Called to Civil Existence

DIALOGUE
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Edited by

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Called to Civil Existence

Mary Wollstonecraft's
A Vindication of The Rights of Woman

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Abbreviations

All essays cite the following edition:
Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, eds. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao. New York: Longman Cultural Editions, 2007.

Hereafter referred to as *Rights of Woman*.

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Introduction

Enit Karafili Steiner

This collection of essays is, we believe, appropriately titled *Called to Civil Existence*, a phrase originating with Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) in her response to the political emergencies of the French Revolution.[1] Indeed, all the essays included here make the overarching claim that Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* continues to be relevant and instructive because of its breadth, radicalness and argumentative momentum that addressed women at a turning point of human history. A continuation of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* was the first feminist treatise to emerge within a broader context of a liberationist human rights theory (Fraser 863).

It appears that women are summoned emphatically in times of crisis. The financial crash of 2008 was one of those historical moments that once again brought to consciousness the acute relevance of Wollstonecraft's vision for the women of the twenty-first century. For scholars, readers and admirers of Wollstonecraft's reformatory agenda, it came as no surprise that the financial crisis ended up hovering above the question of gender. Voices became loud and have not been silenced yet: would a catastrophe of such global magnitude have occurred if women had been in charge or at least empowered to take leading roles in higher numbers? After all, the crash involved serious (and criminal) mismanagements of resources and properties, which legitimated questioning the very structures that tolerated, if not condoned, such abusive practices. What this distrust immediately bore on was the relation between distribution of power and gender identities in Western societies: would women make better managers; would they have embodied a different work ethic than their male peers? The feminization of management, which implies an emulation of female domestic supervision within the work sphere, offered itself as the remedy against risk-taking, masculine speculations.

As appealing as this trust in female ethics was, journalist Tracy Corrigan warned women that such "financial flattery" could lead to the gender trap of an "essential nature that makes women intrinsically suited to the downturn" (par. 9).[2] Corrigan recognized that it was a return to essentialism that fed the flattering illusion of female moral responsibility explained by its supporters with women's aversion to risk-taking. This debate represented a call upon female duties and opportunities. Like in 1792, women were prompted to ponder the social and biological assumptions attached to their roles. In light of Linda Colley's seminal study on the separate-sphere ideology in Britain, one recognizes that, during the financial crisis at the dawn of the twenty-first century, Britons were recycling assumptions that had germinated in the eighteenth-century: to say that women are more risk-averse than men is to reiterate in eighteenth-century vocabulary that women were more (fiscally) prudent; and, in Colley's felicitous phrase, "to be thought of as moral exemplars is a lot better than being dismissed as merely inferior and irrelevant" (280).

As Carole Pateman explicates, women then and now face the same conundrum that she has christened the "Wollstonecraft dilemma": should women capitalize on sexual or moral difference and thus base their claims for citizenship on the civil and legal acknowledgement of talents, capacities and needs that generate from those distinctive experiences that differentiate them from men? Or should they strive for gender-neutral social justice and equal rights? (Pateman 196-7). Not only does the tension between these positions remain unresolved, but they both come with losses:

> Women cannot be full citizens in the present meaning of the term; at best, citizenship can be extended to women only as lesser men. At the same time, within the patriarchal welfare state, to demand proper social recognition and support for women's responsibilities is to condemn women to less than full citizenship and to continued incorporation into public life as 'women', that is, as members of another sphere who cannot, therefore, earn the respect of fellow (male) citizens. (Pateman 197)

Wollstonecraft renders the dilemma palpable with her use of what Elizabeth Wingrove calls "gender-bending" linguistic and rhetorical strategies (347).[3] The singular "Woman" (and not "women") of her

title invokes a generic category that appears the subject of and reason for the reforms she suggests. However, throughout her tract, she uncovers a history of naturalized subordination attached to the sign "Woman" that compels her to argue that femininity (or masculinity) does not result from nature, but from cultural and social practices. Anticipating a postmodern theory of gender performativity, Wollstonecraft does not merely maintain that men and women are influenced by education and sexualization, but that feminine and masculine identities are created through social practices such as child-raising, education, social and legal participation. In a pre-nihilistic gesture, she sees fit to do away with the notion of innate sexual characters. Paradoxically, this requires the denouncement of the category woman, the very category whose lot her writing seeks to improve. Eva Badowska astutely observes that, in *Rights of Woman*, "manifest intention to speak on behalf of women as concrete political subjects" mingles with an understanding of the female body as figural (321). For this reason, I believe Kirsten Wilcox is right to note that the women vindicated in the book differ in definition from the "Woman" in the title (448). These two categories correspond to two instantiations of femininity: women as they are and women as they could be in a reformed society. Thus, "Woman" stands as an enigma, but also a "compelling field of possibility" (448).

An investigation of the reviews that discussed *Rights of Woman* upon its publication in 1792 reveals that Wollstonecraft's tract met with general approval. There was one exception to the favorable comments: the *Critical Review*, the only review that attacked Wollstonecraft, could not forgive her pronouncement on the absence of "a sexual character" (Janes 354). Although the immediate reception of the work suggests that only the *Critical Review* seemed to have sensed the radicalness of this principle, as Anne K. Mellor's essay in this volume shows, this was the core idea that sparked the debate of women's right and shaped at least three kinds of feminism at the time. What the reviewer takes for granted is the fact that, while claiming that there was no "sexual character," Wollstonecraft herself addressed the readers as a woman.

The unease of this paradox deserves some attention even more because Wollstonecraft's posture as a female writer is unique to *Rights of Woman*. Only two years earlier, she had published the first edition of *Rights of Men* (1790) anonymously.[4] Nowhere in this text does Wollstonecraft refer to her sexual identity. Here, as Wendy

Gunther-Canada writes, Wollstonecraft matter-of-factly appropriates a masculine idiom in order to disrupt it from within (69). However, with women's rights, Wollstonecraft treads on the uncertain ground of the signifier "Woman" (Wilcox 449). Her discomfort with the determinist impact of language and representation is not very different from ours: how can we demonstrate the absence of an ontological sexual character in a society steeped in and organized around sexual distinctions?

One of her strategies to keep "Woman" as a "field of possibility" is by pointing up gender confusions of which she herself appears to be one possible embodiment. Long before Judith Butler, Wollstonecraft calls to collective memory instances of gender transgression. She writes:

> What does history disclose but marks of inferiority, and how few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man? So few that the exceptions remind me of an ingenious conjecture respecting Newton – that he was probably a being of superior order accidentally caged in a human body. Following the same train of thinking, I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentrical directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were male spirits, confined by mistake in female frames. (*Right of Woman* 53-54)

If Wollstonecraft writes to convince her readers that there exists no such thing as sexual character, then there is a contradiction in her vision of male spirits imprisoned in "female frames." However, this "train of thinking" might very well describe the activity of writing *Rights of Woman* as a deviation from the "orbit" prescribed to females. Passages like this have often been read as Wollstonecraft's repudiation of femininity and celebration of masculine reason as the central republican virtue.[5] Several of the essays in this volume complicate this conclusion by emphasizing the embodiment of reason and showing the centrality of the body educated through reading practices (Desjardins) or a redefinition of sensibility (Fuehrer Taylor; DeLucia) and the religious sublime (Swift).

In *Rights of Woman*, women are even encouraged to exit the prescribed orbit in order to expand their experience, understanding and agency. Wollstonecraft writes: "one reason why men have

superior judgment, and more fortitude than women, is undoubtedly this, that they give a freer scope to the grand passions, and by more frequently going astray enlarge their minds" (138). Thus, Wollstonecraft deploys the "mistake" of deviation from the female frame (that also stands for the alienation of the bodies of "extraordinary women") to create a space from which to confound and challenge the idea of a sexual character that is anatomically determined (Wolfson 352). She confesses her "wild wish […] to see the distinction of sex confounded in society" (*Rights of Woman* 79). Part of this confusion is her own posturing as the woman writer of a text whose language has no sex. What, indeed, seems to be sexeless is a subjectivity "oriented toward inner states" that inhabits Wollstonecraft's *oeuvre* (Wingrove 349). Discussing *Rights of Woman* in relation to Wollstonecraft's letters, fiction and journalistic activity, the essays in this volume hint towards a sexless capacity to "reason deeply when we think forcibly" that, whether in men or women, is "the fruit of inner struggle" (Wollstonecraft, *Works* 6: 235; Wingrove 349).

The oscillations of the "Woman" of her title between the literal and the figural are performances of this subjectivity. The body of the women Wollstonecraft writes about must be replete with differences (intellectual, class and moral differences) as well as emerge as an identifiable category in need of civil empowerment. As Elizabeth Raisanen's essay in this volume suggests, Wollstonecraft registers not only the differences that distinguish one woman from another, but also the differences and tensions cohabiting even in the works of one woman writer. Wollstonecraft's engagement with the writing of Anna Laetitia Barbauld serves as a case in point. Raisanen's essay is an important addition to a recent line of scholarship that emphasizes Wollstonecraft's awareness of the full range of her readership, an aspect that elevates her from the mass of writers of the eighteenth-century "literature of advice, advocacy, defense, and improvement" (Wilcox 454).[6] Wollstonecraft's inclusive sense of readership is poised by her cautious advice that her observations are not to be applied indiscriminately to all women (Engster 583). The intellectual, class and moral differences incorporated within a program under the sign "Woman" represent a tightrope walk between a present society where anatomy translates into gender distinctions and a utopian order where sex is confounded to the point that it ceases to be a structuring element of social, economic and political significance. This balancing

act recognizes that "political investments of the sign 'essence' are predicated on the subjects' complex positioning in a particular social field […] and that the appraisal of this investment depends not on any interior values intrinsic on the sign itself but rather on the shifting and determinative discursive relations which produce it" (Fuss 20). Thus, Wollstonecraft's term "Woman" can be understood as an unstable but necessary political tool whose "ontological insufficiency" is acknowledged (Butler 529). Consequently, this strategy is radically different from a normative feminist politics that "celebrates or emancipates an essence" which does not exist (529).

This may not solve Wollstonecraft's dilemma, but it drives home the necessity that Wollstonecraft (and feminist thought) face, namely, to occupy simultaneously two conflicting positions, a necessity that requires theoretical flexibility and adaptability. *Rights of Woman* is thus a fitting example of the centrality and productivity of paradox in feminist thought, which in Nancy Cott's words, "is nothing, if it is not paradoxical." Cott's relaxed acceptance of this uncomfortable position is worth quoting:

> [Feminism] aims for individual freedom by mobilizing sex solidarity. It acknowledges diversity among women while positing that women recognize their unity. It requires gender consciousness for its basis, yet calls for the elimination of prescribed roles. (49)

In the opening essay of this volume, Anne K. Mellor suggests that this conundrum is present in the reactions of Wollstonecraft's contemporaries to *Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft's tract divided public opinion and, in particular, women's view of their own sex in unprecedented ways. Despite occasional oscillations, Wollstonecraft recognized what retrospectively has been termed as "equality" or "liberal" feminism to be the position that benefitted women's civic and personal empowerment the most. She founded her gender-neutral stance on the conviction that men and women possess the "same souls, the same mental capacities, and thus the same rights" (Mellor 2). Wollstonecraft's claims went against a long tradition that either saw women as deceptive and impure or morally superior but intellectually inferior. Therefore, as Mellor observes, Wollstonecraft's most radical proposition was to claim that there was no such thing as "sexual character." Mellor demonstrates that the radicalness of this claim can

be only understood through the variety of the responses that it sparked. Opposition came in the shape of conservative feminism, whose most vocal proponent was Hannah More: conservative because it kept with women's innate greater delicacy of feeling and moral sensibility, but feminist because it emphasized their public roles as mothers of the nation.

Between Wollstonecraft and More, there were moderate responses that sought to promote both women's education and increased participation in public life, but could not espouse Wollstonecraft's core principle of the absence of a "sexual character." In particular, the women writers of this camp have at times been misunderstood and misinterpreted. In this regard, Elisabeth Raisanen's essay takes Anna Laetitia Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman" as an example, offering a revisionary reading of the poem. In her meticulous analysis, Raisanen argues that Barbauld's practice-oriented reform does not cloud her view of equality feminism. Barbauld, on the one hand, pragmatically recognizes the "futility of women's attempts to achieve influence and gender parity through a feminism based on women's differences from men," while at the same time, she deems separate rights based on difference to be the solution to gender equality (Raisanen 42). In other words, Barbauld's ironic poem ventriloquizes "Wollstonecraft's dilemma."

Both Anne K. Mellor and Gina Luria Walker agree that Mary Hays, more than any other writer, endorsed Wollstonecraft's radical claim of the absence of "sexual character." This conviction earned Hays and Wollstonecraft Richard Polwhele's phrase "the unsex'd females." Walker is one of the first scholars to investigate the relationship between the two women and the interplay that shaped their public image as "unsex'd females."[7] Her essay demonstrates that, for these two women, a "revolution in female manners" far from being a theoretical concept, was a daily exercise that permeated and connected their writings. Within this context, Hays's little-discussed "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" (1800) must be recognized as emerging "organically from their shared lives," an homage corrective to Godwin's "loving but ill-judged" *Memoirs* of his wife (Walker 50; Mellor 16). Influenced by Walker's insights, Fiore Sireci further argues for the necessary and rewarding work that remains to be done on the intersection of "the historical Wollstonecraft and the authorial personae" of her works (71). In particular, he identifies this intersection in Wollstonecraft's professional activity as a literary

reviewer of the radical *Analytical Review*, which taught her to see authorial self-representation as a device of political rhetoric.

Upon accepting the position offered to her by Joseph Johnson, the publisher of the *Analytical Review*, Wollstonecraft wrote to her sister that continuous collaboration with Johnson would make her "the first of a new genus," a prospect at which she first "trembled." (Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 163-5). Indeed, Natalie Fuehrer Taylor suggests that Wollstonecraft's awareness of novelty exceeded the question of female authorship. Her engagement with the leading thinkers of the French and British Enlightenment in *Rights of Woman* testifies to her self-fashioning as the first female philosopher. Taylor examines the reasons for Wollstonecraft's discontent with John Locke's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political philosophies and concludes that their view of human beings as solitary and compelled to form political attachments by their drive for self-preservation was incompatible with Wollstonecraft's belief in humankind's innate benevolence and sociability. Therefore, the Scottish Enlightenment seemed to offer a better alternative since it explained the rise of civil society and its resulting political structures not by the selfish passion of self-preservation but by the natural sociability of human beings. However, as Taylor argues, the legacy of the Scottish philosophers was ambivalent for a female philosopher and, thus, Wollstonecraft ultimately rejected it.

The influence of the Scottish philosophers on Wollstonecraft's Enlightenment ideas has been carefully researched in book-length studies by both Karen O'Brien and Daniel O'Neill. In continuation of these discussions and Taylor's intervention, JoEllen DeLucia reevaluates the role of Scottish literati such as John Gregory and Adam Smith on Wollstonecraft's feminist formation. Gregory, DeLucia argues, is of particular importance due to Wollstonecraft's frequent citations from his *Father's Legacy to his Daughters* and his connections to both the Bluestocking thinkers and Scottish Enlightenment. By tracing the triangular travel of ideas between the Bluestocking movement, Scottish Enlightenment and Wollstonecraft, DeLucia comments on the contact zones as well as different trajectories of Bluestocking and equality feminism.

The essays by Simon Swift and Molly Desjardins approach Wollstonecraft's social philosophy from a different angle. Both essays build on the assumption that much of Wollstonecraft's social philosophy and belief in progress has to do with her conceptualization

of reason. Indeed, *Rights of Woman*'s seemingly unbending adherence to reason has prompted critics like Mary Poovey and Cora Kaplan to argue that Wollstonecraft sought to discipline women's minds at the expense of their sexual bodies and desires. However, as Natalie Fuehrer Taylor explains, our understanding of *Rights of Woman* changes profoundly, once we realize that Wollstonecraft's reason is very different from that of the social contract theory, i.e., of Locke and Rousseau. In his essay, Swift expands the gulf that divides Wollstonecraft from Rousseau by resuscitating Wollstonecraft's use of "character," a notion that has recently reappeared in cultural theory. Swift locates the thrust of Wollstonecraft's religious "character" in its attempts to delineate continuities between the Supreme Being and reason. It is out of these continuities that Wollstonecraft manages to incorporate radical evil in a providential order that pursues human perfectibility.

Molly Desjardins, too, shows that Wollstonecraft's reason is the product of a physio-religious view of the sublime rather than a disembodied ability. Desjardins's argument brings to light Wollstonecraft's careful assessment of eighteenth-century materialist philosophy and the religious sublime. According to Desjardins, this combination allows Wollstonecraft to prove not only the sacredness of the body, but also the fact that the life of the body affects moral life. Human improvement, in particular, the improvement of women whose bodies and minds have been trained to impersonate a "sexual character," depends on the effacement and rewriting of mental and physiological associations that result from their confinement. Desjardins insists that, by drawing on contemporaneous chemists such as Joseph Priestly and the religious sublime of John Dennis, Wollstonecraft described the neural rewriting of associations in terms of both physiological process and religious exercise. Moreover, Wollstonecraft singled out literature as the principal medium of this physio-sublime process.

If we agree with Desjardins that Wollstonecraft believed that sexual character can be erased and sexual associations rewritten, then femininity and masculinity must lose their essential innate content. Wilcox's analysis of the interpellative use of "Woman" persuasively maintains that Wollstonecraft's primary motivation for composing *Rights of Woman* is "to write into being a new kind of female subject" (449). Extending this argument to the male readership, Katharina Rennhak argues that, although Wollstonecraft's abdication of sexual

character primarily targeted women's emancipation, *Rights of Woman* distrusted any social reform that did not envision the rewriting of masculinity. This accounts for its "shift in the position of the addressee from one clearly definable historical male individual, Talleyrand, to a rather indefinite group of men" (184). Rennhak explains that no historical men occupy this position in Wollstonecraft's time: rather than addressing a male audience that is prior to the text, Wollstonecraft's new masculine associations work as Althusserian interpellations. They anticipate male readers who will adopt the rewritten position of desirable masculinity that *Rights of Woman* carves out for them. Not only does this strategy of gender interpellation support the claim also made by Desjardins that the reading of literature functions performatively, but it also allows Rennhak to offer a revisionary analysis of Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*. By making Darnford the first reader of Maria's memoir, Wollstonecraft, despite influential interpretations of the novel to the contrary, continues the very reformation of masculinity she had started in *Rights of Woman*.

Dustin Friedman's essay reinforces the connections between *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman*, by suggesting that, in these works, Wollstonecraft offers three purposes for masculine energies: heterosexual family, direct political action and aesthetic reproduction. Friedman elaborates on the construction of the third purpose, claiming that Wollstonecraft recognizes the importance of non-reproductive sexualities within an egalitarian society, that is, the channeling of "sensual energies outside of the matrix of reproductive heterosexuality" (214). In *Wrongs of Woman*, alternative masculine identity emerges in the figure of the benevolent uncle who stands for a didactically productive type of masculinity that abjures marriage and heterosexual reproduction. Thus, the figure of the unmarried uncle emerges in late-eighteenth-century literature and reappears throughout the nineteenth-century, opening up the possibility of being a "parent of the mind" rather than the "sexually reproductive parent of the body" (224). Friedman's essay complements Thomas Ford's recent study, which, focusing on the role of motherhood, arrives at a similar conclusion: "social reproduction [which] is tied to sexual reproduction offers a comparatively limited potential for social transformation" (199).

Mary Wollstonecraft was not the first female author to lament the lot of women and plead for its improvement, but, in Eliza Lynn

Linton's words in 1854, she was "one of the bravest and one of the most complete" (424). What lends trailblazing qualities to her *Rights of Woman* is the unprecedented breadth and rhetoric of reforms that pertain to educational malpractices, gender conditioning, wrongs done to women and by women, class disadvantages, and corrective propositions for these social evils. Gary Kelly has brilliantly observes in his *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* that her style in *Rights of Woman* was that of a new genus not because she relied on an original genius, but because she could interweave competing voices and dictions in utterly new ways.

Wollstonecraft learned from the Scottish philosophers that women's subordination and its resulting injustice lies in the fact that gender works as a rank, that is, women by virtue of their sex are adopted into the rank of the men that own them. As I have argued elsewhere, what this adoption amounts to is that a distinction of gender automatically inscribes a distinction of rank (Steiner 8). It is through this practice that women's civil and social existence is swallowed by the civil and social existence of the men that father or marry them. The Scottish philosophers had observed this practice but left it unquestioned, while Wollstonecraft denounced it in the very opening paragraph of *Rights of Woman* as the key factor responsible for the partial progress of civilization (*Rights of Woman* 23).

For her, "an incompleteness of civil enlightenment," reflected in the very "infantilization of women," reduces women's sense of self-ownership, a necessary pre-requisite of republican citizenship (Neill 420). Wollstonecraft links the sense of self-ownership with the ability to attend to social duties, writing that "the private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed when not connected with the general good" (220). Placing women's history at the heart of what Norbert Elias calls "the civilizing process," Wollstonecraft simultaneously argues that the general good can be only imperfectly achieved when severed from the private duties of its members. The extension of classical republican arguments about inequality into the private sphere makes "egalitarian family relations a central focus of her theory of the virtuous republic" (Engster 582). This is also a central distinction that contradicts her reputation as a classical liberal feminist.

Despite the indisputable success of the feminist movement in the twentieth century, Western societies continue to face the challenges of a partial progress and of a civil order that can only incompletely

accommodate the rights and duties of differently gendered citizens. In addition, the proliferation of a feminist idiom, it has been argued, had its cost: feminism, by seeking to permeate all patriarchal structures and by having managed to do so to a comparably great degree, has now lost its edge and radicalism Yet, if feminism is about the improvement of women's real lives, then it must be about agency, whereby agency in Wollstonecraft's vocabulary is "a history of 'frequently going astray'" (Ford 195). In face of unresolved dilemmas and the need to identify and increase instances of female agency within prescribed or deviant "orbits," feminism's alleged death must have arrived, in Jonathan Culler's words, only for those, who "would be happy to have it die" (178).

As long as newborns continue to be assigned a descriptive sexual label that classify them as male or female within the social order, and as long as in their more or less emancipated positions, women (and their children) remain the group most vulnerable to political, economic and social vicissitudes,[8] it is to be assumed that feminist desire for improvement will coexist with what since Christine de Pizan's *The City of Ladies* (1405) has been called *la querelle des femmes*. This not seamless but healthy coexistence promises to cultivate the plurality necessary within a movement, which united under the category of "woman" risks slipping into totalitarianism.[9] For those who lament the loss of feminism's radical edge, the present essays demonstrate that Mary Wollstonecraft's questions, doubts and compromises inform ours. If, in 1792, the challenge was a reconceptualization of gendered citizenship within the nation-state, twenty-first century globalization with its harrowing consequences on the living conditions of Third World women calls for improvement within the frame of world citizenship.

