutions provided international standards by which to assess the status of women in the United Nations Decade for Women, which was adopted by the United Nations following the Mexico meeting.

The World Conference of the International Women's Year held in Mexico City in 1975 resulted from the convergence of three movements. First, the Commission on the Status of Women, a commission of the U.N. Economic and Social Council, had celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1972. Prior to 1972, the United Nations had begun adopting theme years and holding conferences on global areas of concern such as population, food, human rights, and the human environment. The members of the commission adopted a proposal stating that the United Nations should spend a year analyzing the status of

avoid vanity, dressed in uniforms. She breaks new ground by strongly advocating sex education: "truth may always be told to children," she writes, "if it be told gravely, but it is the immodesty of affected modesty, that does all the mischief." The author believed that true freedom could only occur with gender equality.

Wollstonecraft's early life experiences provide an effective backdrop for her famous treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which includes in particular the concurring themes of women's lack of education, resultant poverty, and "unhealthy minds." Her own personal history provided her with firsthand observations of the impediments and indignities suffered by women. This sense of injustice, coupled with an indomitable spirit and gifted writing ability, furnished the fuel for this first classic on equal rights.

Born in Spitalfields, London, the second of seven children born to a middle-class weaver and his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft received little education. The family lived in a variety of places, falling down the social ladder with each new move. As the oldest girl, Wollstonecraft tried to protect her mother from the physical abuse of a drunken tyrannical father. After her mother's death and her sister Eliza Bishop's marriage, she lived with her friend, Fanny Blood, and helped to support the faltering Blood family through needlecraft. Wollstonecraft found her sister Eliza mentally irrational after the birth of a daughter, and suspecting the nervous breakdown to be the result of ill treatment by the husband, removed her sister to safety.

Women at this time had no political rights: Wives were prohibited from leaving their husbands and mothers from gaining custody of their children. Eliza's child died before age one while her mother, in hiding, awaited a legal separation. Penniless, Wollstonecraft, Bishop, and Blood started a school at a time when women's occupations were limited to nurses, servants, and minor shop-clerk positions. The school, however, was short-lived because of Blood's

marriage and move to Portugal, her subsequent death after childbirth, and Wollstonecraft's absence from the school during these crises. Wollstonecraft resided briefly at Eton, where she observed one of the oldest private schools, before taking a job as a governess to an aristocratic family in Ireland. After ten months there, she returned to London in 1788, determined to make a living through her pen.

After the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft traveled to France, where she became deeply involved in the French political cause and lived through the French Revolution, reported later in her *A Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794). While in Paris, Wollstonecraft became passionately involved with the American businessman Gilbert Imlay, with whom she had a daughter, Fanny, in 1794. Despondent over Imlay's decision to end their affair, Wollstonecraft twice attempted suicide in 1795. Concerned about Wollstonecraft's health, Imlay encouraged her to travel to Scandinavia as his business representative; her journals and letters to him were later published as *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). In 1797, she married William Godwin. She died soon after giving birth to their daughter Mary.

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was not the first book advocating equal rights. Wollstonecraft herself was inspired by, and indeed, very favorably reviewed, Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790). Wollstonecraft's passionate work, however, originating in firsthand knowledge, cried out to a readership deeply aware of social injustice. It was both acclaimed and denigrated. On one hand, popular poets Robert Southey and William Blake wrote poems praising her: "To Mary Wollstonecraft" and "Mary," respectively. On the other hand, she was castigated for her masculine attitude and roughness and, in particular, for her views that women should receive sex education.

SUMMARY OF EVENT

Although Sylvia Plath's reputation as a poet was growing in the late 1950s, she had a hard time publishing her first book-length collection. After some delay, *The Colossus* was first published by Methuen Press in England in the fall of 1960. Plath herself was living in England, where she had gone to live with her British husband after her college graduation and her first literary success.

In England, Plath's startlingly revealing, but tightly crafted, poems were received favorably but quietly. Reviewers for *The Manchester Guardian*, *Time and Tide*, *Punch*, and other journals praised her craft and precision while in some cases criticizing the elements of gloom and negativity that dominated the collection. Plath's earlier losses, depressions, and flirtations with death are present in the poems, but they are concealed and controlled by patterns that range from sonnets to syllable-counting forms. British readers and critics basically liked her approach.

Plath, however, would not feel that she had fully arrived as a poet until she had an American edition of her book and an American audience receive it. Her personal life was in turmoil during the two years between her English and American publications, and her poetic style was changing, veering more toward acutely painful revelation and away from the forms that controlled the earlier emotional outpourings and the masks that disguised them. Her husband, poet Ted Hughes, was achieving rapid success, but her own life seemed to be on hold. Her baby took up most of her time, and she suffered a miscarriage, underwent an appendectomy, and then conceived the couple's second child. Financial pressures were an ever-present worry. Nevertheless, while she attempted to keep her life together and while she continued to write poems in her developing new style, Plath was also trying to find an American outlet for those earlier poems that she knew to be successful.

Finally, on the recommendation of Stanley Kunitz, the book was accepted by Alfred A. Knopf for publica-

tion in 1962. (Kunitz had suggested that one or two of the poems in the British edition be deleted because they were too obviously like those of Theodore Roethke, a poet Plath much admired for his ability to weld craft to personal revelation in poems that were both moving and intelligent.) Plath returned home from the hospital after her appendectomy in March, 1961, to the good news that Knopf had bought her book. The editors finally chose to delete a number of poems, finding the collection too long, but Plath was so ecstatic about receiving a contract from a major American publisher that she did not care.

The Colossus was published on May 14, 1962. At that time, Plath's newer poems were appearing in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Poetry*, and elsewhere; her professional accomplishments were at a peak. By then, however, her personal life was deteriorating drastically. Her husband was unfaithful, and the couple separated, leaving Plath to rear two children alone and without money. Partly because of this financial need and partly because she had sold her autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963), to Heinemann in England, Plath began to entertain the possibility of supporting herself through commercial fiction. Knopf, though, rejected *The Bell Jar*—Plath's own editor criticized its point of view as unbelievable—and she received rejections of other work as well. Her career appeared to have gone into a sudden downswing to match that of her personal life. First reviews of the American version of *The Colossus* were warm but sparse. Her frustration and desperation grew as she dealt with the difficulties of planning a divorce, taking care of the children, and trying to find time to write.

Plath's letters, poems, and notes from the period of May, 1962, until her death nine months later show that the optimism and high spirits engendered by the publication of *The Colossus* faded very quickly in the face of personal disaster and apparent professional rejection. She seemed unable to decide on a course of action and follow it. She needed to find a place to