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MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759–1797)

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Working for the *Analytical Review* in 1787, Wollstonecraft gauged the prospect of her economic independence, her own capabilities, and the relationship authors establish with their readerships: “I am then going to be the first of a new genus – I tremble at the attempt” (*Letters* 164). Two hundred years later, her “tremble” is also a telling sign for the shifts of her critical reception.

Wollstonecraft is largely known for her 1792 treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written during the turbulences of the French Revolution. During her lifetime, she was respected for her educational tracts, travelogue, critical reviews, and perhaps most famously, her polemical treatises, even if her work did not meet with unanimous approval. Her public dispute with Edmund Burke, to whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* Wollstonecraft responded with the 1790 *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, earned her the opprobrium of conservative circles. Incited by Wollstonecraft’s unsympathetic portrait of the French queen in her 1794 *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, Horace Walpole gave her the nickname “a hyena in petticoats” (31. 397). It has been argued that Walpole’s antagonism targeted the “female republican writer” rather than the “vindicator of the rights of woman” (Janes 353). In any case, *The Rights of Woman* with its audacious call for the abolishment of sexual character remains her most enduring legacy.

Biography

Wollstonecraft was born 27 April 1759 to Elizabeth Dixon and Edward John Wollstonecraft, second of seven children. She grew up in Spitalfields, in eastern London, home to crowds of immigrants, working poor, successful capitalists like her grandfather, and on a less successful scale, her father, a handkerchief weaver. A daughter overshadowed by a darling son, Wollstonecraft became aware of the wrongs that women endured and committed out of oppression. Taught irregularly at day schools before becoming an autodidact, she saw in education a calling and a path to independence. She set up a school for girls and was employed as a governess in Ireland, before returning to London to work at Joseph Johnson’s radical *Analytical Review*. She lived by the pen, writing the 1787 *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, of the 1788 *Mary, A Fiction*, and the 1788 *Original Stories*. Her interest in cultural and political fortunes thrived as she became part of a community of dissenters. From 1792–95 she lived in Paris and observed the French Revolution, about which she published *Historical and Moral View of the*

Origin and Progress of the French Revolution in 1794. Returning to London as a single parent of an illegitimate child, she struggled to get a foothold as a professional woman writer. She attempted suicide twice. Her tour in Northern Europe resulted in arguably her most cherished work, the 1796 *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. Mary Wollstonecraft loved ardently: she loved her youth friend Fanny Blood; the Swiss painter Henry Fuseli; the American businessman and writer Gilbert Imlay; her child, Fanny Imlay; and the radical novelist and philosopher William Godwin, her husband and father to a second daughter, Mary. She survived Mary's birth only a few days, leaving behind a grief-stricken Godwin and two daughters. Godwin published the unfinished manuscript of her *Wrongs of Woman, Or Maria* posthumously in 1798.

Biographical Resources

William Godwin's influential and maligned 1798 *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was the first biography of Wollstonecraft. Godwin steadfastly believed that life and work were inseparable, and as a result, he was certain that his shocking frankness about his wife's love affairs, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and suicide attempts would increase the reader's esteem for her exceptional life and work (Kelly 38). He was wrong. Those who had not appreciated Wollstonecraft's calls for equal rights found in her unconventional lifestyle a way to discredit both her life and work. Indeed, Godwin's revelations damaged her reputation so much that no other biographer attempted to reevaluate Wollstonecraft's work for another 80 years. C. Kegan Paul took up the task in 1879, followed by Elizabeth Robins Pennell in 1885 and Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough in 1896.

Shorter biographical accounts place Wollstonecraft next to key (male) thinkers of the Enlightenment, as does J. M. Mackinnon Robertson in 1907, or in the company of her husband, as does H el ene Simon in 1909. After 1910, Wollstonecraft garnered roughly one study per decade, including those by G. Stirling Taylor in 1911, Madeline Linford in 1924, and H. R. James in 1932. Also in 1932, Marthe S. Storr contextualized Wollstonecraft's thought among her feminist contemporaries and predecessors.