NOTES

[1] "Females, in fact, denied all political privileges, and not allowed, as married women, excepting in criminal cases, a *civil existence*, have their attention naturally drawn from the interest of the whole community to that of the minute parts, though the

private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed when not connected with the general good" (220, emphasis added). All references are by page numbers to Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, eds. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao. New York: Longman Cultural Editions, 2007. (220). Hereafter referred to as *Rights of Woman*.

[2] See also Sullivan and Jordan pars. 1-10; Ferrary pars. 1-12.

[3] For a recent thorough rhetorical analysis that focuses on "how the production, consumption, and circulation of prose can comprise a politics" see Wingrove's "Getting Intimate with Wollstonecraft" (347).

[4] A second edition followed soon the first one with Wollstonecraft's name on the title page.

[5] See Furniss, who, for example, writes: "The necessity of Wollstonecraft's celebration of the 'manly' is clear in that it forms a paradigm by which radicalism can differentiate its political structures and theories of language from those corrupted and corrupting forms which it identifies as characteristic of the *ancien regime*" (122). Furniss identifies Edmund Burke as the spokesperson of the "corrupted and corrupting forms" of monarchical rule. For a reading of the similarities between Burke and Wollstonecraft see Engster's "Wollstonecraft's Nurturing Liberalism."

[6] Furniss, for example, finds Wollstonecraft's program less revolutionary, because Wollstonecraft devotes attention and attributes potential for reform only to the middle-classes (140). For a convincing counter-argument see Wilcox's "Vindicating Paradoxes," which reminds us that our notion of the middle-class does not correspond to Wollstonecraft's.

[7] See also Waters 415-434.

[8] For an elaboration on present-day infringement of women's human rights see Fraser's "Becoming Human."

[9] Donna Haraway warned of this tendency in her response to Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* writing that "The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one" (197). However, a common language does not imply wholesale agreement but mutual and dialogic understanding, in itself perhaps a utopian but not forcibly totalitarian aspiration.

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The Debate on The Rights of Woman: Wollstonecraft's Influence on the Women Writers of Her Day

Anne K. Mellor

In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft laid out the tenets of her liberal or radical feminism: her argument for the equality or sameness of males and females, and the consequences of adopting this position for social and political practices. After examining the ways in which Wollstonecraft's "Revolution in female manners" was embraced by the feminist novelist Mary Hays, I turn to the opposite end of the feminist spectrum, to the writings of the conservative feminist Hannah More. While More insisted on the innate difference between males and females, she endorsed Wollstonecraft's arguments for the rational education of women. She further argued that women had a greater capacity for sensibility, compassion and virtue and thus might be morally superior to men. Between these two camps of feminist thought, more moderate feminists such as Priscilla Wakefield, Mary Robinson, Anna Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen supported the arguments for the education of women, their professional employment and their capacity to govern both the domestic household and the nation at large. I end with the writings of Lucy Aikin, Barbauld's niece, who promoted in her *Epistles on Women* (1810) an even more radical feminism than did Wollstonecraft.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft threw down the gauntlet, not only to her male readers, but equally important, to the other women writers of her day, as she called for a "REVOLUTION in female manners." And these women took up Wollstonecraft's challenge. Whether they endorsed her views or contested them, very few women writers of the time ignored them. In this essay, I shall explore the range of responses by women writers to Wollstonecraft's ideas, or, more generally, to the feminist programs she and others espoused, taking the works of Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Lucy Aikin and Jane Austen as representative. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* proposed a model of what we would now call "equality" or "liberal"

feminism. Grounded on the affirmation of universal human rights endorsed by such Enlightenment thinkers as Voltaire, Rousseau and John Locke, Wollstonecraft argued that females are in all the most important aspects the same as males, possessing the same souls, the same mental capacities, and thus the same human rights. While the first edition of the *Rights of Woman* attributed a physical superiority to the male, acknowledging his ability to overpower the female of the species with his greater brute strength:

> [...] the female, in general is inferior to the male. The male pursues, the female yields – this is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman. This physical superiority cannot be denied – and it is a noble prerogative! (*Rights of Woman* 24, n. 4)[1]

by the end of the second edition, Wollstonecraft has effectively denied the significance and even the necessary existence of male physical superiority. She first reduces the physical difference between males and females, rewriting the above passage thus:

> In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature, and does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of women. *A degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied - and it is a noble prerogative!* (*Rights of Woman* 24, emphasis added)

She then insists that women's virtues – "strength of mind, perseverance and fortitude" – are the "same in kind" if not yet in "degree" (55). She next adamantly denies "the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty" (*Rights of Woman* 71), in effect erasing any essentialist difference between males and females. She concludes by suggesting that if females were allowed the same exercise as males, then they would arrive at a "perfection of body" that might well erase any "natural superiority" of the male body (111). On this philosophical assumption of sexual equality and even potential sameness, Wollstonecraft mounted her campaign for the reform of female education, arguing that girls should be educated in the same subjects and by the same methods as boys. She further advocated a radical revision of British law to enable a new, egalitarian marriage in which women would share equally in the management and possession

of all household resources. She demanded that women be paid – and paid equally – for their labor, that they gain the civil and legal right to possess and distribute property, that they be admitted to all the most prestigious professions. And she argued that women (together with all disenfranchised men) should be given the vote: "I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government" (*Rights of Woman* 179).[2]

The revolution in female manners demanded by Wollstonecraft would, she insisted, dramatically change both genders. It would produce women who were sincerely modest, chaste, virtuous, and Christian, women who acted with reason and prudence and generosity. It would produce men who – rather than being trained to become petty household tyrants or slave-masters over their female dependents or "house-slaves" (*Rights of Woman* 122) – would treat women with respect and act towards all with benevolence, justice and sound reason. It would eliminate the "want of chastity in men," a depravity of appetite that in Wollstonecraft's view was responsible for the social production of unmanly "equivocal beings" (*Rights of Woman* 170). And it would produce egalitarian marriages based – no longer on mere sexual desire – but on compatibility, mutual affection and respect. As she concluded,

> we shall not see women affectionate till more equality be established in society, till ranks are confounded and women freed, neither shall we see that dignified domestic happiness, the simple grandeur of which cannot be relished by ignorant or vitiated minds; nor will the important task of education ever be properly begun till the person of a woman is no longer preferred to her mind. (*Rights of Woman* 228)

During the heady days of the early 1790s, as the workers and middle classes overthrew the *ancien régime* in France, Wollstonecraft's call for a revolution in female manners was immediately taken up by several of her female compatriots. Her close friend Mary Hays, the daughter of middle-class London Dissenters and the author of a spirited defense of the Unitarian church, *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1791), sprang to the defense of Wollstonecraft's feminist program. Hays' *Letters and Essays, Moral, and*

Miscellaneous (1793), a work which Hays submitted directly to Wollstonecraft for her advice and criticism, eloquently attacked the

> mental bondage [...]; the absurd despotism which has hitherto, with more than gothic barbarity, enslaved the female mind, the enervating and degrading system of manners by which the understandings of women have been chained down to frivolity and trifles, have increased the general tide of effeminacy and corruption. (Mellor and Matlak 37)

Hays further endorsed Wollstonecraft's most radical claim, "the idea of there being no sexual character," arguing that the opposite opinion has caused far more dangerous social extremes; moreover, "similarity of mind and principle is the only true basis of harmony." She concluded that "the rights of woman, and the name of Woollstonecraft, will go down to posterity with reverence, when the pointless sarcasms of witlings are forgotten" (Mellor and Matlak 37). And in her letter to the Dissenting *Monthly Magazine* for 2 March 1797, published under the running head "Improvements suggested in Female Education," she again invokes Wollstonecraft before concluding that

> Till one moral mental standard is established for every rational agent, every member of a community, and a free scope afforded for the exertion of their faculties and talents – without distinction of rank or sex, virtue will be an empty name, and happiness elude our most anxious research. (Hays, *Emma Courtney*, 279)

Mary Hays based both her novels, *Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), on Wollstonecraft's program for social reform. Emma Courtney enthusiastically upholds both Wollstonecraft's and William Godwin's doctrines but brings to them Hays' independent emphasis on the importance of sensibility, of women's capacity for strong emotions and enduring love. Emma falls passionately in love with her mentor Augustus Harley, a Godwinian philosopher who insists that humans will necessarily perfect themselves through the exercise of reason. Although her offer to give herself to him, even outside of marriage, is coldly rejected by Harley (he is already married), Harley finally vindicates both Emma's sensibility and her desire for a truly companionate relationship by

confessing on his death-bed that he has always loved her. In the course of her trials, in which she on one occasion quotes Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, Emma provides an ongoing feminist critique of her society, attacking both the slave trade and the enslavement of women, reflecting "on the inequalities of society, the source of every misery and of every vice, and on the peculiar disadvantages of my sex," and lamenting the "cruel prejudices" that prevented her from being educated "for a profession, for labour" and instead "rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial confinement" (*Emma Courtney* 88, 65-6).

Hays' second novel, *The Victim of Prejudice,* explores the unjust treatment given to women who must pay for a moment of sexual pleasure with a lifetime of ruin, a subject that Wollstonecraft had addressed in *The Rights of Woman* and also, in the minds of many, came in some ways herself to exemplify (after her sexual liaisons with both Gilbert Imlay and William Godwin were publicized in Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1798). Abandoned by her lover, the mother of Hays' heroine rapidly sinks into prostitution, is separated from her daughter and is finally executed as a murderer's accomplice. As she writes to her lost lover, "I perceived myself the victim of injustice, of the prejudice, of society, which, by opposing to my return to virtue almost insuperable barriers, had plunged me into irremediable ruin. I grew sullen, desperate, hardened" (Hays, *Victim of Prejudice* 66). Her daughter, the virtuous heroine Mary, is then raped but refuses to marry her traducer. Unable to get honest work since she is now regarded by society as "a fallen woman," Mary is arrested for debt, sent to prison where her health is destroyed, and finally dies, still refusing to marry her (supposedly reformed and repentant) rapist. Mary Hays thus re-writes the narrative of the fallen woman as a story of social prejudice against an unjustly treated and innocent victim, one who preserves her moral integrity and personal independence throughout.[3]

Mary Hays' most radical feminist claims appeared in her *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Woman*, a tract she wrote before reading Wollstonecraft's *The Rights of Woman* but did not publish until 1798. Here, Hays is far more critical of men than was Wollstonecraft. She insists throughout on the primary equality of women, arguing that "God created mankind male and female, different indeed in sex for the wisest and best purposes, but equal in rank, because of equal utility" (*Appeal* 21). It is men who have defied God,

Hays charges, by refusing to educate women, keeping them in "subjection and dependence" (68), in a state Hays memorably defines as "PERPETUAL BABYISM" (*Appeal* 97). Prostitution is caused not by female vice but by "the base arts used by profligate men, to seduce innocent and unsuspecting females," and fallen women are thus "more objects of pity than blame" (235-6). And it is men who prefer "folly, vice, impertinence of every kind," who desire women to be solely "their amusement, their dependent; and in plain and unvarnished terms their slaves," because they are terrified that their unearned claims of sexual superiority could be overthrown, terrified "of the frightful certainty of having women declared their equals, and as such their companions and friends" (116).

Hays continued her campaign for liberal feminism even after Wollstonecraft's death, although she was forced by the public denunciation of Wollstonecraft sparked by Godwin's ill-judged publication of his *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1798 to speak more circumspectly (her *Appeal* was published anonymously). In 1803, she published her six volume collation of 305 mini-biographies of famous women, *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of all ages and countries*, designed to inspire her female contemporaries to "a worthier emulation" (*Female Biography* vi). Here Hays felt compelled by public opinion to omit a biography of Wollstonecraft although she included biographies of such earlier feminists as Mary Astell, Catherine Macaulay and Madame Roland. Hays' actions here remind us of just how dangerous it had become by 1800 for a woman who hoped to be published and taken seriously to identify openly with Wollstonecraft *as a person*. As Susan Wolfson argues, Wollstonecraft was widely demonized after her death (9-11). Nonetheless, many women writers who did not wish to be tarred with the blackened brush of Wollstonecraft's reputation still continued to invoke and espouse her ideas. As the nineteenth century wore on, as Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson document, numerous women writers and thinkers once again openly invoked Wollstonecraft as their noble precursor, both privately in letters and publically in print.

Reaffirming her commitment both to the education of women and to the importance of the feelings in social intercourse, Hays prefaces her *Female Biography* thus:

> My pen has been taken up in the cause, and for the benefit, of my own sex. For their improvement, and to their entertainment, my labours have been devoted. Women [...] require pleasure to be mingled with instruction, lively images, the graces of sentiment, and the polish of language. Their understandings are principally accessible through their affections: they delight in minute delineation of character; nor must the truths which impress them be either cold or unadorned. (*Female Biography* iv)

Hays here moves beyond her earlier arguments for the equality of the sexes to an even more radical suggestion, that females might potentially be superior to males: "A woman who, to the graces and gentleness of her own sex, adds the knowledge and fortitude of the other, exhibits the most perfect combination of human excellence" (*Female Biography* v). In her final work, *Memoirs of Queens Illustrious and Celebrated* (1821), however, Hays returns to Wollstonecraft's equality feminism:

> I maintain [...] that there is, there can be, but one moral standard of excellence for mankind, whether male or female, and that the licentious distinctions [between the sexes] made by the domineering party, in the spirit of tyranny, selfishness, and sexuality, are at the foundation of the heaviest evils that have afflicted, degraded, and corrupted society: and I found my arguments upon nature, equity, philosophy, and the Christian religion. (*Memoirs of Queens* vi)

In the 1790s several women writers endorsed the program of liberal feminism which Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay and Mary Astell had developed, although none so rigorously or whole-heartedly as did Mary Hays. In *The Female Advocate; or, An Attempt to Recover the Rights of Women from Male Usurpation* (1799), Mary Anne Radcliffe, evoking her personal experiences as a landed Scottish heiress whose ne'er-do-well husband had lost all their money, leaving her destitute and in ill health, bitterly attacked the lack of suitable employment for women. The poet and novelist Mary Robinson, writing as Anne Frances Randall, in *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), attacked the sexual double standard, directly repeating Wollstonecraft's and Hays' argument that male hypocrisy was primarily responsible for

female prostitution. At the same time, she celebrated the historical accomplishments, both political and cultural, of contemporary women, citing 39 examples of accomplished female writers, philosophers, historians, translators, and artists, including both Mrs. Wolstonecraft and Miss Hayes. After calling for a university for women, Robinson turned her attention to women's writing as a literary genre. Anticipating Anna Barbauld's later canon-forming claim in her *Essay on the Origin and Progress of Novel Writing* – the introduction to the collection of reprints of British novels published by Rivington (1810) and titled *The British Novelists* – Robinson was the first to argue that by 1790 the novel had become a feminine genre:

> The best novels that have been written, since those of Smollett, Richardson and Fielding, have been produced by women: and their pages have not only been embellished with the interesting events of domestic life, portrayed with all the elegance of phraseology, and all the refinement of sentiment, but with forcible and eloquent political, theological, and philosophical reasoning. (84)

Conservative Feminism

At the conservative end of the feminist spectrum in Wollstonecraft's day stood Hannah More, a prolific writer of poems, plays, religious and political tracts and ballads, and fiction. So "invincibly" opposed to Wollstonecraft was More that she refused even to read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.[4] Often dismissed by scholars and critics as a reactionary thinker dedicated to upholding the status quo, Hannah More developed a feminist program of her own, one based on a theoretical basis different from Wollstonecraft's. But as Mitzi Myers first recognized, More and Wollstonecraft arrived at surprisingly similar conclusions.[5]

As I have argued at length in my *Mothers of the Nation – Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830*, Hannah More was the most influential woman living in England in Wollstonecraft's day.[6] Through her writings, political actions and personal relationships with the bishop of London and Evangelical Clapham sect, More promoted a successful program for social change from within the existing English social and political order. She called for a "revolution in manners" or cultural mores, a radical change in the moral behavior of

the nation as a whole (*Works* 2: 316). In contrast to Wollstonecraft's "revolution in female manners," which aimed at transforming the education and behavior of women in particular, Hannah More attempted to change the behavior of all the subjects of the British nation, aristocrats, clergy, the middling classes, workers, and women. But insofar as Wollstonecraft's efforts to change radically the social construction of gender in her day entailed a change in the attitudes and daily practices of men as well as women, these two "revolutions in manners" came finally to work toward very similar feminist goals.

Hannah More's writings contributed significantly to the prevention of a French-style, violent political revolution in England. They did so by helping to reform, rather than subvert, the existing social order. More's reform efforts were aimed in four directions: at the moral and financial irresponsibility of the aristocracy, at the laxness of the Anglican clergy, at the immorality and economic bad management of the working classes, and most important here, at the flawed education and frivolous behavior of women of all classes. What More sought above all was to create a new British national identity, one based on a shared value-system grounded on the Christian virtues of rational benevolence, honesty, personal virtue, the fulfillment of social duty, thrift, sobriety, and hard work.

Fundamental to More's project of social revolution was a transformation of the role played by women in the formation of British moral and political culture. Unlike Wollstonecraft, who argued that the two sexes were in all significant aspects the same, Hannah More insisted on the innate difference between the sexes. To women she assigned a greater delicacy of perception and feeling and above all, a greater moral purity and capacity for virtue. Men on the other hand, in More's view, have better judgment, based on their wider experience of the public world; at the same time their manners are coarse, with "rough angles and asperities" ("Introduction" to *Essays on Various Subjects*, 1777; *Works* 6: 266). Unlike Wollstonecraft's program of liberal political reform, which looked equally to men and to women to institute her new systems of co–education and egalitarian marriage, if More's "revolution in manners" was to occur, it must be carried out primarily by women.

But first women must be educated to understand their proper function in society. More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) laid out her program for the education of "excellent women" (*Works* 3: 200): a systematic development of the

innate female capacity for virtue and piety through a judicious reading of the Bible, devotional tracts and serious literature, extended by rational conversation and manifested in the active exercise of compassion and generosity. The goal of More's educational project for women was no less than a cultural redefinition of *female virtue*. As summed up in that "pattern daughter ... [who] will make a pattern wife," Lucilla Stanley (the heroine in More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, 1808), female virtue was equated by More with rational intelligence, modesty and chastity, a sincere commitment to spiritual values and the Christian religion, an affectionate devotion to one's family, active service on behalf of one's community, and an insistence on keeping promises (246), In More's words:

> I call education, not that which smothers a woman with accomplishments, but that which tends to consolidate a firm and regular system of character; that which tends to form a friend, a companion, and a wife. I call education, not that which is made up of the shreds and patches of useless arts, but that which inculcates principles, polishes taste, regulates temper, cultivates reason, subdues the passions, directs the feelings, habituates to reflection, trains to self-denial, and, more especially, that which refers all actions, feelings, sentiments, tastes and passions to the love and fear of God. (*Coelebs* 13)

More's concept of female virtue – like Wollstonecraft's concept of the rational woman – thus stood in stark contrast to her culture's prevailing definition of the ideal woman as one who possessed physical beauty and numerous accomplishments and whose principal object in life was effectively to entice a man into marriage.

Embedded in More's program for the education of women was a new career for upper and middle–class women, as Dorice Elliott has shown, namely, a sustained and increasingly institutionalized effort to relieve the sufferings of the less fortunate. As More's Mrs. Stanley defines this career: "*Charity is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession*" (*Coelebs* 138, More's emphasis). While More did not endorse Wollstonecraft's view that women should enter the professions in general (Wollstonecraft had singled out careers in business, medicine and education as particularly suited to female talents), she did conceptualize for the first time the female professional career of what we would now call the "social worker,"

the organized and corporate, as opposed to the spontaneous and individualistic, practice of philanthropy. As embodied in Lucilla Stanley, this profession involves spending one day each week collecting "necessaries" for the poor – food, clothing, medicine – and two evenings each week visiting them in their own cottages where she can best determine "their wants and their characters" (*Coelebs* 63).

More advocated in her *Strictures* that women participate in an even more institutionalized philanthropy, a "regular systematical good" resulting in a "broad stream of bounty [...] flowing through and refreshing whole districts" (*Works* 3: 270). She urged her women readers to work aggressively in the organization of voluntary benevolent societies and in the foundation of hospitals, orphanages, Sunday Schools and all-week charity or "ragged" schools for the education and relief of the poor. And her call was heard: literally thousands of voluntary societies sprang up in the opening decades of the nineteenth century to serve the needs of every imaginable group of sufferers. More's Evangelical demand that women demonstrate their commitment to God through a life of active service for the first time gave her upper and middle-class sisters a mission in life, the personal and financial support of institutionalized charities, from orphanages, work-houses, and hospitals to asylums and prisons. As F. K. Prochaska documented, these philanthropic activities contributed directly to the emancipation and increasing social empowerment of women by teaching them the skills necessary to organize and maintain complex financial institutions (227 and passim).

According to Hannah More, women were particularly suited to the active exercise of charity precisely because of their sexual difference, because women possessed greater sensibility than did men. More defined sensibility as an active rather than passive sympathy for the sufferings of others, one that immediately attempts to relieve the misery it perceives. As she invoked it in one of her early poems *Sensibility: A Poetical Epistle to the Hon. Mrs. Boscawen*, 1782:

> Sweet Sensibility! thou keen delight!
> Thou hasty moral! sudden sense of right!
> Thou untaught goodness! Virtue's precious seed!
> Thou sweet precursor of the gen'rous deed!
> (*Works* 5: 336, ll. 244–247)

Secondly, women were more versed in what More called "practical piety," the immediate assessment and relief of the day-to-day requirements of the poor, the sick, the dying. Finally, women who had learned how to manage a household properly could more readily extend those skills to the Sunday School, the workhouse or the hospital.

Implicit both in More's *Strictures on Female Education* and in her novel *Coelebs* is the argument that household management or domestic economy provides the best model for the management of the state or national economy. Here More agrees with Wollstonecraft's similar argument in *Rights of Woman* that the same skills are required to administer the well-run household as to govern the well-run nation. More spelled out this concept of home economics in her *Strictures on Female Education*:

> Economy, such as a woman of fortune is called on to practice, is not merely the petty detail of small daily expenses, the shabby curtailments and stinted parsimony of a little mind operating on little concerns; but it is the exercise of a sound judgment exerted in the comprehensive outline of order, of arrangement, of distribution; *of regulation by which alone well-governed societies, great and small, subsist*. [...] A sound economy is a sound understanding brought into action; it is calculation realized; it is foreseeing consequences, and guarding against them; it is expecting contingencies, and being prepared for them (*Works* 3: 189-90, emphasis added).

By assigning to women – and their mentor Eve – the capacity to develop and execute a fiscally responsible plan of household management which satisfies the physical, emotional and religious needs of all the members of the household (servants as well as family members), More effectually defined women as the best managers of the national estate, as the true patriots. As Kathryn Sutherland has argued, More proposed "a practical politics of domestic reformation, which is national in the ambitious scope of its campaign and personal in its focus on the woman in her family as the source of this larger regeneration" (36). Invoking Milton's Eve as her model of female propriety and "those thousand decencies which flow/ From all her words and actions," More urged her sisters to "exert themselves with a patriotism at once firm and feminine, for the general good" (*Works* 3: 14).

