FROM ANALOGY:
The Appeal to Animals and Slaves in Wollstonecraft’s Defence of Women’s Rights

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When Mary Wollstonecraft decried women's trivial values, feeble education, low aspirations, and subordinate role in marriage, she worried these factors made animals of women. Or perhaps women were being made childish (impious, comic, and useless) and if not that, perhaps (in her imaginary) Islamic.

"And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry, they act as such children may be expected to act: they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures. Surely these weak beings are only fit for the seraglio!" (Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792)

Wollstonecraft appealed to multiple arguments and rhetorical devices in defense of women's claims. In the light of the complex circulation of argument, analogy and metaphor intertwined with Wollstonecraft's politics and morality of perfectibility, the paper considers the role of a feminist imaginary of slavery, animality and the brutish. Interrogating Wollstonecraft's literal appeal to biological facts, and her sense of their qualified mutability, I look at the interaction of such references with a more flexible metaphorical level of reference to animals, metaphorical animality, brutishness and different races.

Christina research seminar is chaired by prof. Tuija Pulkkinen. It pays tribute to Gender Studies, and the history of Queen Christina’s name connected to this field of studies at the University of Helsinki. The seminar is open to everybody with an interest in research questions related to gender studies.