In 1951 Ralph Martin Wardle produced the first thoroughly researched biography of Wollstonecraft. Wardle's work became the point of reference for subsequent biographers such as Margaret George in 1970, Edna Nixon in 1971, Eleanor Flexner in 1972, and Claire Tomalin in 1974, who aimed to expand Wollstonecraft's humanist and feminist portrait. Of these, Tomalin's biography remains the most engaging. In 1976, Janet Todd produced an annotated bibliography of Wollstonecraft's work.

Todd's 2000 biography, drawn primarily from Wollstonecraft's letters, revealed a strong-willed and conflicted philosopher. Caroline Franklin in 2004 focused on Wollstonecraft's literary activities (*Mary*). Lyndall Gordon in 2005 aimed to delineate the novelty of Wollstonecraft's appearance on the professional literary scene. Charlotte Gordon in 2015 interweaved Wollstonecraft's biography with her daughter, Mary Shelley's. Sylvana Tomaselli in 2021 focused on the politico-philosophical views of Wollstonecraft, organizing them holistically by themes in Wollstonecraft's writings that have sparked scholarly debate.

Biographical notices appear in the *DLB* (Alistair Duckworth; Claire Grogan; Fiona A. Montgomery; and Gary Kelly), *DWW* (Janet Todd), *EBW* (Anne-Marie Ray, updated by Jacqueline Dello Russo), *Eckroth, FC, ODNB* (Barbara Taylor), and Shattock. Godwin published in 1798 her unfinished *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* in his edition of her *Posthumous Works*.

Works

Wollstonecraft inaugurated her writing career with 1787's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. A conduct book, *Thoughts* heralded Wollstonecraft's enduring concern with female education and her belief that honing women's mental powers would liberate them from the slavery of objectification. In 1788, she translated Jacques Necker's *On the Importance of Religious Opinions*. She refined her profile as an educator in her 1788 *Mary, A Fiction* and *Original Stories from Real Life*, and her 1789 *The Female Reader* and translation of Cambon's *Young Grandison*.

Mary, A Fiction – Wollstonecraft's first novel – fleshed out the ideas she espoused in *Thoughts* but in a genre congenial to empathetic reading. There, the central character Mary (self-taught like Wollstonecraft herself) represents the making of the thinking and feeling self. *Original Stories from Real Life* – a children's book illustrated with ten designs by William Blake – sought to generate reform in the child, who Wollstonecraft imagined as the embryo of an enlightened future society. *Original Stories* hoped to persuade the child to reform through reasoned conversation rather than through the threat of punishment (Zaw 96). The work was translated in 1798 into French and Dutch. Wollstonecraft's 1789 *Female Reader* – a recitation anthology for girls – may be the first “elocution manual” (Franklin 50). Wollstonecraft also worked as a reviewer for the *Analytical Review* and as a translator (into English) and adaptor. In her 1790–1 translations and adaptations, Wollstonecraft contributed additional instruction where needed; for example, in her translation of Christian Salzmann's 1782 *Moralisches Elementarbuch*, she supplemented Salzmann's stories against fear and social bigotry with a tale aimed at curing racial prejudice (*Collected* 2. 29).

In 1790, her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* responded to Edmund Burke's reactionary but hugely popular *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Her tract, addressed as a letter to the well-known politician, philosopher, and orator, was written in a fury of inspiration and was published only 28 days after his *Reflections*. Wollstonecraft positioned her argument at the other end of the ideological spectrum, endorsing the Revolution, its duty to enforce the rights of man, and a new system of government free of hereditary privilege, primogeniture laws, and class divisions.

In 1792, Wollstonecraft sharpened this political vision with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, calling for a revolution in female manners. Though a planned second volume was never written, *Rights of Woman* brought together observations, lessons, and conclusions drawn from Wollstonecraft's expanding expertise and wakeful exposure to social realities.

Written during Wollstonecraft's first-hand witness of the Reign of Terror, her rather neglected 1794 *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe* *Historical and Moral View* reflected on the causes that necessitated the revolution. The work responded to Burke's *Reflections* at a point where many saw his prophecies of Europe's descent into savagery fulfilled by Robespierrean zeal. Wollstonecraft explained the horrific turn of events by pointing to the lack of democratic education: a despotic political system that had kept “learning confined to a small number of the citizens of a state” must be held accountable for the many victims it claimed before and during the Revolution (288).