It is in the role of the mother that More's ideal of the well-educated, fiscally responsible and morally pure woman finds her fulfillment. But it is crucial to recognize that More's mother is the mother, not just of her own family, but of the nation as a whole. More thus implicitly endorses what I have elsewhere described as Wollstonecraft's "family politics,"[7] namely her argument that the well-managed, co-parented and egalitarian family provides the best model for the government of the state. As More affirmed in her *Strictures on Female Education*:

> the great object to which you, who are or may be mothers, are more especially called, is the education of your children. If we are responsible for the use of influence in the case of those over whom we have no immediate control, in the case of our children we are responsible for the exercise of acknowledged power: a power wide in its extent, indefinite in its effects, and inestimable in its importance. On YOU depend in no small degree the principles of the whole rising generation […] To YOU is made over the awfully important trust of infusing the first principles of piety into the tender minds of those who may one day be called to instruct, not families merely, but districts; to influence, not individuals, but senates. Your private exertions may at this moment be contributing to the future happiness, your domestic neglect, to the future ruin, of your country. (*Works* 3: 44)

As Mitzi Myers has noted, no one worked harder than More to define a new ideological mission for women: to "educate the young and illiterate, succor the unfortunate, amend the debased popular culture of the lower orders, reorient worldly men of every class, and set the national household in order," thereby elevating women's "nurturing and reformative assignment" into a "national mission" ("Hannah More's tracts" 266). Women can become, in More's view, the Mothers of the Nation.

Emphasizing women's public role as mothers of the nation, More necessarily downplayed their more private sexual roles as females. Like Wollstonecraft, More has been criticized by modern feminist critics for insisting on a new ideal of female "passionlessness." As Nancy Cott put it, Hannah More's "work perfected the transformation of woman's image from sexual to moral being," giving women power only at the price of sexual repression (226). But this is too one-sided a

reading of More's campaign. More did not urge women to deny their sexual desires, but only to channel them into marriage with a morally as well as sexually desirable partner. As Michael Mason has rightly observed, "[t]o Hannah More belongs the distinction of having written at greater length explicitly about sex than any other leading Evangelical" in her novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (77).

By defining the private household and "private principle" as the source of "public virtue" (*Works* 3: 44), More implicitly endorsed Edmund Burke's concept in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) of the domestic estate as the model for the state of the nation. But rather than assigning to Burke's "canonized forefathers" the ultimate responsibility for the moral improvement and sustenance of the family estate, More like Wollstonecraft explicitly assigned that responsibility to women, to *mothers*. Men may wage battles abroad, but women protect the home front: as she asked rhetorically, "[i]s it not desirable to be the lawful possessors of a lesser domestic territory, rather than the turbulent usurpers of a wider foreign empire?" (More, *Works* 3: 200). This is why her heroine Lucilla Stanley devotes a great deal of time to gardening – to nurturing and controlling the native land of England, as Eve cultivated the fields of Eden.

In making the private middle-class household the model for the national household, as had Mary Wollstonecraft before her, Hannah More effectively erased any meaningful distinction between the private and the broadly-defined public sphere. Both More and Wollstonecraft further agreed that it is women, not men, who are most responsible for carrying out moral reforms and thus for advancing the progress of civilization as such. As More put it, "[t]he general state of civilized society depends more than those are aware who are not accustomed to scrutinize into the springs of human action, on the prevailing sentiments and habits of women, and on the nature and degree of the estimation in which they are held (*Works* 3: 12). Insisting on the primary role of women in establishing "true taste, right principle, and genuine feeling" in the culture of a nation, both More and Wollstonecraft finally claimed for women the dominant role in what Norbert Elias has since called the "civilizing process."

Moderate Feminism

Between these two camps of feminist reform, Wollstonecraft's overtly political "revolution in female manners" based on an assertion of sexual equality and universal human rights and More's more restrictively cultural "revolution in manners" based on sexual difference and the essential moral superiority of women, other women writers took up more moderate feminist positions. Most notable in their efforts to find a middle-ground were the Dissenters, women whose religion (whether Quaker, Unitarian or Methodist) had already granted them a degree of sexual equality based on their capacity for virtue, rationality and religious leadership. The Quaker philanthropist, Priscilla Bell Wakefield, in her *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for Its Improvement* (1798), disagreed with Wollstonecraft's arguments for the equality of women with men, asserting instead that women should submit to their husbands' superior judgment. And while she singled out Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer for special praise, she went beyond More to argue that women must be educated in practical vocations so they could *support themselves*, since the accidents of fortune often left women of all classes without male economic support.

The Unitarian Anna Laetitia Barbauld, inspired by her education at the leading Dissenting academy, Warrington Academy, where her father was the tutor in Classics and Belles Lettres, argued aggressively for the equal rights of all the subjects of the British nation in 1790 in her fiery denunciation of the government's refusal to repeal the Corporation and Test Acts which prohibited non-members of the Church of England from holding political office or attending the established universities, in her political pamphlet *Appeal to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*. Barbauld was the leading female literary critic of her day, arguing forcefully for the preeminence of contemporary women's writing in the genre of prose-fiction. She also promoted the rational religious education of children in her widely disseminated *Hymns in Prose for Children* and wrote numerous poems and tracts attacking the British slave-trade, slavery in the British colonies, and the growing corruption both of the British government and of British commerce as it extended its empire to India and the Pacific Islands. As Elizabeth Raisanen persuasively argues in her essay in this volume, Barbauld's hitherto misunderstood dialogue with Wollstonecraft places Barbauld – not in opposition to

Wollstonecraft – but in the camp of the reformers who actively urge women to seek greater equality in education, society and politics.

This debate between Wollstonecraft and Barbauld, together with the program advocated by Hannah More, vividly reveals the very real intellectual and psychological tensions that existed between the leading feminists in England in the 1790s. Although each of these three influential female writers advocated the radically improved education of women and increased female control over British social, cultural and political life, they held distinctly different views as to exactly how women could best exercise that new cultural authority. Wollstonecraft would have women fulfill the social and political roles currently played by men, Barbauld would have women enter the literary realm as didactic writers, educators and critical judges, while More would have women engage in a life of active service for the welfare of others.

At the end of the century, after the publication of Godwin's loving but ill-judged *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1798, it became increasingly difficult for feminist writers openly to endorse even Wollstonecraft's less controversial demands. In the *Memoirs*, Godwin publically revealed Wollstonecraft's love-affair with Gilbert Imlay and his fathering of her illegitimate daughter Fanny, Wollstonecraft's two suicide attempts (in defiance of the Anglican Church's definition of suicide as a sin), and his own sexual liaison with Wollstonecraft long before their marriage. He further asserted, inaccurately, that Wollstonecraft did not call on God on her deathbed. The popular press then widely denounced Wollstonecraft as a whore and an atheist, as well as a dangerous revolutionary. Their attacks were fuelled by the chauvinist, anti-French feelings roused by England's declaration of war against France in 1802, and the hysterical British reaction against all French revolutionary ideas and practices during the Napoleonic campaigns.

This wide-spread denunciation of Wollstonecraft's personal life made it increasingly difficult for women writers to invoke Wollstonecraft's writings by name, although many continued to endorse her ideas. Maria Edgeworth took pains to distance herself from Wollstonecraft the person even as she directly advocated Wollstonecraft's "revolution in female manners." In her *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1799), Edgeworth insisted that she was not "a champion for the rights of woman" – which she then narrowly defined as "a vain contention for superiority" by women over men – but was

concerned only "to determine what is most for our general advantage" (89). And in her novel *Belinda* (1803), Edgeworth in the seventeenth chapter entitled "Rights of Woman" caricatured her "champion" for women's rights in the figure of Harriet Freke, a cross-dressed, duel-fighting woman who assumes the worst aspects of masculinity – tyranny over the weak (she plays several cruel practical jokes on the black servant Juba), infidelity, and physical violence. The extent to which Edgeworth feels she must go to distance the reader's sympathies from and to punish this early example of what we would today call a "macho" woman or "butch" lesbian – Harriet Freke is finally crippled in a "man-trap" – only reveals, as Patricia Juliana Smith has perceptively recognized, Edgeworth's own lesbian panic, her powerful fear that she will be painted with the Wollstonecraftian brush, defined as a literary "amazon" or "unsex'd female," and thereby excluded from all "polite society," her reputation as a serious thinker and advocate for the education of women in tatters (8-11). At the same time, Edgeworth aggressively promoted her own version of the revolutionary feminist, the new Belinda who will replace Pope's "fairest of mortals" as the envy of her age. Belinda Portman is the embodiment of all that Wollstonecraft called for in women: sound sense, wide reading, prudence, personal modesty and a loving heart. She makes an egalitarian and companionate marriage with Clarence Harvey (after his own foibles have been exposed) and converts her friend Lady Delacour from a life of aristocratic license and personal anguish to a loving domesticity by reconciling and reuniting her with her estranged husband and daughter.

Like Edgeworth, Jane Austen responded positively to many of Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments without ever mentioning her by name. All of Austen's novels are novels of education, in which her female heroines learn from their reading, their wiser mentors, and their own mistakes to become moral, responsible wives and shrewd judges of human nature. Allusions to and endorsements of ideas promoted in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* are scattered throughout Austen's fiction – whether as Elizabeth Bennet's sarcastic condemnation of female "accomplishments" or Wickham's embodiment of Wollstonecraft's critique of standing armies in *Pride and Prejudice*; as the association of the slave trade with the enslavement of British women in *Mansfield Park* (where Fanny Price functions as a house-slave);[8] as the modulated recognition of the competing claims of sense and sensibility which Wollstonecraft had

tracked from her *Mary, A Fiction* through *The Rights of Woman* to *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798) in *Sense and Sensibility*; or, as the affirmation of Anne Elliot as better qualified to manage the national estate than Wentworth in *Persuasion*. In Anne Elliot, as I have argued in detail in *Mothers of the Nation*, Jane Austen deftly stitches together Wollstonecraft's feminist ideas with those of Hannah More: Anne, Austen's ideal woman, achieves the rational, companionate marriage urged by Wollstonecraft and exemplified in Admiral and Sophia Croft, at the same time that she practices Hannah More's "profession" of caring for the sick, the needy and the poor. Throughout her novels, Jane Austen endorses Wollstonecraft's belief that the best woman is a rational woman, a woman of sense as well as sensibility, who seeks a psychologically egalitarian marriage. Within the context of the politicized discourse of the novel in her day, as Claudia Johnson has shown, Jane Austen can be seen as a moderate feminist.

The writer who most powerfully promoted the feminist programs of Wollstonecraft, Barbauld and More in the next generation was, appropriately, Anna Aikin Barbauld's niece, Lucy Aikin. The scion of the two leading English Dissenting families, the Aikins and the Jennings, Lucy Aikin was educated both at Warrington Academy and at home, where she learned Latin, French, history and science, as well as the *belle lettres*. She was best-known in her life-time as a historian of the courts of Queen Elizabeth I, King James I and King Charles I, histories in which she placed as much emphasis on the emotions, private motivations and domestic entanglements of the monarch as on their public pronouncements. She thus initiated a new form of what we might call "court history" or even psycho-history, a study of the past as the interactions of individual subjectivities. Her long poem *Epistles on Women* (1810) is a brilliant feminist rejoinder to Pope, Milton, Juvenal, and the Bible. In this poem she re-writes the history of western civilization from Genesis to the eighteenth-century, suggesting that the fall was caused – not by Eve's sinful desires – but rather by the aggression of men, their "pride of place," first displayed by Cain when he killed his brother Abel. Since that fall, as the *Epistles* spell out in detail, men have everywhere and at all times used their superior physical strength to reduce women to "servitude" and "homely misery." Embracing a more radical, essentialist feminism than did Hannah More, Lucy Aikin argues that all species, both human and animal, have survived only because of "Mother Love," a

maternal instinct in the female that induces her to protect her offspring even at the cost of her own life (while the male of the species, from the stag that gores its kids to the men who send their sons off to war, eagerly sacrifices his young).[9] The poem ends with Aikin's fervent plea to both her sisters and her brothers to become rationally educated and to join hands as friends and partners and thus restore the "primary equality" known by Adam and Eve in paradise. As Aikin wrote to her life-long correspondent, the Unitarian president of Harvard University, William Ellery Channing:

> If you will turn to one of Mrs. Barbauld's *Characters*, beginning, "Such were the dames of old heroic ages…" you will fully understand what kind of spirit I long to inspire into my sex. Almost all my life this desire has been one of my strongest feelings. When a little girl I used to battle with boys about the Rights of Woman. Many years ago, I published *Epistles on Women*, all to the same effect; and […] it contains many sentiments which I still cherish, and would give much to be able to disseminate. (Le Breton 128)

Aikin here combines Wollstonecraft's program for the education of the rational women and argument that family politics underpins national and international politics with Hannah More's belief that females have greater sensibility or compassion, a greater commitment to an ethic of care than do men.

Wollstonecraft's influence on the women writers of the early nineteenth century was incalculably profound. Whether individual writers endorsed Wollstonecraft's most radical demands that women enter the professions on a par with men, that they be granted their own "representation" in Parliament, that they be entitled to the legal custody of their own children and to divorce at will, or disagreed with them, very few denied the validity of her key arguments: that women should be rationally educated, that they should be the companions rather than the servants of men, and that they should be responsible, caring mothers and prudent household managers. However reluctant individual female writers may have been to acknowledge directly their indebtedness to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, this ideology, which Wollstonecraft so sharply articulated, became the dominant belief of the women writers of her day, across the entire feminist spectrum, from the radicals Mary Hays and Mary Robinson through

the more moderate Anna Barbauld, Priscilla Wakefield, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Lucy Aikin to the conservative Hannah More.

NOTES

[1] All references are by page numbers to Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, eds. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao. New York: Longmans Cultural Editions, 2007. Hereafter referred to as *Rights of Woman*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.

[2] I believe that Mary Wollstonecraft here echoes the battle-cry of the American colonists in the War with the Colonies or what Americans call the American Revolution (1776) – "No taxation without representation!", in other words, we will not pay taxes unless we have the vote and can elect our own members of Parliament. Barbara Taylor hears Wollstonecraft's challenge within the context of British parliamentary politics, and believes that Wollstonecraft is asking that a specific member of Parliament "represent" the interests of women, even though women would not have the vote or suffrage to control the choice of this (male) representative. See Taylor 215-6.

[3] For an excellent account of the "fallen woman" in early nineteenth-century literature, see Eberle's *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897*.

[4] See Hannah More's letter to Horace Walpole, 1793 in Roberts 371.

[5] See Myers's "Reform or Ruin: 'A Revolution in Female Manners.'" An excellent analysis of the intersections as well as the differences in the political discourse of Wollstonecraft and More can be found in Guest's *Small Change – Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810*.

[6] See Chapter 1 in Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation – Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830*.

[7] See Chapter 4 in Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*.

[8] For this argument, see Ferguson's "Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism and Gender."

[9] For a lengthy discussion of Lucy Aikin's *Epistles on Women* and her career as a noted historian, see Mellor and Michelle's Introduction to *Lucy Aikin, Epistles on Women and Other Works* and Mellor's "Telling Her Story: Lucy Aikin's *Epistles on Women* and the Re-writing of Western History."

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Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Barbauld, and Equality Feminism

Elizabeth Raisanen

Anna Letitia Barbauld's poem "The Rights of Woman" has long been read as an anti-feminist response to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In this essay, however, I argue that Barbauld's poetic response to Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* reflects a stance on women's rights that is strikingly similar to Wollstonecraft's own. Barbauld's poem does not mock Wollstonecraft's reason-based equality feminism but rather an irrational, emotionally-based difference feminism whose goal is to dominate men. While Barbauld supports Wollstonecraft's reason-based equality feminist tenets in her poem, in the final stanza she also pragmatically admits that, given the lack of educational opportunities for women at the time, gender equality may only be achievable through "mutual love" between men and women. Barbauld's turn to love at the end of her poem is a compromise, but not the most desirable path to equality; she favors instead the rational friendship between men and women touted by Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*.

In the midst of his infamous 1798 characterization of Mary Wollstonecraft as an "unsex'd female," the conservative eighteenth-century minister Richard Polwhele imagines the well-known poet Anna Letitia Barbauld reacting in a defeated manner to Wollstonecraft's call to "vindicate *the Rights of womankind*" (Polwhele 393). According to Polwhele, the "veteran BARBAULD caught the strain" of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (393), and as a result, "deem'd her songs of Love, her Lyrics vain" (394). In a footnote appended to these lines, Polwhele is quick to praise the "chaste and elegant" qualities of Barbauld's poetry (394), which lead him to assert confidently that, despite Barbauld's frequent classification amongst radical literary ladies like Wollstonecraft, Catharine Macaulay, and Helen Maria Williams, "she must reprobate, with me, the alarming eccentricities of Miss Wollstonecraft" (394). It was apparently unfathomable to Polwhele that Barbauld, "a veteran in Literature" (394), could hold radical political views concerning

women, even as he acknowledges her authorship of "several political tracts" on other subjects (394).

Interestingly, Polwhele's construction of Barbauld's feelings about Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* anticipated twentieth- and twenty-first-century responses to Barbauld's only extant piece of written commentary on Wollstonecraft's feminist treatise.[1] Barbauld's poem "The Rights of Woman" (written circa 1793, published in 1825) has long been read as an anti-feminist response to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Barbauld's posthumously-published poem has long confused critics who have tried to reconcile her progressive, Dissenting views on issues like the slave trade and the Corporation and Test Acts with her seemingly retrograde attack on Wollstonecraft's feminist ideals. Penny Bradshaw laments that Barbauld's poem has been "subject to the most homogenous interpretation" (23), and she provides an exhaustive list of critics who have read Barbauld's poem as an attack on Wollstonecraftian feminism (34). Most recently, Daniel Watkins has argued that Barbauld "often writes against the grain of feminist intellectuals such as Wollstonecraft" and that she does so in "The Rights of Woman" (7). The assumption that Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman" was an angry retaliation for Wollstonecraft's critique in the *Rights of Woman* of Barbauld's "To a Lady, with some painted flowers" has been the standard, though unsatisfying, explanation for Barbauld's puzzling poem.[2] More recently, however, scholars have begun to reevaluate Barbauld's gender politics in "The Rights of Woman" and have concluded that, while the poem expresses feminist views, this feminism is nevertheless dampened by the end of the poem, which relinquishes hope for immediate social change for women.[3] Critics have also disagreed as to whether the stifled feminism in Barbauld's poem is based on what is now known as biological essentialism (the belief that men and women are physically and therefore fundamentally different from each other) or the social construction of gender roles (the belief that differences in gender roles are a product of socialization, of nurture rather than nature).[4] "The Rights of Woman" is thus perhaps Barbauld's least-understood, though most frequently anthologized, poem.

In this essay, I argue that Barbauld's poetic response to Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* reflects a stance on women's rights that is strikingly similar to Wollstonecraft's own. An exceptionally

intelligent and educated woman, Barbauld was aware of the barriers to education that most women faced. Just as Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* argues for an equality feminism that is based on the human capacity for reason, Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman," too, suggests that women have the capacity for rational thought that ought to lead to equality between the sexes, but that women's lack of formal education has made them unable to exercise their reason. Barbauld's poem thus does not mock Wollstonecraft's reason-based equality feminism but rather an irrational, emotionally-based difference feminism whose goal is to dominate men, a difference feminism that Wollstonecraft had similarly derided when she complained in *Rights of Woman* that women gain power by "unjust means" (such as exploiting their physical beauty) and then become "capricious tyrants" (65). However, while Barbauld supports Wollstonecraft's reason-based equality feminist principles in her poem, in the final stanza she also pragmatically admits that, given the lack of educational opportunities for women at the time, gender equality may only be achievable through "mutual love" between men and women. Barbauld's turn to love at the end of her poem is a compromise, but not the most desirable path to equality.

I will begin by briefly outlining how *Rights of Woman* supports the tenets of a reason-based equality feminism in order to argue that Wollstonecraft's attack in her treatise on Barbauld's poem "To a Lady, with some painted flowers" – long supposed to be the impetus for Barbauld's angry response to Wollstonecraft – is not actually an attack on Barbauld at all, but rather on the patriarchal social system of their era that denied women's rationality. It is therefore possible that Barbauld may not have been offended by Wollstonecraft's treatise, which means that she would not have had a reason for mounting a literary counter-attack against Wollstonecraft. As I show in section three, this reading is corroborated by Barbauld's progressive attitudes toward a rational education for women, attitudes that have often been overlooked because of the conservative bias in her earliest biographer's construction of her career as an educator. Finally, I will demonstrate that, regardless of Barbauld's feelings about being cited by Wollstonecraft, her poem "The Rights of Woman" echoes key words, phrases, and concepts from *Rights of Woman* – most notably, that of "mutual love" – in order to reinforce (rather than contradict) the importance of Wollstonecraft's clarion call for an equality feminism based on reason.[5]

"invert[ing] the order of things"

In the early chapters of her *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft insists that she does not wish "violently to agitate the contested question respecting the equality or inferiority of the [female] sex" (24) nor "to invert the order of things" (44). These remarks prove to be disingenuous, however, as Wollstonecraft's treatise repeatedly emphasizes both sexes' capacity for rational thought and minimizes the physical differences between them, beliefs that were nothing less than radical in her era.[6] Despite Wollstonecraft's insistence on the mental and spiritual similarities between the sexes, she nevertheless recognized that the middle-class women who were the subject of her treatise most likely were (or would one day become) wives and mothers, an awareness that led her to stress the importance of the duties that women – and mothers, in particular, must carry out in the private sphere. Wollstonecraft's pragmatic concern for women's social position at the time she composed the *Rights of Woman* has often led readers to suggest that her claims are actually deeply invested in the differences between the sexes' functions.[7] These two contradictory branches of Wollstonecraft's feminist philosophy have been eloquently articulated by Carole Pateman as "Wollstonecraft's dilemma," which she defines as women's simultaneous demands for a citizenship based on the (masculine) principles of individuality and autonomy, and for the recognition of women's "specific capacities, talents, needs and concerns, so that the expression of their citizenship will be differentiated from that of men" (*Disorder* 196-7).

