Herschel, Caroline Lucretia (1750-1848) Encyclopedia Article

Herschel, Caroline Lucretia (1750-1848)

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Herschel, Caroline Lucretia (1750-1848) Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Herschel, Caroline Lucretia (1750-1848).....3

Herschel, Caroline Lucretia (1750-1848)

German astronomer

Caroline Herschel was the first female astronomer to discover a comet. Herschel grew up in a home where her father encouraged learning, much to the displeasure of her mother, who believed girls should focus their education solely on skills necessary to manage a well-appointed traditional home. After her father's death in 1767, Herschel's formal education in mathematics and science ceased, as she ceded to the wishes of her mother. Finally, in 1772, Herschel left Germany to pursue a musical career in Bath, England, living with her brother, the astronomer William Herschel.

In England, Herschel trained to become a professional singer, but she also began to study mathematics under her brother's tutelage. William Herschel soon involved her in his hobby, **telescope** building. She helped him grind and polish mirrors for his telescopes, while copying catalogs and tables for his reference. After he discovered the planet Uranus in 1781, William Herschel was awarded a yearly stipend by King George III that allowed him and his sister to pursue **astronomy** full time.

As she became more proficient with her own telescope, Herschel made a name for herself in this largely male domain. In 1783, she discovered three new nebulas and from 1786–1797, she discovered eight **comets**. George III awarded her a salary as well, a rare gesture at the time. She also took on the formidable task of making a thorough index of the star catalog created by John Flamsteed (1646–1719), the first Royal Astronomer. This job called for perseverance, accuracy, and attention to detail, all qualities in which Herschel excelled.

Following her brother's death, Herschel returned to Hanover, Germany, but remained in close contact with her brother's son, astronomer John Herschel (1792–1871), for whom she compiled a new catalog of nebulae. Herschel and Scottish scientific writer Mary Somerville (1780–1872) became the first women to be awarded an honorary membership in the Royal Society. In spite of her informal training, Herschel became a well-known figure in her own time and an important figure in the history of astronomy.