The French Revolution, the fate of British and European civilization and its women, loomed over her 1796 *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* and the posthumously published 1798 *Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman, A Fragment*. *Letters* had considerable success with foreign editions in Delaware, Hamburg, and Altona within a year. *Maria*, too, sparked international interest, with translations in French, Swedish, and German between 1798 and 1806. *Maria* critiqued the institution of marriage, paradoxically at a time when Wollstonecraft's pregnancy compelled her and the marriage-hostile Godwin to wed (Franklin 177). Vulnerable women at the mercy of dissolute husbands and fickle lovers, daring female solidarity, and the importance of mothering the future generation of women are framed by the

Gothic atmosphere reminiscent of Godwin's 1794 Gothic novel of social injustice *Things as They Are*.

Modern Editions

In 1989, Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler produced a seven-volume scholarly edition of Wollstonecraft's works.

Prior to this, Wollstonecraft garnered reading editions, such as Gary Kelly's 1976 *Mary and Maria*, and Richard Holmes's 1987 *Short Residence*. In 2013, Ingrid Horrocks edited *A Short Residence*. Other reading editions place Wollstonecraft's works in contemporary contexts such as Todd in 1991 and 1993; D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf in 1997; Anne Mellor and Noelle Chao in 2007; and Michelle Faubert in 2012 combined *Mary* with *The Wrongs of Woman*.

Moira Ferguson introduced the 1980 facsimile reproduction of Wollstonecraft's 1789 *Female Reader*. In 2014, Cambridge University Press produced a facsimile of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.

Archival Holdings

Much of Wollstonecraft's correspondence is no longer extant, but 345 letters remain, held at 10 institutions. The greatest loss seems to be Wollstonecraft's letters to Henry Fuseli who, unlike Gilbert Imlay, refused to return them. John Knowles scavenged those letters for his 1831 three-volume posthumous biography of Fuseli, after which the collection was sold to Wollstonecraft's grandson, Sir Percy Florence Shelley, whose wife presumably destroyed them. In 1979, Ralph Wardle collected Wollstonecraft's correspondence. Janet Todd superseded Wardle in 2003, re-editing and re-dating Wollstonecraft's known letters and included newly discovered ones. Todd also gleaned content and letters from Knowles' Fuseli biography.

Reception

During her lifetime, Wollstonecraft's educational tracts, translations, and travelogues were generally well received, although her more controversial political works were loved or hated depending on the reader's political leanings. Wollstonecraft's legacy expanded across continental Europe and North America. That reception shifted over time according to each period's political leanings.

Eighteenth Century: Contemporary

Thoughts on the Education of Daughters garnered praise from the 1787 *Critical Review* for its judicious views (despite some "desultory" and "erroneous instances"); and the 1788 *Monthly Review* deemed the work both correct and agreeable (287; 258). *Original Stories* received commendation from the 1788 *Analytical Review* for its thoughtful choice of subjects and excellent illustrating narratives, while the *Monthly* found it the work of a woman imparting excellent principles to the young (271–2).

Mary, A Fiction in 1788 received attention from the *Critical, General Magazine*, and *Town & Country*, all of whom thought the author was probably male. The *Critical* asserted *Mary* was an uncommon tale written in the style of Rousseau with a far greater interest in the workings of the mind than in plot; *Town & Country* found the novel's energy and language "would do credit to a man" (74; 426). The *General* wrote that *Mary* displayed feelings that dignified human nature,

showing the inferiority of so-called “refined education” (424). The 1790 *Monthly* declared it to be well written, although its female protagonist was guided by feeling rather than reason (352). The *English Review* considered the novel to be superior to similar tales but could not condone its “dismal philosophy” (465).

The 1789 *Female Reader* received commendation from the *Analytical* for being more versatile than similar works and evincing diligence and taste (225).