It is noteworthy, however, that Wollstonecraft's arguments about the sexes' similarities are typically couched in discussions of men's and women's inborn capacities (for rational thought, or for religious salvation, for instance), while her arguments about the differences between the sexes typically involve discussions of men's and women's social performances of gender roles (the tasks that they carry out as husbands and statesmen, or as wives and mothers, respectively).[8] In other words, she acknowledges that, despite men's and women's eventual performances of different social roles, they are both nevertheless born with the same mental and physical abilities, which are then shaped by the kinds of educations made available to them. It is women's "disorderly kind of education" (*Rights of Woman* 40) and their "smattering of accomplishments" (26) that sink them "below the standard of rational creatures" (54) rather than any

inherent defect in the female sex. Wollstonecraft argues, of course, that giving women a rational education will allow them to perform their domestic tasks as wives and mothers more effectively (178), but she also proposes that, with a rational education, women could perform men's social functions as well, including studying politics and participating in the nation's government; working as physicians, nurses, and midwives; and establishing and running businesses such as shops and farms (179-81). She declares that, "speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that […] of a mother" (*Rights of Woman* 177). Wollstonecraft's insistence that women's duty to themselves must come before even their duties as mothers is perhaps the strongest evidence in the *Rights of Woman* for her desire to appropriate the psychology of autonomous selfhood for women that was necessary in order to posit the fundamental similarity – and thus equality – between men and women. The radical nature of Wollstonecraft's insistence on women's autonomous selfhood, which was long the privilege of men alone, should not be underestimated. The biblical belief that marriage unites men and women into one flesh was borne out in the eighteenth-century laws of *coverture*, according to which a wife's identity was subsumed into that of her husband. For Wollstonecraft, one of the requirements of equality was allowing both men and women to identify as autonomous individuals.[9]

Wollstonecraft's discussions of the fluctuating power relations between men and women reveal, however, that warfare between the sexes has prevented the recognition of women's autonomy and equality with men. *Rights of Woman* declares that, just as men's historical dominance over women (won through the exercise of brute strength and a superior education) is artificial and objectionable, so too is women's short-lived domination of men – which is obtained "by unjust means" (65) – intolerable. Regarding men's unjust domination of women, Wollstonecraft writes that, "not content with this natural [physical] pre-eminence, men endeavour to sink us still lower" by depriving women of the opportunity to develop their minds (24). Just as Wollstonecraft objects to the notion that women are naturally physically inferior to men, so too does she deny that men are naturally more reasonable than women. Wollstonecraft is in fact so confident that men's traditional ascendancy over women is artificial and unjust that she declares, "I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me" (55). Indeed, Wollstonecraft opposes all

kinds of arbitrary rule in *Rights of Woman*; she objects to "the sacred majesty of Kings" (33) and declares that "[i]t is the pestiferous purple which renders the progress of civilization a curse, and warps the understanding" (35) (presumably of the men who wield arbitrary power as well as of the people subjected to it). Wollstonecraft is therefore similarly critical of the fact that girls are "bred up with a desire of conquest" (121) and "[t]aught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre" (64) because, as a result of this misguided education, women choose "rather to be short-lived queens than labour to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality" (76). Wollstonecraft also takes care to emphasize that the power wielded by beautiful women is in itself hollow because it is unsustainable. What women do not anticipate is that the homage men pay to them when they are young will eventually turn to scorn once they outgrow their youthful beauty (*Rights of Woman* 77). This power is even more dangerous for women, however, because it makes them into "tyrants" (65) and "despot[s]" (75) when they do wield it.[10] For Wollstonecraft, tyranny is as deplorable a deformation of selfhood in women as it is in men.

Since either sex's domination of the other is unacceptable for Wollstonecraft, she advocates in her *Rights of Woman* for friendship between men and women rather than a constant state of warfare that leads to the master-slave dynamics of sexual relationships. Wollstonecraft has frequently been criticized for ignoring female sexuality and denigrating erotic love in her treatise (Poovey 79, Kaplan 39); Cora Kaplan, in particular, evinces disappointment with Wollstonecraft for accepting Rousseau's "paradigm of a debased, eroticized femininity as fact rather than ideological fiction" (45), though she is incorrect that "[m]ale desire […] remains a part of positive male identity" in *Rights of Woman* (46). For Wollstonecraft, male sexuality, no less than female sexuality, is troubling because it corrupts women's bodies and minds; she offers criticism of the "libertine notions of beauty" that force women to sacrifice both bodily and mental strength if they wish to marry well (*Rights of Woman* 26). Furthermore, Wollstonecraft's critique of the "libertines of both sexes" (223) suggests that both men and women should be held to the same standards of rational modesty. Because Wollstonecraft's construction of heterosexual love as it existed during her era involved physical dominance and subjugation, a friendship based on rational, non-sexual love was the only logical foundation upon which men and

women could relate to each other as equals, though *Rights of Woman* criticizes any kind of love (erotic or otherwise) that is not founded on reason. In Wollstonecraft's opinion, "humble mutual love" infantilizes (or even animalizes) men and women because it is simply not sublime enough to raise a couple's thoughts to more lofty, intellectual matters (42-3). Wollstonecraft defines friendship, on the other hand, as a mutual esteem between persons that is founded on a host of principles – including "sense" (19), "confidence" (97), "respect" (48, 97), and above all, "reason," which "cement[s] friendship" (226) – that can only be acquired through a sound education. Women who lack a rational education "have not mind enough to have […] a friendship for a man" (*Rights of Woman* 210); thus, an education that develops both men's and women's intellects is the only way to establish true friendships between the sexes based on reason and equality.

"women of superior sense"

In the fourth chapter of her *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft cites in fairly quick succession passages from three different poems by Anna Letitia Barbauld. Though Wollstonecraft first approvingly quotes a couplet from Barbauld's poem "To Mrs. P – , with some Drawings of Birds and Insects," she then wonders how Barbauld, a woman of "superior sense," could make such an "ignoble comparison" between women and flowers in another poem, "To a Lady, with some painted flowers," which Wollstonecraft cites in its entirety in a footnote (*Rights of Woman* 74-5). Several pages later, though not mentioning Barbauld by name, Wollstonecraft approvingly cites three lines from yet another Barbauld poem (77). Despite Wollstonecraft's two admiring citations of Barbauld's poetry, a number of twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have commented only upon Wollstonecraft's supposed attack on Barbauld for writing "To a Lady, with some painted flowers" without inquiring into the significance of Wollstonecraft's two other admiring citations of Barbauld's poetry or realizing that Wollstonecraft may not have been attacking Barbauld in the first place. In this section, I argue that Wollstonecraft, who was fully aware of Barbauld's political and social opinions, did not intend to attack Barbauld when she criticized "To a Lady" but rather the patriarchal social system that forces even "women of superior sense" like Barbauld to "adopt the same sentiments" as men (74).

Barbauld and Wollstonecraft were both members of the radical literary circle associated with Joseph Johnson's print shop; despite the lack of written records of any conversations that might have passed between them, they were not unknown to each other either personally or professionally.[11] Wollstonecraft had been an admirer of Barbauld's literary work years before composing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. As William McCarthy shows, in *The Female Reader* (1789), a collection of poetry and prose for young women, Wollstonecraft cited widely from Barbauld's *oeuvre*, reprinting poems as well as prose from virtually all of Barbauld's published books (114, 350). In addition, Wollstonecraft wrote a series of lessons to teach her daughter to read (published in her *Posthumous Works*, edited by Godwin) that were an imitation of Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (McCarthy 351). Although Wollstonecraft and Barbauld possessed different temperaments, their lives intersected in a variety of ways. Not only did they know the same people, work as educators, and read each other's work, but Dick Wakefield notes that Wollstonecraft also took a job writing for Johnson's *Analytical Review*, a position that Barbauld had previously been offered, though she had declined it (56-8). Furthermore, Barbauld and Wollstonecraft shared similar social and political opinions, including a preference for Dissenting views and Enlightenment values, opposition to Edmund Burke's conservative *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (McCarthy 351), and support for a feminism based on the fundamental equality between the sexes.[12]

More importantly, that Wollstonecraft recognized that her political as well as educational views were compatible with Barbauld's is apparent in *Rights of Woman*. It is essential to note that Wollstonecraft's critique of "To a Lady" is lodged between two other appreciative citations of Barbauld's poetry, and that these additional citations demonstrate Wollstonecraft's awareness of Barbauld's feminism. Wollstonecraft first quotes a couplet from the poem "To Mrs. P—," in which Barbauld attributes "glory, virtue, [and] Heaven" to man (Barbauld, qtd. in *Rights of Woman* 74), who, unlike birds or insects, must toil for a higher destiny. As Mellor notes, the "man" in Barbauld's poem refers to all of mankind (153). Wollstonecraft cites this couplet in a footnote during the course of her arguments for the restoration of women's dignity; her approval of these lines at this juncture in her treatise suggests that she also felt that Barbauld's usage of "man" included women as well as men. Wollstonecraft's second

admiring citation of Barbauld's work can be found several pages after her disparagement of "To a Lady." Here, Wollstonecraft quotes three lines from Barbauld's "Song V" because they aptly convey her own thoughts about the problems that arise when women's influence depends upon the capricious whims of men (*Rights of Woman* 77). To Barbauld's claim that women are "quickly scorned when not ador'd" (Barbauld, qtd. in *Rights of Woman* 77), Wollstonecraft merely adds that "the adoration comes first, and the scorn is not anticipated" (77), an augmentation of Barbauld's sentiment that does not in any way refute it.

Wollstonecraft's treatment of "To a Lady" is undeniably harsh, even though her favorable citations of the two other Barbauld poems surround (and, in some measure, soften) it.[13] In the same footnote in which she quotes the couplet from "To Mrs. P—," Wollstonecraft asks incredulously, "[a]fter writing these lines, how could Mrs. Barbauld write the following ignoble comparison?" (74). She goes on to cite "To a Lady" in its entirety, typologically emphasizing the words and phrases that she felt were particularly objectionable (74-5). In the sentence with which Wollstonecraft ends her derogatory footnote, however, she makes it clear that she disparages not Barbauld herself, but rather the patriarchal sentiments that her poem expresses, sentiments that are not originally Barbauld's because they are a legacy of the patriarchal culture in which she lives. After mentioning men's degrading comparison of women to "smiling flowers," Wollstonecraft complains that "[t]his has ever been the language of men, and the fear of departing from a supposed sexual character, has made even women of superior sense adopt the same sentiments" (74). It is only then that she cites Barbauld's "To a Lady" as an example of the kinds of texts that women write out of "fear," presumably of men's poor opinion of them if they abandon their "sexual character." Indeed, after citing Barbauld's entire poem, Wollstonecraft significantly remarks, "[s]o the *men* tell us" (75, my emphasis). It is important to note that Wollstonecraft does not accuse Barbauld of creating the woman-as-flower metaphor, which eighteenth-century authors had inherited from a long line of male poets; rather, Wollstonecraft merely criticizes Barbauld for perpetuating this trope. Because Wollstonecraft is clearly attacking men for originating the degrading ways in which women are discussed by both male and female authors, Barbauld is far less implicated in this episode in *Rights of Woman* than later critics have assumed. It is therefore possible that Barbauld may have been far less

upset (if at all) about her treatment in Wollstonecraft's treatise than she has traditionally been made out to be. If this is the case, it becomes less likely that her poetic response to Wollstonecraft was angry and reactionary.

"the bounds of female reserve"

Barbauld is thought to have composed "The Rights of Woman" shortly after the publication of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, perhaps as early as 1792 or 1793 (Barker-Benfield 473; Mellor 153), although no manuscript copy of the poem has ever been discovered (McCarthy 635). What is known is that Barbauld's niece, anthologizer, and first biographer, Lucy Aikin, published the poem in *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld* (1825) after Barbauld's death. Although Aikin chose to reprint even the most political of Barbauld's poems and essays in *The Works*, she was also careful to curate a conservative legacy for her aunt on the matter of her stance on women's rights (McCarthy xvi). In the "Memoir" she composed as a preface to the two-volume *Works*, Aikin reprinted a letter that Barbauld had written in order to decline an offer from Elizabeth Montagu to head a "College for young ladies" (xvi). McCarthy reads this as another tactic on Aikin's part to give "a conservative spin to Barbauld's views on women" by distancing her from the "favorite feminist cause" of female education (xvi). Citing from the letter in which Barbauld declined the position allowed Aikin the opportunity to demonstrate her aunt's "good sense" and "humility" (Aikin xvi-xvii), as well as to establish Barbauld's "just and comprehensive ideas […] of the habits and acquirements most important to females" (xvi). Because none of these descriptors would have been applied to Wollstonecraft during the early decades of the nineteenth century, Aikin's reading of her aunt's letter helps to distance Barbauld even further from Wollstonecraftian principles, a necessary tactic at a time when, as Mellor notes, the "wide-spread denunciation of Wollstonecraft's personal life made it increasingly difficult for women writers to invoke Wollstonecraft's writing by name, although many continued to endorse her ideas" (155). For Aikin to have published "The Rights of Woman" – whose title blatantly echoes the title of Wollstonecraft's most radical treatise – at a time when Wollstonecraft's reputation was in shambles, she must have felt that

the poem contained no Wollstonecraftian impropriety that would have tarnished her aunt's legacy. In fact, McCarthy surmises that "Aikin probably hoped the poem would be read by the Tory press as evidence that her aunt was no Wollstonecraftian" (352). Aikin's conservative reading of Barbauld's poem (as well as of her views on women) has lingered into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, even as Barbauld's other politically progressive ideas on issues like the slave trade and the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts are well known. I should like to suggest, however, that Barbauld's views on the education of women were just as radically liberal as Wollstonecraft's, and that her equality feminist views can be discerned both in her letter regarding the college for young ladies and in "The Rights of Woman."

Feminist critics have typically interpreted Barbauld's refusal to open a school for young women as proof that she held conventional, patriarchally-influenced views of femininity (McCarthy xvi-xvii), although Barbauld's actual opinions on women's education were rooted in pragmatism rather than sexism. Barbauld's comments on her own exceptional education initially suggest that she viewed her situation as a fluke rather than a model to be emulated by other women:

> having myself stepped out of the bounds of female reserve in becoming an author […] I am full well convinced that to have a too great fondness for books is little favourable to the happiness of a woman, especially one not in affluent circumstances. My situation has been peculiar, and would be no rule for others. (qtd. in Aikin xix)

Barbauld's reluctance to encourage other women to obtain a scholarly education is not, however, based on the belief that women are inherently less intelligent than men, but rather on her desire to promote the "happiness" of women who have no choice but to live as the dependents of men. Because women are groomed from an early age to be "agreeable companions to a man of sense […] [t]he best way for women to acquire knowledge is from conversation with a father, a brother or friend in the way of family intercourse" (Barbauld, qtd. in Aikin xviii). Though the "pomp of learning" is necessary for the "[y]oung gentlemen, who are to display their knowledge to the world" (Barbauld, qtd. in Aikin xvii), such an erudite education is unnecessary for women who do not plan to teach or "engage in any

learned profession" (Barbauld, qtd. in Aikin xviii). Barbauld's views on the education of women are thus rooted in practical considerations – why give women a rigorous education when the vast majority will never have the opportunity to make use of their learning? Teaching young women how to interact with the male authority figures (fathers, brothers, and husbands) who will determine the courses of their lives would be far more conducive to women's future happiness and well-being. Barbauld further emphasizes this point in a short piece titled "On Female Studies," published in the posthumous miscellany *A Legacy for Young Ladies*. In this brief essay, Barbauld asserts that "[e]very woman should consider herself as sustaining the general character of a rational being" and that "the motives for acquiring general knowledge and cultivating the taste are nearly the same to both sexes" (42). As Barbauld explains, the differences in men's and women's educations stem from women's exclusion from "all professional knowledge" ("Female Studies" 42):

> A woman is not expected to understand the mysteries of politics, because she is not called to govern; she is not required to know anatomy, because she is not to perform surgical operations; she need not embarrass herself with theological disputes, because she will neither be called upon to make nor to explain creeds. ("Female Studies" 43)

Just as Wollstonecraft's discussions of the differences between men and women are always rooted in the different social activities that the sexes perform, so too are Barbauld's discussions of gender differences embedded in the social roles that men and women perform, rather than in their supposedly inherent mental capacities.

Barbauld's unwillingness to manage a school for young women was also, however, rooted in her reluctance to teach the kinds of superficial accomplishments that eighteenth-century girls were sent to schools to acquire. Beginning at the age of fourteen, young women

> have many things to learn which books and systems never taught. The grace and ease of polished society, with the established modes of behaviour to every different class of people; the detail of domestic economy […]; the duties, the proprieties of behaviour which they must practice in their own family, in the families where they visit, to their friends, to their acquaintance: – lastly, their behaviour to the other half of their

> species […] These are the accomplishments which a young woman has to learn […] and surely these are not to be learned in a school. (Barbauld, qtd. in Aikin xx-xxi)

In the Dissenting school at Palgrave that she ran with her husband (in a relationship, as it happened, that reflected the conjugal companionship and friendship that Wollstonecraft had envisaged for marriage), Barbauld taught geography, history, composition, and public speaking to her male pupils, and she designed her lessons to help her students become citizens not only of England, but of the world (McCarthy 172-3). With such cosmopolitan pedagogical practices, it can be little wonder that Barbauld blanched at the necessity of teaching female pupils the rudiments of the far more localized interactions in which the typical Englishwoman would engage within her family and social circles. Furthermore, Barbauld felt that she lacked the necessary qualifications for offering instruction on the social graces because she never attended a "girls' boarding-school" and thus "conversed little" with other girls when she was growing up (qtd. in Aikin xxii). While Aikin interprets Barbauld's acute self-scrutiny on this point as "an instance of the humility with which she estimated her own accomplishments" (xvii), Barbauld's own discussion of the issue again reveals a thinly-veiled distaste for the kind of instruction that girls' schools were expected to provide:

> Young ladies […] ought to have their education superintended by a woman perfectly well-bred, […] and she should be able to direct them, and judge of their progress in every genteel accomplishment. I could not judge of their music, their dancing; […] I know myself remarkably deficient in gracefulness of person, in my air and manner, and in the easy graces of conversation. […] there are few things I know well enough to teach them with any satisfaction, and many I never could learn myself. […] I could never prosecute with any pleasure an undertaking to which I should know myself so unequal: I am sensible the common boarding-schools are upon a very bad plan, and believe I could project a better, but I could not execute it. (Barbauld, qtd. in Aikin xxiii-xxiv)

Barbauld's comments make it clear that she has no interest in teaching adorning accomplishments such as "dancing," "music," and genteel conversation and deportment. While she goes so far as to critique the

education provided by "common boarding-schools," she also acknowledges that she would not be able to "execute" a better school, presumably because an education for women based on reason rather than accomplishments would not be in high demand.

Barbauld's refusal to teach young women according to eighteenth-century society's terms should not, however, be misconstrued as a belief that women should not be rationally educated. In fact, Barbauld unofficially mentored as well as officially (though privately) instructed a number of female pupils throughout her life.[14] Barbauld's "On Female Studies," an essay that appeared in a posthumously-published collection of her unpublished work on women's education, *A Legacy for Young Ladies* (1826), suggested that a full range of academic and scientific subjects, including history, English grammar and usage, astronomy, botany, natural history, experimental philosophy, chemistry, physics, and languages like French, Italian, and Latin, were appropriate for women's study (Barbauld 45-51). Barbauld and Aikin also founded a women's book club circa 1803 (McCarthy 505). According to McCarthy, Barbauld's efforts on behalf of women's education were meant to create "an ideal sphere in which women could be imagined to think, talk, and act – or could really think, talk, and act – by and for themselves" (506); indeed, he argues that Barbauld "dreamed of a college for women" and that "True Magicians," an essay she had addressed to her protégée Sarah Carr, "with its avenues for meditation, its cloistered arches, its classical portico, its all-female faculty in charge of an arts and sciences curriculum, is that dream" (McCarthy 507). Such a college should not, however, be confounded with the "College" of Aikin's description – that is, the finishing school that Barbauld declined to superintend. Rather, the women's college of Barbauld's imagination was one in which women could gain a sound, rational education in a wide range of academic subjects and Enlightenment principles.

"humble mutual love"

Read in light of Barbauld's high opinion of women's aptitude for rigorous academic study, it is clear that "The Rights of Woman" issues a call for the rational education of women that is strikingly similar to Wollstonecraft's own. As outlined above in the introduction, however, few critics have acknowledged the extent of

Barbauld's agreement with Wollstonecraft's equality feminism. Even Penny Bradshaw and William McCarthy – who both have forcefully argued that "The Rights of Woman" is a feminist poem and who also have made strong cases for Barbauld's equality feminism and similarities to Wollstonecraft in many other aspects of her life and work – have neglected to argue that "The Rights of Woman" is a poem that wholeheartedly supports Wollstonecraft's equality feminist views. Bradshaw describes Barbauld's poem as "deeply ambiguous and tentative" (29), while McCarthy claims that it is "conflicted" (353). Such descriptions of "The Rights of Woman" imply that there is a measure of anti-feminist (or anti-Wollstonecraft) sentiment lurking in it. Both Bradshaw and McCarthy also make similar claims about Barbauld's overall message at the end of her poem, which supposedly offers an alternative to Wollstonecraftian rationalism – "mutual love" – that is the real path to equality for the sexes (Bradshaw 33-4; McCarthy 354-5). I argue, however, that Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman" is an equality feminist poem that, like Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, presents rationality rather than an unreflective sensibility as the ideal basis for equality between the sexes. Barbauld's poem echoes key words, phrases, and concepts from Wollstonecraft's treatise in order to suggest that sensual (or indeed, any kind of unintellectual) love between men and women is a poor substitute for a friendship based on mental equality. What sets Barbauld's poem apart from Wollstonecraft's treatise, however, is her willingness to acknowledge that, in the absence of rigorous educational opportunities for women, mutual love may be the only available route to equality. As such, mutual love is acceptable to Barbauld, but far from the ideal that other critics have argued that it is for her.

The forceful first stanza of "The Rights of Woman" – copiously sprinkled with exclamation points that comically emphasize the speaker's point – has frequently been misread as a sarcastic jibe at women, like Wollstonecraft, who fight for their rights. While Barbauld's poem is largely comic, it does not mock women's struggle for equality; rather, it ridicules women who attempt to overcome that inequality by subduing men with stereotypically feminine weapons, figured in the second stanza as "panoply divine" (line 5).[15] By playing on the double meanings of "panoply" – a full suit of armor as well as magnificent attire (*OED*) – Barbauld wryly suggests that the only attack women are prepared to make on men is sartorial, a point that

echoes Wollstonecraft's claim that women's fondness for stylish clothing is "not natural" but is rather rooted in "a love of power" (*Rights of Woman* 46). If a woman's fashionable dress is her armor in Barbauld's poem, her "artillery" (10) consists of "soft melting tones" (11) and "blushes and fears" (12). Barbauld's comparisons of a quiet voice and a retiring attitude to deadly weapons are supposed to be ludicrous, because such feminine qualities are actually not powerful at all. These lines recall Wollstonecraft's scorn in *Rights of Woman* for "soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment" and "those pretty feminine phrases," which are all merely "epithets of weakness" (25) that confirm women's disenfranchised status. Barbauld's poem and Wollstonecraft's treatise both recognize that women use such coy, timid, and ultimately self-defeating tactics because they have no real social or political power at their disposal.