Her 1790 *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* found agreement in the *Analytical* and *New Annual Register*, although the latter noted its digressive style (237). The *Critical* contested its views of Burke’s *Rights of Men*, whereas the 1791 *Gentleman’s Magazine* mocked the work’s belief in human perfectibility and the fact that a woman advocated for the rights of *men*. In 1791, *The Monthly* bemoaned the style and found confusing some of its ideas, but deemed the author clearly a friend to human virtue and liberty (95–7).

Her *Elements of Morality* was mentioned favorably in the 1791 *Analytical* and 1792 *Monthly*, and the 1793 *English Review* praised it as following worthily in John Newbery’s footsteps (72).

Her 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* drew the attention of at least six reviewers. The *General Magazine* and the *Analytical* praised its support of women’s ungendered education. The *Monthly* showcased its contrast between fashionable and rational women, lauding Wollstonecraft’s mental powers, but not endorsing the idea of women occupying government positions (198–209). The *Scots Magazine* agreed with Wollstonecraft’s juxtaposition of fashionable and rational female education, and conceded that the condition of women needed improvement (290). The *New Annual Register* found it stylistically elegant, meriting a wide readership, but puzzled over the odd mixture of exaggerated and sensible ideas (298). The *Critical*, in contrast, found fault with Wollstonecraft’s indelicacy in both views and diction (141).

The 1794 *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* garnered mostly praise. The *Analytical* considered it a just and captivating reflection on the revolutionary events. The 1795 *Monthly* praised Wollstonecraft’s “vigorous mind, inured to reflection, and free from vulgar prejudice,” while noting that the work didn’t portray the chain of events, but analyzed the causes for them (394). The *British Critic* claimed that Wollstonecraft lifted whole passages of *Historical and Moral View* from the *New Annual Register*, finding neither style nor ideas worth recommending (29). The 1796 *Critical* emphasized the work’s analytical nature, but disparaged its tedious style and digressions (395).

The 1796 *Letters Written During a Short Residence* received at least seven reviews. The *Monthly Mirror* objected to Wollstonecraft commenting on the political institutions of countries she could not have known sufficiently. The *Analytical* granted *Letters* an exceptional status among travel narratives for its suggestive sketches of nature, manners, and philosophical ruminations (229). The *British Critic* applauded Wollstonecraft’s stylistic improvements but faulted her “erroneous opinions,” whereas the *Critical* thought that the book’s “lively interest” compensated for its disorderly structure (610, 210). The *Monthly Magazine* valued the travelogue’s coupling of emotional intensity with keen observation, but drew attention to some “inaccuracy of expression” (279). The *New Annual Register*, though disliking the travelogue’s occasional melancholy, thought its style to be light, spirited, with “bold and highly picturesque” depictions of Scandinavian landscapes (249).

Contemporary comments on Wollstonecraft appear in eight *RWWR* volumes.

Eighteenth Century: Posthumous

Although Wollstonecraft’s most radical ideas met with resistance, her early obituaries testified to the respect and compassion she had earned as a reformer. Even reviewers who disagreed with

her philosophy stressed her intellectual acumen, as did the 1797 *Gentleman's Magazine* (894). Her friend Mary Hays wrote glowingly of her talents in the *Monthly Magazine*, reading the hardships of Wollstonecraft's life as results of social ills (232–3).

William Godwin's 1798 publication of *Memoirs* effected a dramatic change in attitudes toward Wollstonecraft. Almost immediately, reviewers used the opportunity to disparage her work, particularly her two *Vindications* and her perceived lack of religion. The *British Critic* noted a divergence between her religious opinions and Godwin's description of them. The *Monthly Visitor* refuted Godwin's claim about Wollstonecraft's atheism with textual proof from her *Thoughts* and *Letters*. The *Gentleman's Magazine* deemed Godwin's revelation of deeply personal events indelicate and ill-judged (186–7). The *Monthly Review* acknowledged Godwin's benign intentions but found the result indefensible; and objected to Godwin's coloring of his wife's opinions with his own (323). Godwin's *Memoirs*, wrote the *Magasin Encyclopédique*, highlighted the discrepancy between Wollstonecraft's theory and her lived life. The 1798 *Scots Magazine* severely censored Wollstonecraft's life as "the catastrophe of a female philosopher of the new order" to be "read with disgust by every female who has pretensions to delicacy" (301). The *Scientific or Freemason's Magazine* argued the *Memoirs'* irrelevance, adding that Wollstonecraft's character, a cautionary example of suffering and immorality, was best captured in her works (403–4). While no criticism was spared for Godwin's outré volume, Wollstonecraft emerged as a woman of lively imagination, "a candid and just soul" (343). The *Aberdeen Magazine* wrote perhaps the most positive review, endorsing both Godwin's *Memoirs* and emphasizing Wollstonecraft's faithfulness in her relationships with the men she loved.