Like Wollstonecraft's treatise, Barbauld's poem also favors equality between the sexes rather than never-ending sexual warfare that always results in one sex's domination of the other. Wollstonecraft repeatedly stresses the importance of friendship between men and women in *Rights of Woman*, and Barbauld echoes this significant concept in her critique of women who deploy their feminine charms in order to make men their slaves: "Make treacherous Man they subject, not thy *friend*: / Thou mayst command, but never canst be free" (19-20, emphasis added). According to Barbauld, it is a mistake for women to attempt to subdue men, because merely turning the tables and making men into slaves will never lead women to enduring freedom, even if it offers them short-lived influence. Barbauld's assumption that women who grasp power through such underhanded means ultimately harm themselves reinforces Wollstonecraft's claim that "unjust" power based on the exercise of feminine wiles corrupts women, who become "abject slaves or capricious tyrants" (65). For Barbauld as well as for Wollstonecraft, friendship between the sexes is the better, although overlooked, route to true, lasting equality.

For Wollstonecraft, equality between the sexes is founded on friendship, which is itself founded on the discourse of reason, but this route to equality is disrupted by women's lack of education. She deplores the fact that women's "strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty" (*Rights of Woman* 26), and that, as a result, most women are unable to engage in intellectual discourse. As she points out, women "are not to be contradicted in

company" (*Rights of Woman* 80), a pernicious social practice that would not permit the ladies of her era to exercise their mental faculties by participating in debates. Barbauld likewise demonstrates that sexual equality can be achieved through the exercise of reason and vigorous intellectual conversations, but because women do not receive the rational education that men do, they are unable to engage in public debates on the issue of women's rights, which instead forces them to found their "empire" (Barbauld 13) on "sacred mysteries" (Barbauld 15). Women's influence over men is tenuous, however, because it is "Felt, not defined, and if debated, lost" (Barbauld 14). In these lines, Barbauld laments that women are not educated enough to rationally debate the foundations of their equality with men, and that any attempt to do so without the aid of a rational education would cause women to lose what little authority they have. Only by "[s]hunning discussion" (Barbauld 16) can women's power over men be preserved, but a foundation for women's rights based on women's silence is neither stable nor desirable.

Both Barbauld and Wollstonecraft take pains to emphasize that, because women are unable to debate the foundations of their equality with men, the dominance they may achieve through the performance of femininity is short-lived. As discussed above in the second section of this essay, Wollstonecraft's approving citation of three lines from Barbauld's "Song V" demonstrates that both authors were aware of the scorn that inevitably follows men's adoration of women once they are no longer youthfully beautiful. For similar reasons, Barbauld ends "The Rights of Woman" with women's eventual loss of the influence they have gained through their superficial "panoply divine" (5):

> Then, then, abandon each ambitious thought,
> Conquest or rule thy heart shall feebly move,
> In Nature's school, by her soft maxims taught,
> That separate rights are lost in mutual love. (29-32)

This stanza has traditionally been read as the moment when Barbauld finally abandons her satiric tone in order to offer a serious solution to the battle of the sexes. Rather than fighting one another for their rights, men and women will abandon the issue of "separate rights" altogether in favor of a "mutual love" (Barbauld 32) that will make the establishment of legal rights unnecessary because an ethic of care will prevail (Bradshaw 33-4; McCarthy 354-5; Mellor 154). What is often

overlooked in this sentimental reading of the stanza, however, is the fact that rights for women are ultimately "lost" (Barbauld 32) in such a solution. According to the British law of *coverture*, a married couple consisted of one legal entity – the husband – by which the wife was "covered." At stake in the loss of "separate rights" are, specifically, the wife's separate rights, as the husband is already treated as a citizen with a full set of legal rights. Barbauld's language of loss in this crucial line is not incidental or metaphorical – women who cannot reasonably debate the foundations of equality and who try to conquer men by emphasizing their femininity will lose not only the superficial influence that their beauty has won for them, but also (and more troublingly) any opportunity to obtain genuine equality based on the recognition of their autonomous selfhood and capacity for rationality. In fact, in "The Rights of Woman," women can expect to lose their individual influence while they are presumably still young and beautiful (since love and its concomitant dissolution of separate rights through marriage is offered as an alternative to the individual power gained from physical pomp and vainglory), an even earlier loss of influence than that experienced by the women who are scorned due to old age and faded beauty in "Song V." "The Rights of Woman" can thus be read as a work of equality feminism that demonstrates the futility of women's attempts to achieve influence and gender parity through a feminism based on women's differences from men (that is, biological essentialism).

Despite the ominous "loss" overshadowing the final stanza of "The Rights of Woman," Barbauld does not entirely foreclose the possibility of a positive reading of the poem's final line, but when the line is read through the filter of Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, it becomes clear that Barbauld's seeming elevation of mutual love is really only an attempt to find a second-best path to gender equality. The phrase "mutual love" actually originates, not with Barbauld, but with Wollstonecraft. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft had expressed disdain for what she describes as "humble mutual love," which is "not dignified by sentiment, or strengthened by a union in intellectual pursuits" (42-3). For Wollstonecraft, a better love is one that is "dignified" solely by intellectual activity (according to eighteenth-century usage, the word "sentiment" referred to mental activity rather than emotion).[16] Barbauld's repetition of the phrase "mutual love" in the final line of her poem – a repetition that omits the adjective "humble" – could suggest an effort to reclaim and even

elevate mutual love between men and women. However, the first line of the stanza, in which the speaker instructs women to "abandon each ambitious thought" (29), indicates that the "mutual love" of the poem's final line is in fact the unreflective mutual love that Wollstonecraft disparages. With this in mind, it becomes more difficult to believe that Barbauld intended to elevate a kind of love that is not dignified by rational thought. Humble, unintellectual mutual love might triumph at the end of the poem, but Barbauld does not present it as an end in itself; rather, she pragmatically acknowledges that this lesser form of love may be the only path to equality available to women who lack the intellectual training necessary to debate the issue. "Separate rights are lost in mutual love" is thus the most ironic line in the entire poem, as it offers both a solution to and a cause of gender inequality.[17] Reason is still the only solid foundation for women's rights (as well as for a more dignified form of love) in the poem, although Barbauld is perhaps more willing, for pragmatic reasons, than Wollstonecraft to accept the expediency of a lesser form of love in the establishment of gender equality. Nevertheless, Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman" and Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* share an equality feminist point of view that is founded on the perfectibility of women's reason, a similarity that, for too long, has been overlooked

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NOTES

[1] It is not known, however, if Polwhele ever encountered a manuscript copy of Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman."

[2] See, for instance, Todd, *Sign* 214 and Barker-Benfield 264-5.

[3] Susan J. Wolfson argues that Barbauld's own frustrated attempts to engage in the public sphere made her unable to "envision legal reform in her sarcastic response to Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* (178). Similarly, Bradshaw contends that Barbauld speaks from a defeated position in "The Rights of Woman" and imagines that only in the future will gender-based equality be reached through mutual love (32-33). Bradshaw also claims that the poem reflects Barbauld's discouraging belief that "woman's position is, if anything, even more hopeless than that of the slave" (34). Anne K. Mellor argues that there is hope for gender-based equality in Barbauld's poem, but that, for Barbauld, equality is something that will be achieved only

gradually. According to Mellor, Barbauld "foreswears what she sees as Wollstonecraft's overly aggressive demand for the immediate equality or 'rights' of woman for a more gradual process of moral development, mutual sexual appreciation, tolerance, and love" (154).

[4] Mellor, for instance, has argued that Barbauld's poem "endorses Hannah More's belief in innate sexual difference" (153). Similarly, Susan Levasseur reads "The Rights of Woman" as recognizing and embracing "'essential' distinctions between men and women" (25). Other critics, however, have argued that many of Barbauld's writings were critical of biological essentialism. Haley Bordo points out that Barbauld's feminism was "about enabling difference and critiquing the biological essentialism at the root of sexism" (187). Bradshaw concurs that there is further evidence in Barbauld's correspondence to suggest that she was "fundamentally opposed to biological essentialism" (35). Likewise, William McCarthy argues that Barbauld believed that the differences between the sexes were socially constructed (494, 500). However, none of these critics have applied their theories about Barbauld's non-essentialist feminism to "The Rights of Woman" specifically.

[5] Though the "mutual love" of which both Wollstonecraft and Barbauld are wary is often erotic and sensual, I will argue that they critique any kind of love in which the mind is not involved. For both authors, love that is based on empathy and spirituality (*agape*, for instance) has an intellectual, and thus rational, dimension. Virginia Sapiro makes a similar point when she argues that, for Wollstonecraft, "passions must be infused with reason" (62).

[6] For readings of Wollstonecraft as an equality feminist, see Mellor (141) and Craciun (128). As several critics have pointed out, however, Wollstonecraft insisted on a model for equality between the sexes based on "masculine" traits rather than attempting to recuperate "femininity" (Poovey 79, Kaplan 46, and Johnson 29).

[7] This point of view is typical of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators on Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, who attempted to recuperate Wollstonecraft's claims for the dignity of women's social functions as wives and mothers by emphasizing the treatise's supposed adherence to many traditional tenets of femininity. In 1878, for instance, Mathilde Blind praised Wollstonecraft for the "modest character" of her demands as well as for her insistence on the "Duties instead of Rights of Woman" (398). Similarly, in 1890 the feminist crusader for women's suffrage Millicent Garrett Fawcett claimed that Wollstonecraft "constantly exalted what was truly feminine as the aim of woman's education and training" (23) and that she "does not claim for women intellectual or physical or moral equality with men" (18). Later critics have still occasionally remarked upon Wollstonecraft's acknowledgment of differences between the sexes (albeit to different ideological ends). According to Gary Kelly, Wollstonecraft wishes to establish "women's claim to minds and careers equal to if different from those of men" (109). Claudia L. Johnson concurs, arguing that even as Wollstonecraft scorns the distinctions made between men and women, "she is far from arguing that no distinction exists" (23).

[8] The one exception is when Wollstonecraft remarks upon the differences in physical strength between men and women. While at first this would seem to indicate that Wollstonecraft believed that there are significant, essential differences between men's and women's bodies (and not just in their social performances), she then goes on to minimize those physical differences at every opportunity, as well as to suggest that

even these physical differences are due more to socialization than to nature (see *Rights of Woman* 24, 25, 27, 47, 58-63). Adriana Craciun explains that Wollstonecraft's acknowledgement of men's superior physical strength is placed in "conditional terms" and that Wollstonecraft implies that "women may continue to push the limits of corporeal distinctions" between the sexes (Craciun 128).

[9] For detailed discussions of the many ways in which women have historically been defined as relational rather than autonomous selves, see Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* and *The Disorder of Women*, and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*.

[10] Wollstonecraft undoubtedly borrowed her views on the corrupting effects of women's physical beauty from Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790), just as she had borrowed many of Macaulay's views on education (Wollstonecraft 133). In *Letters*, Macaulay writes that it is certain "the admiration of the other sex is held out to women as the highest honour they can attain; and whilst this is considered as their *summum bonum*, and the beauty of their persons the chief *desideratum* of men, Vanity, and its companion Envy, must taint, in their characters, every native and every acquired excellence" (208). Wollstonecraft's allegiance to Macaulay brings her yet another degree closer to Barbauld, as both Macaulay and Barbauld were associated with the Bluestockings and had been pictured in Richard Samuel's painting *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (1778).

[11] Wollstonecraft and Barbauld met each other in person on at least one occasion. Wollstonecraft's husband William Godwin noted in his diary on 12 January 1797 that he and Wollstonecraft, along with Barbauld and other guests, had dined at the Carr residence on that date.

[12] Barbauld was a well-known member of the Dissenting community in London. Wollstonecraft was never a Dissenter herself, but she sympathized with many Dissenting views, particularly those relating to the importance of rationality and education (Todd, *Mary* 59-60). See also Bordo 187, Bradshaw 35, McCarthy 352.

[13] Wollstonecraft also approvingly invokes Barbauld's essay "Against Inconsistency in Our Expectations" (published in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose*) in a footnote at the end of the fifth chapter of *Rights of Woman* (143).

[14] See Chapter 21 ("Legacy to Young Ladies") in McCarthy's biography of Barbauld for more detailed information about Barbauld's mentorship and instruction of women.

[15] All further in-text citations from Barbauld's poem will refer to the line number(s) cited.

[16] According to Samuel Johnson's dictionary, a "sentiment" is a "thought; notion; [or] opinion." Susan Levasseur points out that Wollstonecraft draws a distinction between sensuality and sensibility; while the former inflames the senses and is based on passion rather than reason, the latter combines reason with moral virtue and emotion (13-4).

[17] While Ross also reads the poem's final stanza ironically, he argues that Barbauld intended for her irony to uphold the *status quo* (217-20).

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The Two Marys: Hays Writes Wollstonecraft

Gina Luria Walker

Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays were linked, in the Reverend Richard Polwhele's phrase, as "unsex'd females" by the conservative British public. Little attention has been paid to Hays's role in shaping this image, although her life-writing was among the first to frame Wollstonecraft for posterity. Unremarked, as well, is the actual interplay between the two women – their frequent contact after Wollstonecraft's second suicide attempt; their self-conscious representations of themselves and each other; their concern for the other's reputation. In the last 23 months of Wollstonecraft's life, she and Hays participated in a *pas de trois* with William Godwin that challenged and further shaped the situational feminism the women were crafting together. This essay reads through the surviving documentary record to demonstrate that Wollstonecraft and Hays were intimately connected by the texts they wrote and read by and about each other as they struggled to forge a "revolution in female manners" out of their daily experience. Hays's neglected "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" (1800) emerged organically from their shared lives, both an homage, corrective to Godwin's *Memoirs* of his wife, and the template for Hays's major work, *Female Biography* (1803), informed by her mature interpretation of Wollstonecraft's precepts in *Rights of Woman*. In *Female Biography,* Hays counters Wollstonecraft's denial in *Rights of Woman* of the importance of exceptional women for the improvement of all women's understanding, revealing in 302 entries how much the struggles of such women have to teach us.

> "Mrs W——ft was not acquainted with the affair till the mischief was done __ & now alas! we can each be wiser for the other than for ourselves."
>
> - Mary Hays to William Godwin, [6 February 1796]. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 12.

Mary Hays was born in 1759, the same year as Mary Wollstonecraft, and died in 1843, 46 years after Wollstonecraft. She is still mainly remembered as the second late Enlightenment British feminist. In their

time, the two Marys were linked, in the Reverend Richard Polwhele's phrase, as "unsex'd females" by the conservative British public.[1] Little attention has been paid to Mary Hays's role in shaping this twinned image, although her life-writing was among the first to frame Wollstonecraft for posterity. Unremarked, as well, is the actual interplay between the two women – their frequent contact after Wollstonecraft's second suicide attempt; their self-conscious representations of themselves and each other; their concern for the other's reputation. In the last 23 months of Wollstonecraft's life, she and Hays participated in a *pas de trois* with William Godwin that challenged and further shaped the situational feminism the women were crafting together.

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The two women met in 1792, at Hays's request, following her enthusiastic reading of *Rights of Woman*, a gift from Baptist George Dyer.[3] "I was extremely gratified by this interview," Hays commented:

> This lady appears to me to possess the sort of genius which Lavater calls the one to ten million. Her conversation, like her writings, is brilliant, forcible, instructive and entertaining. She is the true disciple of her own system, and commands at once fear and reverence, admiration and esteem." (Wedd 5)

Hays immediately recognized Wollstonecraft's rare amalgam of conviction, character, and conduct because of her own training in the historical struggle for general toleration in which previous free-thinkers encouraged recognition of the morally heroic among the living. This tradition celebrated pioneers of unfettered inquiry and action, an exclusively male pantheon; Hays proposed Wollstonecraft as its first female member. Although she was competitive with other radical women in their circle, Hays's regard for Wollstonecraft proved unwavering, as did her subsequent generosity. Hays's earlier experiences with pioneering Unitarian activists and their wives – Theophilus and Hannah Lindsey, John and Jane Disney, Joseph and Mary Priestley, among others – as both thinkers and doers prepared her to recognize that Wollstonecraft was "the true disciple of her own system." Like the theologically heterodox, Wollstonecraft tried to live what she advocated.

A self-taught woman like Wollstonecraft, Hays bootstrapped her way into the intellectual community of English Nonconformists with no academic credentials. She relied on correspondence with "generous men,"[4] using the epistolary medium to further her education. She suffered from a sense of disability, as did other female autodidacts, because of her lack of formal instruction or institutional support. But the freedom of this situation allowed her to blur the boundaries between conventional literary genres and Classical pedagogy. During the last two years of Wollstonecraft's life, Hays's letters to William Godwin can be read, in Foucault's phrase, as life-writing of self and others. In her diurnal accounts, Hays deliberately represented Wollstonecraft as a heroic thinker, bruised woman, and confidante, using this *persona* to unite Wollstonecraft *and* herself as indivisible in the name of all women. Hays thus transformed the two Marys into a single emblem reflecting women's rights and woman's wrongs. She did so to each woman's peril. Despite their efforts to claim freedom for all women, ignominy, then neglect, awaited Hays and Wollstonecraft.

Both women were more hopeful in June 1792, when Hays initiated contact. Before Wollstonecraft left for France, the two women breakfasted together at Wollstonecraft's rooms where they discussed the travails of women writers. Soon after, Hays asked Wollstonecraft to read the preface to the collection of occasional pieces Hays was readying for publication. She had represented herself as "Eusebia," the learned widow with an interest in female education, in her earlier

pamphlet, *Cursory Remarks on the Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1791) that defended the communal practices of Rational Dissenters. In this first publication, Hays opened with an apology for the author's "great presumption" as "a woman, young, unlearned, unacquainted with any other language but her own," in responding to the erudite man whose polemic had provoked hers (Hays 3). The draft she now asked Wollstonecraft to review apparently repeated such supplication.

Wollstonecraft responded bluntly. From her perspective as a female veteran in male print culture, Wollstonecraft warned Hays of its gendered realities and the imperative of female autonomy. "Your male friends will still treat you like a woman," she instructed, "and many a man, for instance Dr. Johnson, Lord Littleton, and even Dr. Priestley, have insensibly been led to utter warm elogiums in private that they would be sorry to openly avow without some cooling explanatory ifs." Wollstonecraft passed on her own hard-won lesson about female vanity. "An author, especially a woman," she advised,

> should be cautious lest she hastily swallows the crude praises which partial friend and polite acquaintance bestow thoughtlessly when the applicating eye looks for them. In short, it requires great resolution to try rather to be useful than to please. With this remark in your head I must beg you to pardon any freedom whilst you consider the purpose of what I am going to add. __ Rest on yourself. (*Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* 210)

Hays modified her preface, and, probably, her references to Priestley in the book. She knew Priestley, heard him preach, socialized with him, read his works, and included him in the eponymous male character she created in her life-writing on Unitarian men in *Letters and Essays*. In her essay describing Unitarian afterlife, she even ventured to contradict him.

While Wollstonecraft was on the Continent, Hays published *Letters and Essays, Moral, and Miscellaneous* (1793), a collection of theological, philosophical, and feminist "sketches." Hays dedicated the work to Dr. John Disney, a Unitarian minister who may have preached sermons actually written by Hays at the Unitarian Essex Street Chapel. The presiding spirit in the book, however, was Wollstonecraft's. Hays acknowledged the flaws of her essays in the

preface to pre-empt male critics from doing so, but did not apologize. She now understood that such defects were the result of inadequate female education. Hays sounded the tones of male discourse in her salute to "the admirable advocate for the rights of woman (rights founded in nature, reason, and justice)," paying "a tribute of public respect [...] to the virtue and talents of a writer, who with equal courage and ability hath endeavoured to rescue the female mind from those prejudices, by which it has been systematically weakened" (*Letters and Essays* vi). Here, Hays posits Wollstonecraft as the champion of the enduring belief of Hays's life, that "in the intellectual advancement of women, and their consequent privileges in society, is to be traced the progress of civilization, or knowledge gradually superseding the dominion of *brute-force*."[5]

In the repressive climate of opinion during the war between Britain and the Revolutionary government in France, critical reaction to *Letters and Essays* was swift, savage, and yoked together the two Marys, with Hays depicted as Wollstonecraft's inept devotee. The conservative *English Review* attacked the work as "an abortion," described Hays as "the baldest disciple of Mrs. Wollstonecraft," and judged that "female philosophers while pretending to superior powers carry with them [...] a mental imbecility which *damns* them to fame."[6] Infamy is more like it: The two Marys were invoked to give feminism a bad name for the next 150 years.

Before encountering Wollstonecraft, Hays's single-minded pursuit of knowledge led her to study as a shadow student at the newest Dissenting Academy, New College Hackney. Defending the politically radical, short-lived institution in *Cursory Remarks* brought Hays to the attention of Cambridge mathematician and Unitarian William Frend, who wrote a complimentary letter to "Eusebia," her pen name, although he knew Hays was the author through a mutual friend. They met and corresponded occasionally. Frend assumed that, as a plain, bookish woman, Hays would expect only intellectual exchanges with him, but almost immediately, she desired more and told him so. At Frend's suggestion and out of her own desire to know more about the mental terrain in which he excelled that was traditionally off limits for women, in October, 1794, Hays initiated correspondence with William Godwin, the leading radical political philosopher of the day, asking to borrow a copy of his new, controversial, and expensive book, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Hays's request to Godwin was the impetus for an intense,

occasionally turbulent, relationship with him that endured over the next several years, initiating a series of interactions that changed her life, and his, and Wollstonecraft's, and their respective reputations.

By fall 1795, Hays and Godwin had established the ground rules for their exchanges: Hays wrote ruminative letters that Godwin answered mostly in person. Once William Frend moved from Cambridge to London, Hays acted on Wollstonecraft's example by moving out of her mother's house into rooms of her own in London in October, 1795. Like Wollstonecraft, Hays now joined the "new genus" of professional women writers; occasional paid employment reviewing novels for several radical publications provided income she needed to supplement the small annuity inherited from her father. Away from the judgmental eyes of her family, at the age of 37, Hays was at liberty to experiment with the subversive ideas she had been contemplating, in particular to transform her friendship with Frend into love by ever more vigorous epistolary persuasion.

Hays wrote to Godwin on the night of October 13, 1795, sitting alone in her new apartments at 30 Kirby Street in the Hatton Gardens section of London. During the past year she had adopted him as her "tutelar'y genius." Now she told him of the exhilaration and anxiety she felt at her great act of independence. She still wrestled with the question, "what benefits I propose to reap from this eccentric step?" She gave a provisional answer: "Shall I reply, a kind of, I know not what, satisfaction in the idea of *being free* … a desire of strengthening my mind by standing alone […] also, I will own, a latent hope of enjoying, occasionally, more of the intercourse & conversation that pleases me." The society she hoped for most was Frend's. In her newly autonomous state, Hays also had great expectations for her exchanges with Godwin. "I shall expect truth," she told him, "truth which by sexual prejudices, voluptuous & impertinent precautions, has hitherto been prevented, like the winds of heav'n, from visiting us too roughly!" (Hays to Godwin, Pforzheimer Collection: MH 2).