Following the publication of *Memoirs*, Richard Polwhele in his 1798 poem "The Unsex'd Females" divided the leading women writers into two camps: the unsexed females (led by Wollstonecraft) and the proper ladies. The hostile *Anti-Jacobin Review*, eager to couple lax morals with the radical cause to condemn both, indexed Wollstonecraft under "P" for prostitute and, in 1800, found that in comparison to Wollstonecraft, Defoe's prostitute protagonist Moll Flanders was a paragon of purity (Johnson, "Introduction" 1; Myers 93).

Maria or the Wrongs of Woman was published at the same time as the *Memoirs* and was often reviewed in tandem with it. The *British Critic* called the work an affront to female virtue, and the *Critical Review*, though praising its style, could not commend its ideas. The novel's social critique left the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and the *Monthly Review* unconvinced, with both ascribing the protagonist Maria's hardships to her own poor choices and moral failings. The *Monthly Mirror* acknowledged that its unfinished, "mutilated state" hindered definitive criticism, but noted the accomplished portrayal of the heroine (154).

Nineteenth Century: Posthumous

Wollstonecraft was widely considered an unnatural woman, a view that proved stubborn, through the end of the century in Britain. Yet other women writers defended her. Eliza Lynn Linton in 1854 called Wollstonecraft "one of the bravest and one of the most complete" feminists. George Eliot in 1855 regretted the slight notice of Wollstonecraft's legacy, finding the prevailing "vague prejudice" against *Rights of Woman* deterred readers from its "eminently serious, severely moral" value (3). Eliot credited Wollstonecraft with the genesis of the American women's movement: "We find Mary Wollstonecraft offering a suggestion which the women of the United States have already begun to carry out" (5).

Renewed European interest in Wollstonecraft between 1822–68, first in France and then in Germany, was connected to "the rise of French socialism and its cross-fertilization with Owenite socialism" (Botting, "Wollstonecraft" 519). This trend continued with the rise of organized feminism following the work of John Stuart Mill.

Twentieth Century

An indicator of Wollstonecraft's changing literary reputation across the twentieth century is evident from comparing the 1900 and 2002 DLB entries. The 1900 *DLB* gave her a single line – “Wollstonecraft, Mary (1759–97) miscellaneous writer” – but in 2002, she received a full-bodied, 12-page entry as “the most famous feminist of the eighteenth century” (318; 368). In the early twentieth century as women struggled for the right to vote, Wollstonecraft received attention for her life more than her writing. Yet Wollstonecraft's works increasingly gained attention since the right to vote would not end women's subordination.

Mobilized as a feminist groundwork, Wollstonecraft's legacy prospered as the 1970s saw the creation of the discipline of women's studies. Even so, Western feminism is no monolithic movement, and some, relying on ahistoricized readings of Wollstonecraft's work, found her legacy a bitter seed. Sheila Rowbotham in 1974, for example, took Wollstonecraft to task for lacking a clear agenda of reform (44). And some twentieth-century feminists deplored the complicity of her thought with patriarchy. In 1976, Gary Kelly appealed for a shift away from Wollstonecraft's life towards “the almost constant growth of her mind and imagination” (38). Nina Auerbach in 1978 observed that Wollstonecraft's relationship to the female body was one of disgust: the animalistic terms Wollstonecraft used to describe the woman's body, its needs, and activities, betrayed a rejection of the body and of female sexual desire (14–15). Heeding Kelly's call, Mitzi Myers in 1979 argued that Wollstonecraft gained her “stylistic knowledgeability” of the travel narrative through writing for the *Analytical Review* (182). This experience informed *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, where “a very personal version of association” holds together a “hybrid” yet “unified” “literary experiment” (166).

In 1983, Cora Kaplan followed Auerbach in considering the issue of sexual desire, particularly Wollstonecraft's condemnation in the *Rights of Woman* of sexual pleasure as “narcotic inducements to a life of lubricious slavery” (18). For Kaplan, this signaled a “reactionary and regressive” turn against feeling. In 1984, Mary Poovey combined literary interpretation with historical analysis, attributing Wollstonecraft's marred radicalness to her failure to reject middle-class ideology, and considering her sexual denial “a defense against what she feared: desire doomed to repeated frustration,” a failure that kept her captive “of the category she most vehemently rejected” (81, 74). Jane Rendall in 1984 drew attention to Wollstonecraft's affiliation with theories of civilization elaborated by Scottish Enlightenment historiography, with which Wollstonecraft grew familiar during her work as a reviewer. Wollstonecraft recognized the pivotal position gender held in these theories. She borrowed and adapted ideas which she found useful to her projection of the rational woman.

For Sylvana Tomaselli in 1992, Wollstonecraft believed women were prisoners of a code of civilized appearances and that Rousseau's insistence on sexual difference only affected male tyranny and female bondage (129). Also in 1992, Gary Kelly examined Wollstonecraft's literary and rhetorical style, finding that Wollstonecraft intended both a revolution of manners and the development of new linguistic ways to voice her ideas as a woman in a predominantly male arena.

Joyce Zonana in 1993 examined Wollstonecraft's philosophical limitations, focusing on her derogatory views of “Mahometanism” (or Oriental despotism), and locating in *Rights of Woman* a feminist orientalism advocating human – particularly women's – rights.

Contrary to Tomaselli and Kelly, Susan Gubar in 1994 asserted that Wollstonecraft evinced feminist misogyny because she treated the feminine principle as “a virus” that threatened “to contaminate and destroy men and their culture” (456).

In 1995, Ferguson traced Wollstonecraft's transformation of the trope of the female slave from its embodiment in the subjugated daughter or wife to become a premise for human

rights in *Rights of Men* (126). Wollstonecraft had gleaned from Catherine Macaulay's 1790 *Letters on Education*, the idea that the abolition of sexual difference formed the foundation for the equal rights of all. Yet, for Ferguson, Wollstonecraft's rhetoric still reiterated the racism found in some strands of eighteenth-century abolitionist discourse (Ferguson 136). Also in 1995 Claudia Johnson read *Mary* and *Maria* as embracing proto-lesbian desire; while *Mary* relocated desire from the home to the relationship between the heroine and her friend Ann, *Maria* constructed Wollstonecraft's ideal of a "mutually respecting, and rationally loving couple between Maria and Jemima with Maria's infant girl at the center" (69).

In 1999, Barbara Taylor, supporting Johnson, responded to Gubar's depiction of Wollstonecraft as a distrustworthy feminist. Taylor proposed a revisionist method that combined

traditional modes of historical inquiry – the intensive scrutiny of sources and context – with an interpretative theory capable of tackling the deep agenda of feminism, by which [she meant] the unconscious fantasies as well as the conscious intentions fueling feminist ideals.

(*"Mysogyny"* 499)

In 2000, Susan Eilenberg and Todd hotly debated Wollstonecraft's antagonism between body and mind ("Letter").

Twenty-First Century

Revisiting earlier ideas, the new century has produced historicized, nuanced readings of at least two fundamental issues – Wollstonecraft's treatment of the body as a site of discipline, vulnerability, and desire, and her work's place in a dichotomized mind-body feminist history – leading to such research intersections as that of feminist philosophy and environmentalism.