As she wrote to Godwin, Hays was aware of the other Mary who was nearby at the home of friends recovering from a second suicide attempt three days earlier. Wollstonecraft was recently returned to London in search of her faithless lover, Gilbert Imlay, father of her young daughter, Fanny. She found Imlay living with a younger actress. Already weighed down by her insights into the intractableness of woman's gendered place, on October 10, she wrote Imlay a note,

drenched her clothes, then threw herself into the Thames when she was rescued, against her will, by fishermen.

Wollstonecraft's presence as a "fallen woman" and her nearly successful effort to kill herself were of philosophical, as well as personal, importance to Hays, for the woman and her situation joined the crucial issues of Hays's female life that she had been debating with Godwin during the previous year. Hays pressed him to acknowledge the role of private feeling; to give credence to the cognitive, religious, sexual, and economic debility of women; and to heed the obstacles in the way of achieving general adherence to his advanced notions. Within the tiny, self-protective network of English radicals, Hays kept abreast of Wollstonecraft's movements, and, in turn, let Godwin in on her friend's depressed state, representing its meaning in her own terms, frequently comparing Godwin's lack of romantic experience with Wollstonecraft's excess, identifying Wollstonecraft and herself as objects of intolerance from even Godwin and his friends.

Hays was especially struck by Wollstonecraft's diminished status as the mother of an illegitimate child, who still chose to die for love. Hays knew herself to be the inverse of Wollstonecraft: she had contemplated suicide for the absence of a beloved. In the moment of Wollstonecraft's crisis, Hays joined the matters: both women's lives had been damaged by the magnetizing force of misogyny. Rather than repudiating or romanticizing Wollstonecraft's dilemma, Hays took responsibility for her benighted friend, shifted the earlier balance between them from stern mentor and aspiring apprentice, erotic expert and unattractive virgin, to an intentional solidarity uncommon among women.

She confided to Godwin that she had already defended "Mrs. Imlay's" illicit affair with Imlay to a group of mutual female acquaintances in which Hays positioned herself as innocent of sexual entanglement and therefore free of Christian guilt or social remorse. Hays traced the inextricable causality for Godwin between the privileging of male reason over female intuition, men's refusal to acknowledge the inapplicability of existing theory to women's real lives, and their blindness to the fettered condition of all women. Even between an enlightened man and woman as themselves, Hays discerned, gender interfered with mutual comprehension. "This is an argument which we certainly cannot feel with an equal degree of force," she insisted, "because society has, in these respects, made most

unjust, tyrannical, & barbarous, sexual distinctions: Distinctions which, if they were not tragical in their consequences, wou'd be contemptible & ridiculous" (Hays to Godwin, 20 November 1795. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 9).

Whether an object of male desire like Wollstonecraft, or scorned by men as undesirable like Hays, every woman stood alone. The example at hand was Wollstonecraft's present circumstance, interpreted through *Rights of Woman*: "These reflections recurred to me with additional force," Hays continued.

> Some ladies present, most amiable, sensible, & worthy, women, expressed their concern on a variety of accounts, & especially lamented that it would no longer be proper for them to visit Mrs W. I started at what I conceived to be bigotry, frankly declaring that it would have no effect upon my conduct, that I had visited her since, & shou'd receive much pleasure in having an opportunity of doing so again. (Hays to Godwin, 20 November 1795. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 9)

From Wollstonecraft's story, Hays drew some general truths. "Every one was liable to be led into mistakes by the illusions of the imagination," she told Godwin, "or the erring conclusions of the judgement, that we must not expect to find perfection […] at present, I only saw in Mrs W___s conduct a breach of civil institution which, no doubt, would bring with it, notwithstanding her superior fortitude & resources, civil inconveniences."

So deep were the pernicious influences of gender prejudice that, in defending Wollstonecraft, Hays was suspected of moral contagion. "I have since been told that the reflection has been suggested (not by any of the party alluded to) that 'as Miss Hays is so professed an admirer of Mrs W, it is to be hoped that she does not mean to imitate her conduct?' Here, was an exemplification of my friend's observations," a general reference to *Rights of Woman.* Despite, or perhaps because of, her own precepts, Wollstonecraft had given herself freely to the fierce pull of sexual desire, ignoring the claims of society. Hays understood this as a vulnerability peculiar to intellectual women, including herself. "While men pursue honor, pleasure, interest & ambition, as accords with their several dispositions," she explained, "[w]omen, who have too much sense, spirit, & delicacy, to degrade themselves by the vilest of all interchanges" in marriages or liaisons

made only for money, "remain insulated beings, & must be content tamely to look on, without taking any part in the great, tho' absurd & often tragical, drama of life." The aspiration of women like Wollstonecraft and Hays to transcend cultural expectations had no legitimate expression. Frequently, this friction provoked intellectual women to turn on themselves:

> Hence the eccentricities of conduct with which women of superior [minds have] been accused! the struggles, the despairing, though generous, efforts of an ardent spirit denied a scope for its exertions. The strong feelings & strong energies which properly directed, in a field sufficiently wide, might __ ah! what might they not have aided? __ forced back, & pent up, ravage & destroy the mind that generated them! (Hays to Godwin, 28 July 1795. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 6)

Once Wollstonecraft was sufficiently recovered from the rupture with Imlay to set up residence nearby, she and Hays saw each other frequently, discussing their intimate histories, suicide, chastity, and the somatic, as well as psychological, effects of their singular status as unmarried, self-aware women. They shared day-to-day events as well as established a professional relationship in which Wollstonecraft as an editor at the *Analytical Review* commissioned Hays to review new fiction. At the same time, Godwin recommended that Hays use her revelatory correspondence with him as the basis for a novel. She agreed to do so if he would serve as critic as she composed and set to writing. On Friday, January 8, 1796, Hays invited Godwin and Wollstonecraft to tea, reuniting her close associates who had met several years earlier and disliked each other. Two days later, Hays wrote to Godwin, thanking him for his "humane & tender consideration for my feelings, it is a proof of the sensibility & of the goodness of your heart." She reminded Godwin that during their tea, Wollstonecraft had protested against Godwin's attentions to Hays's depressed spirits over a final rejection by an unidentified man. Nevertheless, Hays now confided, Wollstonecraft "told me, that it has raised you greatly in her esteem." She cautioned that Godwin should not be fooled by Wollstonecraft's vivacity. "I was glad to see her so lively," Hays wrote, "tho' I knew the gaiety to be very superficial, she has been a great sufferer & with all her strength of mind, her sufferings had well nigh proved fatal __ happy for her, & happy for

me she is yet, preserved! __I shall ever love her, for her affectionate sympathies, she has a warm & generous heart!" (Hays to Godwin, 11 January 1796. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 11).

Failure in love drew the two women closer together. For all their combined "strength of mind," each had succumbed to the rush of sexual fantasies and misread the man who aroused them. Now, they demanded honesty, clarity, and rigor from themselves and each other. Together, they put their minds to their lives in productive ways, an exercise essential to improving female judgment. For Hays, it was also necessary in responding to the "collision of mind to mind" that Godwin demanded as he reviewed the first pages of her novel. To protect Frend's reputation, Hays had not named him as the object of her desire and disappointment to either Wollstonecraft or Godwin. Godwin criticized her now for going back on her promise of complete candor, and still expecting his honest opinion of her "fiction":

> All your misfortunes seem to have arisen from concealment. You brooded over your emotions, & considered them as a sacred deposit. I have myself received twenty letters from you, & seen you almost as often, during the pendency of this whole transaction, without your having ever given me the slightest hint. Yet, if I be a fit counsellor now, I was a fit counsellor then. Your folly was so gross, that, if it had been exposed to the light of day, it could not have subsisted for a moment. Even now you suppress the name of your hero. (Clemit 1: 155)

In her reply, Hays emphasized the exclusively female experiences she and Wollstonecraft shared: "Lately, a strong sympathy of feeling, & similarity, in some respects, of situation," she wrote, "has produced an unreserved communication of friendship & confidence between Mrs Woollstonecraft & myself." She explained that through a third party, Wollstonecraft had become privy to the identity of the man who would not return Hays's love. Hays had acknowledged Frend's name to Wollstonecraft, who she judged would empathize with her, but not to Godwin who she knew would not. "Mrs W——ft was not acquainted with the affair till the mischief was done __ & now alas! we can each be wiser for the other than for ourselves" (Hays to Godwin, [6 February 1796]. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 12).

In March, Wollstonecraft reciprocated Hays's support by accompanying her to Frend's residence, entering first to announce

Hays's visit. Hays described the episode to Godwin, without divulging Frend's name:

> "I am come (said I, smiling) to call upon you for the exercise of less than a Christian duty, the forgiveness, not of an enemy but, of a friend __ I have, no doubt, been guilty of errors, who is free?" __ I held out my hand __ He took it, & replied to me, with a degree of cordiality. The past was no farther alluded to. __ I ask'd him, if he wou'd, with [Wollstonecraft] present, come & drink tea with me, to this he assented without hesitation. A few days since, they fulfilled their engagement, two other friends were also of the party. Whether he will ever think proper to call on me again, I know not… (Hays to Godwin, 8 March 1796. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 16)

Wollstonecraft's camaraderie in such a delicate maneuver was instructive and strengthening for Hays. "Since this," she told Godwin, she saw

> the whole affair with a cooler eye… my hopes have, now, entirely ceased, & with them, some illusions appear to be losing their force __ my mind seems regaining a firmer tone — it is no longer convulsed with uncertainty....It is no bad method of examining our motives & actions, to try how far we dare reveal them to a judicious & benevolent friend. (Hays to Godwin, 8 March 1796. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 16)

Hays turned her cooler eye on the inexperienced Godwin, several times wishing him romantic entanglement, unaware that she was prophetic: "I wish you had ever loved!" (Hays to Godwin, MH 15) and, again, "I wish you, in return for all yr crimes, to be most desparately & *hopelessly* in love – Beware!" (Hays to Godwin, [29 April/3 May 1796]. Pforzheimer Collection: MH 20).

Meeting Wollstonecraft and Godwin in company, Hays observed the growing intimacy between them. She was happy to play matchmaker, but her solitary status, once again, intensified her private unhappiness. The dynamics among the three altered: instead of encouraging Hays, Godwin grew concerned about the perverse effect of one deeply feeling Mary on the other. Soon after they became lovers, he urged Wollstonecraft to resolve to be happy and to stay

away from the depressive Hays: "You deserve to be so," he wrote, fearing that

> Every thing that interferes with it, is weakness & wandering; & a woman, like you, can, must, shall, shake it off. Afford, for instance, no food for the morbid madness, & no triumph to the misanthropical gloom, of [Miss Hays], your afternoon visitor. Call up, with firmness, the energies, which...you so eminently possess. (Godwin to Wollstonecraft, Wardle 17)

Godwin represented Hays as the self-absorbed, dependent woman, who despite her serious intellectual competence was incapable of acting upon her insights into the disparity between male and female autonomy, especially in romantic love. Yet the close friendship between the two women persisted, and the trio met often.

Their informal notes to each other speak of intertwined lives that required shifting confidences. On one occasion, Hays wrote to Godwin about Wollstonecraft's sensitivity: "NB Do not tell Mrs I __ y, that I suspected she did not like criticism __ I love her __ a word in which is comprehended every thing that is kind __ it wou'd grieve me to offend her" (Hays to Godwin MH, 23). In turn, Wollstonecraft urged Hays to be the disciple of their shared feminist beliefs, and after the final farewell, give up her hopeless grief over William Frend: "Pray do not make any more allusion to painful feelings, past and gone," she wrote, "I have been most hurt at your not-labouring to acquire more contentment."

In the new year, Wollstonecraft had occasion to defend Hays and her recently published roman à clef, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). Hays created a fiction out of living documents, her correspondence with Frend and Godwin, in which the heroine offered herself to the character based on Frend and revealed to the character based on Godwin that she had contemplated suicide. "I have not time, at present," Wollstonecraft wrote, "or I would tell you how I defended your novel yesterday __ that is your character, to Mr. Barbauld, with whom I dined, you are stigmatized as a Philosophess__ a Godwinian __ I assured him that your nove[l] would not undermine religion, &c." (Mary Wollstonecraft to Mary Hays, ed. Todd 400). Readers continued to conflate Hays and Emma Courtney. In 1800, Scottish Evangelical novelist Elizabeth Hamilton drew on her acquaintance with Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and their circle in her wicked satire,

Memoirs of Modern Philosophers. Hamilton was especially savage in her caricature of Hays as the sex-crazed, man-hunting, ideology-prating Brigettina Botherim, a representation that stuck to Hays until well into the twentieth century.

Hays was among the confidantes informed that Wollstonecraft was pregnant, and then that she and Godwin had married. When the infant girl was born, Hays was among the close friends who visited Wollstonecraft. A few days later, Hays called and saw that her friend was dying. Hays called again the next day, but Godwin informed her there were already enough people attending his wife and refused her admission. Hays insisted but Godwin prevailed. Their altercation was overheard by a female caretaker. Hays never saw Wollstonecraft again.

Hays made claim to Wollstonecraft in the first death notice, although it was published without attribution in October. Hays incorporated all the elements of her Wollstonecraft, elucidating how "this extraordinary woman, no less distinguished by admirable talents and a masculine tone of understanding than by active humanity, exquisite sensibility, and endearing qualities of heart," was "quick to feel, and indignant to resist the iron hand of despotism, whether civil or intellectual" ("Obituary" 233). She referred to a more substantial tribute being written by Godwin, already at work on his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1798, six months after Wollstonecraft's death, in tandem with his edition of her love letters to Imlay. Not surprisingly, the two texts created an uproar.

In *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft had posed a prophetic question: "When do we hear of women who, starting out of obscurity, boldly claim respect on account of their great abilities or daring virtues? Where are they to be found?" (*Rights of Woman* 79). Hays responded to Wollstonecraft's query in 1800. In an extended memoir, she represented Wollstonecraft as both partisan and victim of the historical struggle of the imaginary lineage of free-thinkers – the first woman in the chain. Following the chronology that Godwin had constructed in his *Memoirs*, Hays told Wollstonecraft's story as a female biography, different from the male vitas of Great Men that dominated life-writing, and that informed Godwin's portrait, as he wrote in the preface to his *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft, as the "glorious dead" (43). Hays described Wollstonecraft's difficult childhood and adolescence, her haphazard education, and the

obstacles to achieving the talents Wollstonecraft was compelled to realize. After attempts at the trio of sanctioned ladylike employments as companion, governess, and teacher, Wollstonecraft discovered her calling as thinker, writer, and editor. Hays speculated: Wollstonecraft's "mind probably owed its activity to the difficult circumstances in which she had been placed, to the force of her passions, and to the early necessity for the exertion of her powers" ("Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" 413). Women, too, might be roused to greatness by struggle.

In "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft," Hays drew from Wollstonecraft's published and unpublished writings, including her love letters to Imlay that Godwin had made public. Hays interleaved Wollstonecraft's revelatory letters to Imlay to demonstrate the permeable membrane between private and public texts that attested to women's experience of misogyny. As Wollstonecraft aspired to "interrupt the conversation of canonical forefathers" in *Rights of Woman*, so Hays insisted on blasting open the peepholes through which contemporaries spun gossip. Wollstonecraft "[had] always been fond of tracing to its source in nature any prevailing custom," and Hays exposed the harsh realities that Godwin elided in his portrait of his wife in his *Memoirs*. The one-sided conversation between Wollstonecraft and Imlay that Godwin published and Hays excerpted was direct evidence of the local, specific, and dire effects of gender prejudice. There was no need to invent theories or excuses for the wrongs of women: the inequities in sexual relations were painfully exposed in the searing letters Wollstonecraft wrote as Imlay's interest in her waned.

Hays wrote Wollstonecraft's experiences to make crucial connections between herself and her beloved friend, and other female intellectuals, as a separate and further marginalized cohort. "There are few situations in which a woman of cultivated understanding has not occasion to observe and deplore," she wrote, "the systematic vassalage, the peculiar disadvantages, civil and social, to which she is subjected, even in the most polished societies, on the account of her sex" ("Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" 7). Such women existed in a limbo between feudal superstition and the dream of enlightenment. "It might be difficult to convince such a woman," she continued, "conscious of superiority to the majority of men with whom she converses, that nature has placed between them, in what respects intellectual attainments, an insuperable barrier" ("Memoirs of Mary

Wollstonecraft" 422). Hays called upon her idiosyncratic study of William Enfield's translation of *The History of Philosophy* (1791) from Brucker's *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (1743) for an example: any thinking woman "would be tempted to remind such partial reasoners of the reply given to the philosopher who disputed the existence of motion, when his adversary gravely rose up and walked before him" ("Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" 422).

"Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" was an opportunity to complement, critique, and correct Godwin's *Memoirs*. Hays drew attention to the feminist precursor to *Rights of Woman* in Catharine Macaulay's *Treatise on Education*, in this way intimating a genealogy of female thinkers. She addressed the calumny Wollstonecraft had incurred as mother of a young daughter who dared to die for a man. Hays knew from Wollstonecraft's accounts in their conversations soon after her second, nearly fatal, suicide attempt, that "in these terrible moments, while her purpose remained unshaken, the idea of her child forcibly obtruded itself, awakening all the mother in her heart" ("Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" 449).

At her death, Wollstonecraft was composing her second novel, *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman* which was published posthumously by Godwin. Hays read the unfinished fiction, like the incomplete life, as testimony to the extreme discrepancy between Wollstonecraft's visionary ideas and the risks she took to be free of societal constraints. Wollstonecraft acted on her sexual and intellectual passions. "The laws of nature are paramount to the customs of society," Hays wrote, "its dictates will not be silenced by factitious precepts. Those who, without guilt or imprudence, find themselves excluded from the common solace of their species, will be led to consider the reasonableness of this privation, of which its injustice tends to aggravate its importance" ("Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" 454).Wollstonecraft was isolated as a woman thinker and writer because of sexual hypocrisy and the imperative that a woman have no story to be told against her. Wollstonecraft lived too magnanimously to care about reputation in such reductionist terms. Among the common themes developed in Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman* and Hays's *Victim of Prejudice* (1799), her second novel, was the rebellious woman as social outlaw. Reflecting on her own and Wollstonecraft's battles, Hays articulated the predictable fate of such unconventional women whose sensibility and ambition impels them to "over[step] the bounds prescribed to them [and]…by a single error,

they become involved in a labyrinth of perplexity and distress" ("Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" 455). Taking a leaf out of Godwin's political commentary in *Things as They Are: or, Caleb Williams* (1794), Hays pointed to the severe social persecution that forces women "from the haunts of civil life" ("Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" 455).

The conclusion to "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" was both an elegy to "a judicious & benevolent friend" and a prayer for the future of that friend's shared vision for enlightened feminism. "Her own sex have lost, in the premature fate of this extraordinary woman, an able champion," Hays lamented. "Yet she has not laboured in vain: the spirit of reform is silently pursuing its course. Who can mark its limits?" ("Memoirs of Wollstonecraft" 459). In representing Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays validated her own life-in-writing. Her Wollstonecraft evolved to reflect Hays's understanding in changing times. In this way, in death as in life, the two Marys sustained each other.

Hays's omission of Wollstonecraft from her major work, *Female Biography*, has continued to be misread by most commentators. The memoir of Wollstonecraft formed the template for Hays's collective biographies of other women, allowing her to link Wollstonecraft's struggle to the universal condition of women's lives. This was complicated terrain for Hays, because Wollstonecraft had dismissed the importance of exceptional women in *Rights of Woman*, defining them as those women "who, from having received a masculine education, have acquired courage and resolution" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 101). At the conclusion of *Rights of Woman*'s "Chapter IV. Observations on the State of Degradation to which Woman is Reduced by Various Causes," Wollstonecraft argues that all women are degraded because of their lack of education. In a footnote she identifies several learned female figures – Sappho, Eloisa, Mrs. Macaulay, the Empress of Russia, Madame d'Eon, "&c," to pose a question: "These and many more, may be reckoned exceptions; and are not all heroes, as well as heroines, exceptions to general rules?" And provides her own answer: "I wish to see women neither heroines nor brutes; but reasonable creatures" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* n. 51, 101).

With time for reflection that Wollstonecraft was denied, Hays now recognized Wollstonecraft's error. Women who struggled to access male knowledge "have acquired courage and resolution"

(Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 101). Their efforts mattered to all women, whether acknowledged or not by men. Beyond this, Hays discerned that competent women, albeit autodidacts, might produce new knowledge distinct from and outside the erudite cultures of traditional teaching and learning. By these criteria, Wollstonecraft was exceptional, and Hays aspired to be. Both were compelled to seek the life of the mind. Their haphazard educations and interactions with generous men had encouraged them to risk becoming thinking women. Yet they knew themselves and each other as simultaneously reasonable and irrational beings, caught within what each several times imagined as "the magic circle" of misogyny. Out of grief, loneliness, and clarity, Hays broke free of the compelling personal hold Wollstonecraft had exerted on her to write Wollstonecraft as both exceptional and real, resolute and vulnerable, the everywoman who defied the persistent and prevailing myth that all women are undifferentiated daughters of Eve.

Wollstonecraft's death, a nearly final rupture with Godwin, and the prolonged cold war in England against suspected subversives left Hays isolated. At the nadir of her life, Hays recognized that the process of writing "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" had crystallized and strengthened her conviction that telling an exceptional woman's life was the first step to constructing an alternative narrative of the past to conventional history, mostly by and about men. From this, Hays conceived the idea of a collection of women's lives, like the multi-volume *Biographia Britannica*, then edited by Unitarian Andrew Kippis, that included few women. Hays's "female biographies" would be modeled on the entries in Pierre Bayle's skeptical *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697) that criticized and corrected orthodox accounts of the past in revisionist commentary on particular figures. During the next three years Hays sought and found evidence of a legion of "reasonable creatures" that formed their own class, like men, of "productive genius and talent" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 101). The six volumes *of Female Biography* present the stories of 300-plus women, remembered and forgotten in the historical record, of interest to Hays because they attest to women's energetic achievements in the face of men's refusal to tolerate their competence. Determined and subversive, like the figures she highlights, Hays produced the first women's intellectual history in English, the first in any language since Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies* (1405), and the first by either male or female compilers since

Thomas Hewyood's *Generall Historie of Women* (1624, 1657) to include impious women.