In support of Todd's "balanced" approach, Barbara Taylor in 2001 dismantled Eilenberg as being trapped in the "Silly Woman or Heroine" paradigm and criticized her work as a new episode in Wollstonecraft's history of bouncing-on-and-off-the-pedestal. In 2003, Barbara Taylor also examined the legacy of Godwin's *Memoirs*, which transformed Wollstonecraft into an atheist and positioned the Enlightenment as an irreligious tradition. Taylor insisted that Wollstonecraft thought and wrote within a tradition of feminism, for which the Christian doctrine meant liberation from arbitrary subordination. This arbitrariness, argued Anna Neill in 2003, was Wollstonecraft's target when she analyzed the contradictions of commercial society – the supposed highest stage of civilization – particularly the contradiction woven into the distribution of desire (419). Wollstonecraft's project pursued the liberation of libidinated bodies, "marketed sexually" and held captive in commercial society. This state of captivity endured by the woman's body is the remnant of an earlier barbaric state of commercial society, which, for Wollstonecraft, highlighted "the incompleteness of civil Enlightenment" that imprinted on women "an underdeveloped sense of [the kind of] ownership" that Locke had claimed for men (420).

Wollstonecraft explored such a sense of ownership, according to Caroline Franklin in 2004, in *Mary, A Fiction*, a "novel of sensibility turned against marriage to hymn the alienated female artist" (29). Eileen Hunt Botting and Christine Carey in 2004 confirmed that Wollstonecraft's work inspired key American feminists to compose their own treatises and base women's rights and abolitionist activism on her ideas, although, as R. M. Janes points out, Wollstonecraft's politics of no sexual distinction remained unpopular through the end of the nineteenth century (360).

In 2007, Daniel O’Neill revealed the moral blind spots that allowed Wollstonecraft to praise the American Revolution as a repudiation of “[old-world] barbarism,” while disregarding the Atlantic slave-trade and slave-labor sustaining New-World plantations (242). Yet he also connected the Wollstonecraft-Burke debate to Scottish philosophical views on savagery, progress, and civilization; these environmentalist perspectives underpinned Wollstonecraft’s concept of gender inequality as socially constructed rather than natural (10, 118–19). Wollstonecraft’s insight, Natalie Fuehrer Taylor argued, resolved Aristotelian political theory’s warning about the dangers of female exclusion from the city (*polis*): providing mixed education for both sexes at home and at school to cultivate affection (private) and reason (public) would develop citizenship’s two important facets (170–1).

Susan Laird in 2008 showed that Wollstonecraft’s inspiring (though unacknowledged and radical) belief in mixed education would confound gender inequality by promoting children’s mental and physical strength, while affording females access to subjects which the traditional monarchist model – based on sexual essentialism – did not (148, 145–6).

In 2009, Bernadette Andrea, Karen O’Brien, and Kirsten Wilcox examined gender in *The Rights of Woman*. Andrea argued that Wollstonecraft’s address of Eastern female slavery – deploying the commonplace trope of female orientalism – supplemented the growing opposition to the Western slave trade. O’Brien proposed that this reform entailed an evolutionary rather than essentialist conception of gender so that “this history was bound up with the evolution of natural rights and justice” (79). And Wilcox observed that the women the book vindicated differed in definition from the “Woman” in the title: they represented an experienced and envisioned instantiation of femininity, respectively, women as they are and women as they could be in a reformed society. Thus, “Woman” stands as an enigma but also as a “compelling field of possibility” (Wilcox 448).

According to Lisa Plummer Crafton in 2011, Wollstonecraft seized on “the inherently subversive potential of theatricality” to enlarge the repertoire of self-representations for women (4).

Three in 2014 examined Wollstonecraft’s innovations on male self-representations. For Dustin Friedman, *Maria* envisioned the “political importance of non-heterosexual identities within an egalitarian society,” and the renewal that resulted from the channeling of “sensual energies outside of the matrix of reproductive heterosexuality” (203, 214). In this sense, argued Katharina Rennhak, Wollstonecraft’s effort to call into being “a new subject position for her male readers which no historically existent man occupies as yet” took the form of “Althusserian ‘hailing’ or ‘interpellation’” (184–5). Refuting the dichotomy set up by Polwhele’s “Unsex’d Females,” Anne Mellor found that 1790s feminism revealed its capacity to accommodate different feminist approaches: Wollstonecraft’s, radical or liberal; Hannah Moore’s, conservative; and Jane Austin and the Dissenters Priscilla Wakefield and Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s, moderate (9).

For Amy Mallori-Kani in 2015, the question of “a healthy state” drove Wollstonecraft’s feminism (22). Unlike Burke, for whom protection from the external contagion of French principles ensured the health of the British nation, Wollstonecraft’s “medico-politics” saw the herds of infection within rather than outside the body of the British state (22).

Botting in 2016 considered Wollstonecraft’s work alongside John Stuart Mill’s, as both accorded women rights because they are human beings. Botting addressed Wollstonecraft and Mill’s cultural biases, their racism, and colonial Eurocentrism, adding that, their thoughts have undergone critical revisions in the women’s movements of Russia, India, Africa, and South America.

In 2017, Kathryn Temple read Wollstonecraft’s style in the history of emotion and affect, finding agitation a “brilliant device” that merges political and emotional agitation “to create a new form of legal subjectivity,” as most clearly seen in *Maria* (374).

In 2019, Damian Walford Davies enlisted Wollstonecraft as a subject of the method of counterfactual philosophy, featuring an alternative life-story as mother and writer, and drawing attention to the role of obstetrics in her works. In 2019, Enit K. Steiner read Wollstonecraft's restless mood, also addressed by Temple, as an element of a planetary ecosophy, whereby planetary is defined by Gayatri Spivak "as an inclusive, and non-homogenizing approach to alterity" ("Mood" 27). Because of humanity's drive towards the improvement of life conditions, Wollstonecraft views the earth as a womb of exhaustible resources. Thus, she both endorsed the progress of mankind and questioned it for the sake of environmental exhaustion and resulting human suffering, a cornerstone of her cosmopolitanism and a critique from within the cosmopolitan tradition (Steiner, "Mary" 4).

In 2021, Tomaselli and Rowan Boyson both examined Wollstonecraft's philosophy. Boyson, referring to climatological theory and slavery, expanded the medico-political and feminist ecosophical readings, recovering a philosophical "right to air" that "reclaims women's lack of social weight, power, and visibility" (173, 182).

Avenues for Further Research

Wollstonecraft's work and reputation from the 1820s through the Victorian editions of *Rights of Women*, along with her subtle presence in nineteenth-century thought, deserve further attention. Her translations and adaptations also warrant study, both in their own right and in dialogue with visual culture and the work of Fuseli, Blake, and Imlay. Another avenue could involve more sustained consideration of Wollstonecraft as a reviewer and anthologizer, including her opinions on education, sexuality, gender, and Romantic aesthetics. Following Botting's 2013 lead, more can be done to position the afterlife of Wollstonecraft's writing within European and worldwide dissemination. Finally, an ongoing investigation of Wollstonecraft's legacy and her vision's global adaptability promises fruitful reinterpretations.

Other Signatures

Mr. Cresswick, The Author of

List of Texts

All published by Joseph Johnson unless otherwise indicated.

Educational and Political Tracts

Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life. 1787. [small 8vo. 2s. sewed.]

A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honorable Edmund Burke Occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France. 1790. [8vo. 2s. 6d.]

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects. 1792. [8vo. 6s. boards.]

An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe. 1794. [8vo. 7s. boards.]

Fiction

Mary, a Fiction. 1788. [12mo. 3s. sewed.]

Maria; Or the Wrongs of Woman. vols 1–2 of Godwin's *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* 1798. 4 vols. [8vo. 14s. boards.]

Nonfiction

Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, etc. 1788. [8vo. 2s. 6d. sewed.]

Travel Writing

Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. 1796. [8vo. 4s. boards.]

Translations

Of the Importance of Religious Opinions. By Jacques Necker, translated from French. W. Gordon and J. Dickson, 1788. [8vo. 5s. boards.]

Young Grandison. A series of Letters from Young Persons to Their Friends. Translated from the Dutch of Madame of Cambon: with alterations and improvements by Mary Wollstonecraft. 1790. [12mo. 6s. sewed.]

Elements of Morality, for the Use of Children. By Christian Gotthilf Salzmann, translated from German. 1791. [12mo. 10s. 6d. sewed.]

Editions of the Works of Others

The Female Reader; or Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse; Selected from the best Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads; for the Improvement of Young Women. 1789. [12mo. 3s. 6d. bound.]

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