Female Biography was the fruition of Hays's deep thought on the problems of reputation, manners, and attitudes as these were filtered through millennia of male intolerance toward women and women's surrender of the power to control their own lives because they lacked the knowledge to resist. With the memoir of Wollstonecraft already published, Hays now selected women who embodied the values she and Wollstonecraft had defined together. Hays included two women Wollstonecraft had known, Manon Roland, Girondist martyr of the French Revolution, and Catharine Macaulay, pioneering historian of English liberties. The women's self-writing was an integral element of Hays's portraits, as well as the assessments, positive and negative, of their contemporaries. Hays quoted big swatches of text from the recent English translation of Roland's provocative *Appeal to Impartial Posterity* (1795). Hays did original research for the entry on Macaulay, tracking down her second husband's sister for accurate information that refuted the disgrace of Macaulay's marriage to a much younger man. Demonstrating that learned women could be both reasonable and ardent, Hays assembled for the first time productive women in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy like Hypatia and "Newtonians" Laura Bassi and Anne Dacier; members of the "new genus" of professional women writers; women who led armies, forged political alliances, initiated apostolic revivals, achieved fluency in 11 languages, painted, traveled, and the many queens who, Hays posited, were the sole class of females positioned to deploy real power. In every "female biography" for which she had evidence, Hays calibrated the woman's obedience or resistance to religious and social norms for romantic and sexual behavior, emphasizing that this was often the touchstone of women's reputations despite, or because of, their other achievements.

In pursuing such an ambitious project, Hays sought her share in the booming market for the new genre of biography. Entrepreneur Richard Phillips published "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" in *The Annual Necrology* for 1797-8, one of his fledgling publications that focused on historical lives. Hays knew that Phillips was signing authors and editors for large scale biographical projects. Her associates, like Godwin, who received such contracts stood to make substantial royalties. Mindful of both consumer demand and the potential to educate women, Hays addressed a wide audience of

female readers, eager for lives to emulate and accounts of the past in which they could identify with female actors. The six-volume sets produced substantial enough royalties that Hays was able to buy a little "cabin" of her own outside London. In 1807, Jane Austen's aristocratic sister-in-law was given *Female Biography* by her elder son as a wedding anniversary present. Austen probably made use of Hays's "female biographies" when she revised and composed her novels during extended visits to Godmersham, home to Lady Elizabeth and Edward Austen Knight. Hays's imagined community of real women may well have informed Austen's fictional ones.

Standing on Wollstonecraft's shoulders, in her mature works, Hays sketched a female historiography based on an imaginary lineage of active, bustling women, deeply engaged in the great struggles of their times. From the interstices of their lives the two Marys had endorsed a new, collaborative way of being women that Hays exemplified in the concept of "female biography." Hays created a feminist icon of Wollstonecraft in her "Memoirs," then demonstrated its reach to women past, present, and future in 300 other "female biographies." The work of visionaries is never done, as Wollstonecraft and Hays both knew, yet their mutual vision continues to inspire. The texts of Wollstonecraft and Hays endure: they teach us to be wiser for each other than they were for themselves.

NOTES

[1] See Polwhele's *The Unsex'd Females.*

[2] All quotes are from Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, eds. A. K. Mellor and N. Chao. New York: Longman, 2006. Hereafter referred to as *Rights of Woman*. Future references will appear parenthetically within the body of the text; Mary Hays, *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries*. London: Phillips, 1803. Hereafter referred to as *Female Biography*. Future references will appear parenthetically within the body of the text.

[3] The copy of *Rights of Woman* that Dyer gave to Hays is included in the Mary Hays archive in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Hays's markings and those of her younger sister, Elizabeth, can still be seen. I appreciate permission to cite

manuscript materials from The Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Unless otherwise indicated, all biographical information about Hays is taken from Walker, *Mary Hays (1759–1843)*; Walker, *The Idea of Being Free:* Walker and Ditchfield, *"'Energetic Sympathies of Truth and Feeling'"*; Walker, "Women's Voices."

[4] A term used by Hays's young lover, John Eccles, in their correspondence. See Walker, "Love Letters."

[5] Hays, "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft," 8.

[6] [John?] Evans to Mary Hays, n.d., Pforzheimer MSS, JE 2202.

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"Defects of Temper": Mary Wollstonecraft's Strategies of Self-Representation

Fiore Sireci

In the past decade, psychological interpretations of Wollstonecraft's writing have given way to analyses of rhetoric, genre, and political discourse. However, the relationship between the historical Wollstonecraft and the authorial personae who appear in the works remains a rewarding area of study. Mary Wollstonecraft's experience as writer in different genres and in particular her involvement in professional literary reviewing for the *Analytical Review* gave her the capacity to employ authorial self-representation as a form of political rhetoric. In particular, Wollstonecraft's appreciation for Rousseau's *Confessions* reveals an interest in the strategic use of emotive postures. The essay analyzes the various forms of self-representation that Wollstonecraft undertakes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

What sort of person wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)? This has been asked more frequently and more urgently of Mary Wollstonecraft than of most other writers. Readers of Wollstonecraft have related to her in various ways, sometimes engaging in an intimate relationship with the author as confidante, mother figure, or political warrior. Towards the end of the twentieth century, as Wollstonecraft and her landmark work became central to feminist literary history, interpretations could be widely divergent, but one particular approach takes away much of her agency. In this variant of psychological criticism, the works are symptomatic of the allegedly tortured life of this woman. In the introduction to the Penguin edition of *Rights of Woman*, a dated but still popular edition, Miriam Brody characterizes this school of thought in colorful, metaphorical language:

> Writing about rationality, Wollstonecraft repressed her own sensibility and desire, but these have risen to the surface of the text elliptically, accounting for its apparent disorganization, digressiveness, sporadic examples, apostrophes and outbursts.

> All of these are the surface rumblings of the author's repression of feeling. (70)

Few scholars now indulge in long-distance diagnoses such as this, where texts are seen as transparent and symptomatic, but some important and rewarding questions remain, and will remain with us as long as *Rights of Woman* is read. If we set aside the theoretical debate about whether the author exists at all or if there is anything "outside the text," we might ask: Can we actually discern the woman behind the published writings? How much of herself did Wollstonecraft allow us to see?

During her lifetime, Wollstonecraft was known to the reading public as the matronly educator of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), the tough and principled book reviewer of the *Analytical Review* (1788-1797), the radical political writer of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and the stout advocate for women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. A more sensitive and deeply meditative Wollstonecraft appears in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1794), but she still provides the sharp political and social commentary found in her *Vindications* and in her reviews, and moments of vulnerability in *Letters* are edifying, not desperate. However we choose to understand the relationship between Wollstonecraft the woman and Wollstonecraft the author, it is clear that the narrative postures taken up in these works presented an aura of authority for the purpose of educating her readers.

The control of Wollstonecraft's public image was abruptly taken out of her hands. Ten days after giving birth to her second child, the future writer of *Frankenstein*, Wollstonecraft died of puerperal fever. Just months later, her husband hastily published a biography as well as a set of stormy letters she had written to her American lover years earlier. In the *Memoirs of the Author of the Rights of Woman* (1798), the reading public was first introduced to a woman quite different from the one they had come to know. Here, readers meet a woman who, in the midst of the whirring guillotines of Robespierre's Terror in 1793-4, fell in love with a dashing American captain, bore his child, and tearfully pursued him until, out of utter frustration with his ambivalence, twice attempted suicide. The letters Mary Wollstonecraft wrote to Gilbert Imlay, collected in *Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), seem ready made to

complete the portrait of the woman who bled out her passions onto the page, and could swing from manic highs to the depths of extreme insecurity.

The contrast between this Wollstonecraft and the proto-feminist crusader of *Rights of Woman* has never ceased to provoke strong reactions in readers, including professional critics. In 2001, a *New York Times* book review claims that the "irrefutable evidence" of Wollstonecraft's letters reveals a "darker agenda" behind her work: "[T]he letters give us another Wollstonecraft, a woman so blindly self-absorbed and unheroically in need of constant reassurance we can't figure out whether her accomplishments stemmed from courage or a maniacal effort to deflect despair" (Shulevitz 23). Shulevitz here is reviewing Janet Todd's biography, *Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (2000), in which we meet a passionate, self-contradictory and insecure Mary Wollstonecraft. The contrast between the private and public woman is interesting indeed. But does this mean that we ought to then scour the works published in her lifetime for clues of her "mania," and "despair"? If anything, accomplished writers such as Wollstonecraft – and Godwin – were quite aware that readers were eagerly monitoring their writings for clues to personality, and exploited this curiosity. The very title of Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of the Rights of Woman* invites us to look behind the curtain. In a sense, William Godwin dismantled a public image that Wollstonecraft had developed over a lifetime.

Wollstonecraft was a highly visible figure, a literary celebrity, and, because she was also a skilled writer and reviewer, was capable of presenting herself in her published texts in ways that complicate our attempts to read her actual emotional life through them, even *with* the help of her personal letters and the biographical material that are now available. Thus, we would benefit from approaching *Rights of Woman* not as a work whose "surface" is warped by anger and passion, not as a haphazard work that is a result of haste, but as a work whose prose and structure reflect years of practice in the contentious field of eighteenth-century print culture. Sigmund Freud has cautioned that even if texts can betray something of the impulses of their authors, we should not ignore the writer's ability to craft their self-representation: "In the first place, [the artist] understands how to work over his daydreams in such a way as to make them lose what is too personal about them […] He understands, too, how to tone them down so that they do not easily betray their origin from proscribed sources" (Freud

376-7). In other words, personal experiences may certainly contribute to the shape and energy of a text, but skilled authors know how to keep readers from seeing any direct connection to these sources. This essay argues that in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft drew upon a set of narrative postures that she had developed throughout her career as professional literary reviewer, educational and political writer. This is especially important in *Rights of Woman*, where her primary task is to examine the writings and beliefs of cultural, literary, and political authorities such as John Milton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and a number of respected educational writers. Wollstonecraft chose not to present herself as a woman author who was reticent to enter into proscribed areas of public debate, a posture she discerned in her female contemporaries and utterly rejected. Instead, she debated powerful male authorities from a position of equality.

In the eighteenth century, readers expected to feel a pure sympathetic thrill as they shared in the emotions of the author. Male authors, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Edmund Burke, exploited this expectation and delivered influential political statements through the medium of a vulnerable, and hyper-emotive narrator or character. For all her vigor as an author, Wollstonecraft realized that a woman could not practice the kind of public disclosure that was available to men and hope to retain an authoritative voice in the public arena. Rousseau's accomplishment in the *Confessions* provided a model of authorship which blended radical politics with a persuasive and apparently intimate expressive voice. In her review of the *Confessions*, written the same year as her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, and just months before planning *Rights of Woman*, we see that Wollstonecraft appreciates Rousseau's sincerity. However, it becomes clear that the composition of her own work is tempered with an understanding of the limits upon even the most daring female author.

It is the task of this essay to locate and analyze the various forms of self-representation that Wollstonecraft presents in *Rights of Woman*. In the first section, I examine Wollstonecraft's reviews of the *Confessions*, her first lengthy interaction with Rousseau in a public forum. The second section takes up the debate over Wollstonecraft's role as republican citizen, one that was distinctly gendered as male. This is only one of the many postures in *Rights of Woman*, and one which she altered significantly as she took up a proto-feminist agenda. In fact, in order for *Rights of Woman* to come into its own, Wollstonecraft must break decisively with her mentors in the

republican political tradition. The third section presents a close reading of *Rights of Woman*, following the shifts in Wollstonecraft's self-representation. The essay concludes with a consideration of Mary Hays, among Wollstonecraft's last standing allies during the period of backlash after her death. Hays's publication of *Female Biography* (1803) represents the culmination of her own experiences in dealing with the tremendous pressures on a public female radical writer. This work vindicates the public reputations of hundreds of women throughout history, as well as contemporary to Hays, and stands as a powerful response to those who would wrest agency from female thinkers and doers.

Biography and Autobiography

In the Preface to *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), Wollstonecraft's first novel, she makes a statement of extraordinary self-assertion and self-consciousness. Unlike the prefaces of many contemporary female writers, here Wollstonecraft does not affect a pose of utter modesty or plead for forbearance, but speaks as both an educated reader and an accomplished writer. She declares that in good novels, characters are infused with the spirit of the author: "These compositions only have the power to delight, and carry us willing captives where the soul of the author is exhibited, and animates the hidden springs" (Wollstonecraft, *Mary* 3). The Mary Wollstonecraft we have come to know in *Rights of Woman* and other more mature works, with her firm, rational tone, is already present. Just one year after the publication of this novel, Wollstonecraft began working as a reviewer for the *Analytical Review*. Her proud announcement to her sister that she is "the first of a new genus," a female critic who supports herself by writing, is well known to students of Wollstonecraft. Her duties gradually expanded beyond her initial purview of novels by women, educational texts, and poetry until she was counted on to review important new works of philosophy and politics (Waters 417).

A crucial moment arrives when Wollstonecraft is asked to review the latest volume of Rousseau's *Confessions*, published posthumously. The *Confessions* was a groundbreaking work by any measure, offering an unprecedented level of intimacy and frankness. Rousseau's early adolescence, in which his unconventional sexual urges begin to develop, might have been particularly shocking to an audience steeped

in writings on proper conduct and morals. After being beaten by his female caretaker, Rousseau begins to yearn for more beatings, and as an adult can only be aroused by assuming a submissive role. While this may all seem the stuff of lurid novels, it is important to remember that the autobiography is another medium by which Rousseau brings forward his republican politics. As Robert Darnton has shown, Rousseau's ability to provoke visceral reactions in his readers contributed greatly to the dissemination of his core political ideas. One of the lessons of Rousseau's experience with Mlle. Lambercier is that the young man's sexual character is distorted by contact with a punitive authority figure.[1]

Wollstonecraft's lengthy review of Rousseau's *Confessions* was an opportunity to distinguish herself amongst other writers in her field, and she does so with characteristic force. Wollstonecraft approves of Rousseau's autobiography primarily for its frankness and the revealed vulnerability of the author. Wollstonecraft contrasts her independent assessment of the merits of Rousseau with the knee-jerk moralism of contemporary critics:

> [T]hose who admire Rousseau as a writer, respect his integrity, and love the foundation of his singular character, will not be extreme to mark the shades which throw it forward; – in short, without screening himself behind the pronoun WE, the reviewer's *phalanx*, the writer of this article will venture to say, that he should never expect to see that man do a generous action, who could ridicule Rousseau's interesting account of his feelings and reveries – who could, in all the pride of wisdom, falsely so called, despise such a heart when naked before him. (*Analytical Review* 228)

Rousseau satisfies Wollstonecraft's primary criteria. The character emerging in the *Confessions* is indisputably authentic. No one would willingly reveal so many compromising facts about himself unless they were true. Rousseau is not afraid to present himself as he is, a quality which is underappreciated by those who judge him merely on his moral failings. Wollstonecraft identifies a normative and slavish consensus amongst critics, who overlook the more profound educative potential in this work. She also appreciates Rousseau's complexity and humanity. When he is faced with moral choices, he does not always choose well. In this sense, he shares much with the characters

in the novels Wollstonecraft most admires, characters that are ripe for rehabilitation. In her review of Helen Maria Williams's *Julia* (1790), Wollstonecraft remarks that "A good tragedy or novel" is "not the most moral work," meaning that ideal characters should not simply model perfect behavior, as some of her fellow critics insisted. Instead, the novelist must depict "those *human passions*, that too frequently cloud the reason, and lead *mortals* into dangerous errors […] which raise the most lively emotions, and leave the most lasting impression on the memory" (*Analytical Review* 253). In order for the novel to fulfill its educational function, it must present people as they are, as flawed as human beings can be.

When Wollstonecraft was planning and writing *Rights of Woman*, she strove for some of the same ideals of emotional sincerity. On October 6, 1791, Wollstonecraft wrote to William Roscoe to say that she was writing a book "in which *I* myself, for I cannot *yet* attain to Homer's dignity, shall certainly appear, head and heart – but this between ourselves – pray respect a woman's secret" (*Letters* 190). As Janet Todd explains, Wollstonecraft's reference to Homer was a commonplace example of an author who removes himself from the text (*Letters* 190). What do we make of Wollstonecraft's mention of "a woman's secret" and her claim that she is not quite accomplished enough to completely mask her personality? Is this a piece of lighthearted play or does this reveal the profound vulnerability seen by Shulevitz? Significantly, the vulnerable, striving woman whom we meet in this letter, and others, does not "appear" in *Rights of Woman* at all. Even in discussions of intimacy and sexual attraction, Wollstonecraft herself is well hidden.

> Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. (*Rights of Woman* 47)

Readers of this passage are made conscious of the sex of the writer, a rare moment in *Rights of Woman*. However, the strong woman who appears here does not resemble William Roscoe's teasing, feminine

confidante. At the same time, we find moments of dramatic emotion throughout the text, usually in the form of indignation, and impatience with both condescending men and superficial women. But does this then mean that the "surface of the text" is turbulent with barely contained anger, as we see in Brody's comment above, or should we conclude that the high toned pose of virtue and advocacy is a desperate attempt to mask the insecurities in her personal life, as we are told by Shulevitz?

Rather than opt for interpretations that depict Wollstonecraft as a victim of personal history, there is plenty of evidence to read her indignation at the treatment of women as *justified* and *strategic* emotionality, a common enough feature of eighteenth-century political writing. One might compare her more heated moments to Edmund Burke's melodramatic tears for Marie Antoinette, and for the death of chivalry in a post-Revolutionary Europe, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). I know of no scholar or historian who has speculated that Burke's tortured psyche was the source of his extravagant show of emotion when he describes the queen as a morning star, the revolutionaries as brutes and rapists, and the chevaliers of France dejected men who have become unable to defend the honor of such a woman. Instead, Burke is recognized, and rightly so, as a masterful stylist and rhetorician for exploiting the sensibilities of his audience while shaping a quintessential statement of conservative politics: "Burke sought to play on the sensibility of his readers, encouraging them to come to her [Marie Antoinette's] defense and thereby to the defense of the old order" (O'Neill 146). Note that Burke is given full intentional agency for the composition of his text.

Revising Republicanism

The first well-developed persona that appears in *Rights of Woman* is the virtuous republican citizen. In the Dedication, Wollstonecraft addresses Talleyrand, delegate to the National Assembly of the French Republic, on equal terms, declaring that while she battles for women, she is not the typical woman: "I plead for my sex – not for myself" (*Rights of Woman* 15). She is, rather, a stoic figure who exhibits extreme mental and physical fortitude: "independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren

heath" (15). Implicitly claiming one of the prerogatives of the republican citizen, she takes the floor in a virtual Senate to argue from a moral high ground: "Consider, I address you as a legislator, whether, when men contend for their freedom […], it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women […]?" (17). The equivocation in this passage is intriguing. Is she addressing a legislator, or is she speaking *as* a legislator? The forum Wollstonecraft is occupying here is the sphere of public debate made possible by a vigorous print culture, but it is a republic nevertheless, a republic of letters in which she had grown comfortable as the authoritative critic of critics. Chapter 9 of *Rights of Woman*, a critique of the "distinctions in society," gives voice once again to a republican disdain for the luxurious classes.

It has been argued that Wollstonecraft's character here owes much to the republican discourse in works such as James Burgh's *Political Disquisitions* (1744-45). It is true that we can see clear connections between Wollstonecraft's rhetoric and what has been called the language of the "eighteenth-century commonwealthman," a term which refers to those reformers and radicals who consciously drew upon seventeenth-century republican discourse.[2] In Chapter 1, Wollstonecraft's disdain for the standing army, for the "pestiferous purple" of the monarchy, for the "triple crown" of the pope, and for the arrogance and wealth of the Anglican episcopacy seems to be a direct repetition of Burgh's rhetoric, and that of Joseph Priestley and Richard Price. These men, who represented the agenda and spirit of Rational Dissent in the middle and later eighteenth century, have been frequently cited as major influences upon Wollstonecraft. There is much value in this connection. At the end of Chapter 1, we see the influence of the writings of Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, who joined republican discourse with the concept of inevitable social and intellectual progress. Wollstonecraft writes: "Men of abilities scatter seeds that grow up and have a great influence on the forming opinion; and when once the public opinion preponderates, through the exertion of reason, the overthrow of arbitrary power is not very distant" (n. 35). Wollstonecraft apparently joins the commonwealthmen in praising the radical writers of the past, and here the allusion is most certainly to Milton, whom she will subsequently critique in Chapter 2.

While it is true that Wollstonecraft's political thought owes much to republicanism, her particular application of republicanism to an agenda of expanded rights and public engagement is unusual among her contemporaries. When most political thinkers invoked republican

social models they saw women in exclusively domestic roles. Women's primary contribution to the polity was as mothers and the first educators of young men, instilling them with a set of virtues expected of the citizen, but women were not conceived as citizens themselves. Wollstonecraft certainly envisions a domestic role for women, but her inclusion of women in civic life is in sharp contrast with even her closest political allies:[3] "The being who discharges the duties of its station is independent; and, speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother" (177). To envision motherhood as a subset of citizenship is one of Wollstonecraft's most significant contributions to feminist thought.

Wollstonecraft's public persona would diverge from that of her mentors and father figures. She was an already established reviewer and political writer by 1792. In her role at the *Analytical Review*, she had commented on politics, and her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) was seen as one of the most vigorous responses to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). She was a key figure right at the start of the intense political debates in the 1790s, staking a position, along with Thomas Paine and Richard Price, in favor of the French Revolution and of major legislative reform in Britain. Thus, Wollstonecraft was like the "men" she praises in Chapter 1 of *Rights of Woman*, a writer who would "have a great influence on the forming opinion," and contribute to "the overthrow of arbitrary power." Finally, in *Rights of Woman*, her quarrel is with the patriarchal elements within radicalized republican thought itself.[4] Her fire is turned upon those who share her political sympathies, John Milton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and at the start, Bishop Talleyrand, delegate to the National Assembly of revolutionary France. This is a significant shift from *Rights of Men*, where her vigorous assault on Burke's reactionary argument flows directly and cleanly from the republican language of the commonwealthmen like Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, and James Burgh.

The Structure of *Rights of Woman*

From the point of view of Wollstonecraft's politics, *Rights of Woman* begins where *Rights of Men* left off, with Wollstonecraft rehearsing the philosophical and political inflections of the Rational Dissenters. However, the sudden attack upon Milton at the start of Chapter 2, mere lines after her declaration of solidarity with the "men of abilities," at the end of Chapter 1, constitutes a glaring break. In Chapter 1, we only come upon the word "woman" once, but Chapter 2, beginning with an attack upon Milton, is the moment when Wollstonecraft dramatically ends her political apprenticeship. Wollstonecraft's treatment of Milton is more than a quarrel with the ashes of the great man: it is a lesson to her political and intellectual allies, who continued to idolize him as their undisputed radical ancestor.

In Chapter 2, Wollstonecraft assumes the role of the literary critic and educational authority, virtually taking the podium and lecturing to an educated readership well versed in Milton. She presents excerpts, marked up in italics, and invites the reader to analyze these along with her:

> To whom Eve with perfect beauty adorn'd.
> My author and disposer, what thou bid'st
> Unargued I obey; so God ordains;
> God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more
> Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise. (37)

The italics trace Milton's desire to quell female intelligence by associating beauty with obedience. In the spirit of the teacher and critic, Wollstonecraft compares this passage to another spot in *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton configures woman as a rational equal to man. There, at an earlier point in the narrative, Adam asks God for a companion. Adam is lonely in the company of animals, who are "inferiors," "unequals" (also italicized by Wollstonecraft). He feels there can be no "harmony," no "true delight," without rational "fellowship." Milton had a hold of the truth here but, upon pondering the physical form of Eve, he is led astray by his own sexual desire, and thus we have the passage presenting her as seductively submissive. Wollstonecraft tells us that Milton is not alone in his error: "into similar inconsistencies are great men often led by their senses" (37).

Wollstonecraft then links Milton with two other male writers who had a great influence on the formation of cultural models of womanhood, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Gregory, the celebrated writer of a popular conduct book, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774):

> I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society. (39)

Only a very erudite woman could make a categorical declaration such as this. This passage constitutes a conclusion to the critique of Milton and simultaneously introduces Wollstonecraft's larger project, one which will take up much of *Rights of Woman*, that is, to prove the existence of a tradition of writing that spans historical periods and genres, a tradition which instills and reinforces debilitating gender roles. She takes aim at an entire tradition of writing, choosing men of three different generations (mid- to late seventeenth century, mid-eighteenth century, and late eighteenth century), but also texts written in three completely different genres. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem, Rousseau's *Emile* is an education treatise in the form of a novel, and Gregory's *Legacy* is a conduct book written as a last testament. A bit further along in the chapter, Wollstonecraft declares again, that "man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke …" (44). Here, Wollstonecraft audaciously groups Scripture with poetry and conduct books. The woman emerging here is not the self-consciously humble female correspondent of William Roscoe, eager to present herself "head and heart," and not the sexually repressed woman in distracted pursuit of Henri Fuseli (an episode in Godwin's *Memoirs*), but the erudite, independent, civic-minded female citizen.

While Wollstonecraft herself practiced a form of psychological criticism, she stops to consider the limitations of reading texts as symptomatic. Even as, further along in *Rights of Woman*, she is verbally lashing Rousseau for his perverse sensuality – "he soon became lascivious," "he debauched his imagination" – Wollstonecraft

ponders the limits of this sort of commentary: "But peace to his manes! I war not with his ashes, but his opinions. I war only with the sensibility that led him to degrade woman by making her the slave of love" (117). By the time she wrote *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft was moving from the criticism of the idiosyncrasies of individual authors to a condemnation of broad cultural phenomena. As we read Wollstonecraft's analysis of Rousseau's *Emile*, at first she seems to target Rousseau's idiosyncrasies. These have led him to create a perverse image of the ideal woman. Sophia's innocence and docility arouses the sexual desires of both Emile and apparently, of the narrator of the tale himself. However, in the statement above Wollstonecraft begins to shift the blame to the "sensibility" of his time and place, the regime of gender formation which is reinforced by men's desire to dominate.

In dealing with Milton, who had written generations earlier, Wollstonecraft makes a similar comment: Eve, as the ideal woman is meant to "gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation" (36). Even here, Milton is not an isolated case. He follows in a long tradition of writers, thinkers, fathers, and teachers who attempt to dominate woman either by physical force or through beguiling words:

> [M]an, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure. (*Rights of Woman* 44)

To return to the comment on Rousseau's ashes, the distinction between the person and his opinions is crucial, because the opinions are themselves a product of cultural pressures, reinforced generation after generation. Wollstonecraft's critical approach still sees text as transparently communicating the attitudes of the author, but the pressure of *other* texts and of social norms themselves also has its effect.

When Wollstonecraft moves on to more important quarry, she continues to operate as a professional reader, closely analyzing texts and placing them in their cultural and literary contexts. Dr. John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* had gained near-universal affection amongst readers of Wollstonecraft's time. The

circumstances under which the *Legacy* was written were all too perfect for an audience brought up on sentimental writing. The good doctor's two daughters have lost their mother. Soon afterwards, Gregory realizes he will soon follow his wife and determines that he must write a last missive to the daughters, a "legacy" of something more precious than property, a guide to life and conduct. For these reasons, Gregory was more insidious than Rousseau because he delivered up an ideology of female subordination in a seemingly benevolent form. The way in which Wollstonecraft dismantles the pretensions of *A Father's Legacy* is delicate and masterful, and reveals one of the ways in which *Rights of Woman* was carefully planned (despite those telling "outbursts"). She builds her case gradually, over hundreds of pages, beginning by linking Gregory with Rousseau, a softer target. As we have seen in Wollstonecraft's review of the *Confessions*, Rousseau had lost much of his moral authority in British print culture, and so she could expect some sympathy with her position. Female conduct book writers, when they did mention Rousseau, always did so as a negative or dangerous influence. Edward Duffy, who did a lengthy study tracing Rousseau's influence in England, notes that an initial infatuation at mid-century quickly dissipated and became "a decisive retreat by the end of the eighteenth century.[5] After 1789, Rousseau was closely associated with the French Revolution, and would have been a natural ally of Rational Dissenters such as Richard Price. However, in Price's *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, a landmark in the debate over the Revolution, he neglects to mention Rousseau amongst the pioneers in the march towards universal reform.[6] By Chapter 5, Wollstonecraft is ready to pass judgment upon Gregory. While she concedes, even at this point, that she feels "affectionate respect" for the "benevolent father," she now finds that the initial impression of touching, unaffected sincerity gives way to a certain self-consciousness, a certain artificiality: "[T]here is a degree of concise elegance conspicuous in many passages that disturbs this sympathy; and we pop on the author, when we only expected to meet the – father" (123).

Again, from the point of view of her literary theories, Wollstonecraft demands utter transparency from an author, but here, in the context of *Rights of Woman*, Gregory's fond, self-indulgent prose is not merely a tasteless feature of a mediocre book. It is a cover for his manipulative sexual politics. Thus, the task at hand is to sweep away the sentimental pretensions of this conduct book clothed as the

last, sacred duty of a devoted parent. For the last blow, Wollstonecraft goes right to the sexuality barely beneath the surface, and if she is correct, it is virtually incestuous. Gregory cautions his daughters to be aware that if they are too forward in public they may draw the sexual gaze of men. Wollstonecraft notes that these "narrow cautions" may very well be written in a "more decorous manner" than the more explicit language in Rousseau's *Emile*, but "it all comes home to the same point" (127). Her conclusion is devastating: "whoever is at the trouble to analyze these sentiments, will find the first principles not quite so delicate as the superstructure" (127). Gregory's "first principles," are, like those of Moses, Milton, Rousseau, and any number of other men. He minimizes women by seeing them as essentially sexual beings.

In Chapter 6, Wollstonecraft provides the theoretical support for the literary and cultural criticism that animates Chapters 2 through 5. Here, in a chapter on "association," she summarizes a series of principles of the proto-psychological writing of Joseph Hartley, which had been popularized by Joseph Priestley. Wollstonecraft's point here is to prove in philosophical terms that ideas found in texts and presented to female children at an early age through the spoken language of nurses, parents, and others profoundly affected their sense of identity. Because of the power of association, in which these ideas are linked to feelings of self-worth and social acceptance, notions of femininity are set firmly and permanently in the mind, becoming almost impossible to change in later years. The placement of this chapter in the progression of Wollstonecraft's argument is also significant. Up to this point in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft has worked inductively, that is, to first engage in close readings of *Paradise Lost*, *Emile*, and *A Father's Legacy*, as well as dozens of related texts, including poetry by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, the writings of Madame Genlis, Catharine Macaulay, Hester Thrale Piozzi, and the influential educational writing of James Fordyce. Only after all of this groundwork does Wollstonecraft elaborate on a psycholinguistic theory that the cultural prescriptions accumulated in literary and educational texts have a decisive impact upon the identities and behaviors of women.

Wollstonecraft continues in the role of moral philosopher in Chapters 7 through 9. In Chapter 7, the discussion of modesty addresses women's self-regard. Wollstonecraft admonishes them to give up on the notion of modesty as a negative capability, that of

avoiding sexual encounters, and think of it as a proactive capability, that of knowing one's strengths and acting to unfold them. The relationship of self-regard and sexual behavior completes the discussion in this chapter. In Chapter 8, Wollstonecraft moves to a related issue, that of how society views the sexual behavior of women. Here there is a rebuttal of Rousseau's primary mechanism for regulating women, presented prominent in the last book of *Emile*, and developed more along the lines of political theory in the *Letter to D'Alembert* (1758). In Chapter 9 of *Rights of Woman*, as I have mentioned above, Wollstonecraft returns to a more explicitly republican voice, in her critique of the social behaviors that are influenced by an upper class with courtly manners. But this is also a chapter shaped by an anthropological approach. Gender is yet another form of social hierarchy, a basic insight which is left unexamined by Wollstonecraft's supposed mentors amongst the Rational Dissenters. Within the family, women redirect the fundamentally unnatural hierarchies imposed on them by passing on their resentment to those around them.

Finally, there is Wollstonecraft as educational writer, dispensing advice on childrearing, the proper attitudes of parents, the sorry state of education in England, and some miscellaneous thoughts on reading and superstition. These are the concerns, respectively, in Chapters 10 through 13. In this section, we move back to more surface level discussions typical of conduct literature, periodical writing, and educational treatises. Chapter 12 is a lengthy essay on the necessity of forming a national educational system, with the specific reservations that Wollstonecraft outlines. She favors a combination of home education and public schools, and opposes the empty formalities and restrictive curricula of the schools she has apparently observed. She recommends a hearty, active and coeducational program. Her detailed suggestions as well as her many cautions about the dangers of public schools are delivered from the point of view of a seasoned educational professional. Chapter 13 represents a miscellany of observations on superstitious beliefs but contains one moment where Wollstonecraft discusses her technique for tutoring young girls in reading, again reinforcing her role as teacher. If *Rights of Woman* is an exhibition of Wollstonecraft's "head and heart," it is not designed to frankly reveal the emotions or moral conflicts of the author. It is designed to teach, to admonish, and ultimately to set political and philosophical standards for women.

Writer and Woman

Wollstonecraft's strategies of self-representation raised the status of the female writer. Both critics and sympathizers benefitted from Wollstonecraft's sharp elbows in the public literary space. She showed the way forward in an environment where it was treacherous for women to exercise their intelligence in the public literary space. Wollstonecraft's concern with the perils and politics of "reputation" was well developed in *Rights of Woman*. There, she reveals how works such as Gregory's *Legacy* attempted to make women highly self-conscious in public by insidiously drawing attention to their sexuality. Wollstonecraft devotes another chapter to this issue, Chapter 8, which is titled, "Morality Undermined by Sexual Notions of the Importance of a Good Reputation" (162). Wollstonecraft's concern with reputation in *Rights of Woman* recognizes how public roles were gendered in such a way as to deprive women of one of the most effective means of personal growth – the ability to speak, write, and do business in public.

Perhaps the best example of the danger of self-revelation for women is Mary Hays, one of the last public supporters of Wollstonecraft during the reactionary phase in British politics beginning from the declaration of war on republican France in 1793. Hays experienced the full force of negative public opinion when she published *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), a novel based on events in Hays's life. Influenced by Godwin's ideal of utter candor, and her own training in Rational Dissent, Hays bravely relates the details of a would-be love affair in which a woman is the pursuer and boldly suggests a meeting of minds and bodies. There had of course been female characters in eighteenth-century novels who challenged the mores of the reading public, but the sexual frankness of Emma Courtney was utterly rejected by readers and critics alike. Hays regrouped and published the novel, *Victim of Prejudice* (1799), in which she sets a woman against her numerous moralist hecklers, and insensitive "friends." This novel wrests control of her public image away from her detractors. Her *Female Biography* (1803) moves forward into the authoritative realm of women's history. This is an extraordinary work of history and biography which chronicles the lives and cultural contributions of women throughout the ages, and brings many forgotten names to light. *Female Biography* has inestimable value for the history women, women's writing, and

women's reputations. In the years after *Emma Courtney*, Hays wisely abandoned defensive sniping at her critics. Instead, she expanded on the principle of women's right to be seen, heard, and read. Hays presents a huge catalog of women that are known and unknown to the public, offering the latest knowledge available to her, thereby opening up avenues for further historical exploration, an invitation that is still open today. *Female Biography* is a project that extends our knowledge of historical women and invites us to continue the tradition of restoration, respect and research into their lives.[7]

Hays learned from the public strategies in the Wollstonecraft writings, and from the observing how Wollstonecraft's own reputation was undergoing an unfortunate transformation at the end of the eighteenth century. Professor Walker, in "The Two Marys," the piece in this volume to which this is a response, proves that the "life writing" of Hays, starting from the youthful, admiring letters to Wollstonecraft and Godwin, develops into a powerful practice of self-assertion in the public sphere. At first it appears that Hays took the Godwinian ideal of "candor" too literally for her own good, as we have seen in the reception of *Emma Courtney*, and her letters to Godwin in 1793-4 are still in the vein of the supplicant and admirer. However, Walker shows that Hays began to take control of her public persona by working her private correspondence with Godwin into the novel itself.

The crucial testament to Hays's ability to fully realize her role as heir to Wollstonecraft and groundbreaking female historian is her extended "memoirs" of Wollstonecraft, published in the *Annual Necrology for 1797-8* (1800). Hays characterizes Wollstonecraft as a woman who worked through her personal vulnerabilities to establish herself as the most powerful contemporary voice for women. In a sense, Hays was able to do for Wollstonecraft what Wollstonecraft had not been able to do for herself during her brief life, to raise the issue of her private life and put it in context, finally showing how the intellectual and political woman could be fully appreciated. Although Godwin's *Memoirs* had the greater influence over the coming years, we are just beginning to fully understand the accomplishments of Hays, not only in the case of Wollstonecraft but in the case of scores of historical female figures who would otherwise be lost to us.

In conclusion, it is worth going back to Wollstonecraft's interaction with Rousseau, the most complex literary relationship of her life. Wollstonecraft understood that Rousseau's suggestions for

the education of women represented a retrenchment of a sharply gendered society, one in which women would be shut away from public dialogue. For this reason, she carefully built a powerful image in that arena. The publication of Godwin's *Memoirs* and the letters to Imlay forever complicated that image, but Wollstonecraft has left a cautionary statement against psychological readings, and this statement, ironically, comes in her review of Rousseau's *Confessions*: "[T]hough we must allow that he had many faults which called for the forbearance of his friends, still what have his defects of temper to do with his writings?" (*Analytical Review* 7: 409). Wollstonecraft, although she was about to come into intense conflict with Rousseau over his egregious sexual politics, protects the integrity of the late writer by separating his life from his thought. This was written in December of 1791, when Wollstonecraft was deep in the composition of *Rights of Woman*.

NOTES

[1] See Darnton's "Readers Respond to Rousseau."

[2] The classic treatment of this historical theory is in Robbins's *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*. In "Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman," Barker-Benfield connects Wollstonecraft with this community by finding numerous concrete connections between Wollstonecraft and the republican discourse of Burgh. Claudia Johnson in *Equivocal Beings* sees the republican "provenance" of Wollstonecraft's politics as having a decisive influence on Wollstonecraft's conception of gender (33).

[3] Arianne Chernock has done a valuable study of a group of male Dissenters in the late eighteenth century who championed women's rights: she points out that a limited number of male Dissenters in the late eighteenth century championed women's rights.

[4] The term "patriarchal" would not be used in feminist discourse until the twentieth century, but aptly describes the target of Wollstonecraft's criticism here, that is, the subordinate role of women in most radical and reformist programs and particularly the generational reproduction of a gender hierarchy.

[5] See Duffy's *Rousseau in England*.

[6] Price lists Turgot, who attempted to save the French economy in the last days of the *ancien regime*, and Montesquieu amongst the French, and even Algernon Sidney, an alleged supporter of regicide, but not Rousseau (Price 360-1).

[7] Professor Gina Luria Walker is the Editor of The Chawton House Library Edition of *Female Biography*, the first modern scholarly edition since it was first published in

1803 (Pickering & Chatto, 2013, 2014). This project is a collaboration of 150 scholars and student researchers from more than a hundred institutions and 18 countries. The website "Project Continua" contains the latest information on Hays's women and many others.

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"Mistaken Notions of Female Excellence": Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of Virtue

Natalie Fuehrer Taylor

As "the first of a new genus" Mary Wollstonecraft considered herself, not only a female author, but also a female philosopher. This essay explores Wollstonecraft's philosophic engagement with some of the leading lights of the British and French Enlightenment on the nature of women. It examines the reasons that the political philosophies of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were unsatisfactory to Wollstonecraft and why the moral and social philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment seems to be a compelling alternative to those philosophies. Finally, this essay argues that political philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment is also incompatible with Wollstonecraft's own philosophy that articulates women's rational and virtuous character, even while preserving their affections for men.

Mary Wollstonecraft is often remembered as the first feminist. In her most well-known work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft boldly challenges the contemporary wisdom on the differences between men and women and audaciously asserts the equality of women. The ink on the manuscript was barely dry when Wollstonecraft dashed off to Paris to witness the unfolding French Revolution. As a writer she enjoyed a degree of independence uncommon to women. Hesitant to submit to the constraints imposed by marriage in the eighteenth century, Wollstonecraft took lovers and bore one child out of wedlock. The anticipation of a second child, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, resigned Wollstonecraft to marriage to her lover, radical William Godwin. Sadly, Wollstonecraft died as a consequence of childbirth at a young age. A fierce defender of women, economically independent, and (relatively) sexually liberated, Wollstonecraft seems to have much in common with her twentieth-century feminist sisters. Yet, the description of Wollstonecraft as a feminist is anachronistic (the word feminism has its origins in France during the nineteenth century). Although intellectuals devoted a great deal of their attention to the nature of women and the part women play

in promoting progress and Wollstonecraft did wade into these debates, as JoEllen DeLucia's excellent essay in this volume demonstrates, Wollstonecraft did not join a feminist movement in doing so. Furthermore, the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* did not inaugurate a movement in the way that the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is credited with launching the modern women's movement in the mid-twentieth century. Most importantly, Wollstonecraft did not consider herself a feminist. She considered herself a philosopher (*Rights of Woman* 53).

In this essay, I will argue that, while vindicating the rights of woman, Wollstonecraft entered into a lively debate among the leading lights of the British and French Enlightenments. Barbara Taylor cautions us against understanding *the* Enlightenment as a monolithic philosophy for which Wollstonecraft is yet another spokesperson (30). The Enlightenment philosophers offer a variety of answers to the fundamental questions of political philosophy: what is human nature? How does human nature determine the formation of political society? How do the differences between the sexes shape the relationship between men and women? How does the relationship between men and women influence political life? In weighing these questions, Wollstonecraft has often been compared to John Locke and to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. However, neither the philosophy of Locke nor Rousseau captures Wollstonecraft's efforts to reconcile human reason with the passions. And, so, both Locke and Rousseau have different understandings of human nature than Wollstonecraft. The nature of human beings has bearing on the origins and purpose of the political community. As Dr. DeLucia mentions, neither philosopher describes the origin and purpose of political society that is compatible with Wollstonecraft's understanding of human nature and political life. Dr. DeLucia poses the Scottish Enlightenment as an alternative to the social contract theory of Locke and Rousseau, but it is beyond the scope of her essay to develop Wollstonecraft's critique of social contract theory and to examine Wollstonecraft's engagement with the Scottish Enlightenment on the origins and purposes of political society.

This essay will take Dr. DeLucia's insights as a starting point. I will begin by elaborating the reasons that Locke's and Rousseau's social contract theory is incompatible with Wollstonecraft's understanding of political society. I will then consider the reasons that the Scottish Enlightenment may have been instructive to

Wollstonecraft. I will end by considering the significant differences between Wollstonecraft and the Scottish Enlightenment, demonstrating that Wollstonecraft confronts tensions within the Scottish Enlightenment's notion of civilization and offers her own account of human nature and political life, vindicating reason and virtue in women.

The Soul Stamped with the Heavenly Image

Mary Wollstonecraft is generally described as a liberal. In her introduction to *Feminist Thought*, Rosemarie Tong claims that liberal feminism "received its classic formulation in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of* Woman" (2). Those scholars who argue for Locke's influence on Wollstonecraft stand on firm ground. During her lifetime Wollstonecraft was associated with some of Great Britain's most well-known Dissenters, such as Richard Price, Joseph Johnson, and Thomas Paine, whose intellectual lineage may be traced to John Locke. There are also philosophical reasons to place Wollstonecraft in the tradition of Lockean liberalism. Although Wollstonecraft rejects property rights as the basis for democracy, Virginia Muller argues that Wollstonecraft's thought is fundamentally Lockean. She does, after all, emphasize reason and looks forward to the possibility for change – especially change brought about by education. Muller also points to Wollstonecraft's commitment to individual liberty to demonstrate the similarities between Wollstonecraft and Locke. Other scholars caution against understanding Wollstonecraft in simply Lockean terms. Virginia Sapiro has rightly argued, "Those who make Wollstonecraft sound like a late eighteenth-century Locke in drag mistake her" (xx). There are fundamental differences between Locke and Wollstonecraft that cannot be elided. While both Locke and Wollstonecraft consider human beings rational, they have different conceptions of human reason. As a consequence of their differing understandings of reason, Locke and Wollstonecraft articulate differing accounts of the origins and purpose of political society. These differences between Wollstonecraft and her predecessor suggest a rigorous critique of Lockean political philosophy and contribute to Wollstonecraft's rightful claim to be a philosopher. Because I have discussed the

differences in *Rights of Woman as Chimera*, I will offer only a brief explanation of them here (89-111).

John Locke distinguishes himself from pre-modern philosophers by arguing that there are no innate principles of knowledge. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke encourages his readers to "suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without ideas" (121). Human beings acquire knowledge by beginning with simple ideas and building ever more complicated ideas. Eventually, they are able to articulate abstract truths, which have been mistaken for innate principles, through the use of their reason. Although principles of knowledge are not innate in human beings or, in other words, are not natural to them, human beings are not lacking in natural tendencies. The propensity to gratify pleasure and to avoid pain is natural to human beings. It is this inclination to avoid pain, more particularly a desire for self-preservation, that leads human beings to form political societies.

Thomas Pangle beautifully explains how reason is employed to satisfy the desire for self-preservation, which in turn leads human beings to form social contracts. Relying on Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, Pangle begins with the simple idea that human beings naturally seek to avoid pain: "The desire for preservation is not only 'planted in men,' as it is in other animals; it is a 'natural Inclination,' 'wrought into the very Principles of their Nature'" (187). From this simple principle, human beings construct more complicated ideas, including their relationship to one another and natural right as the basis of those relationships. Reason instructs human beings that they need assistance from other human beings, who also desire their own self-preservation, in order to accomplish their mutual interest:

> The human animal, in its desire for preservation, can readily come to see that it needs the aid of other similarly insecure and farsighted humans: the rational desire for comfortable self-preservation constitutes all men, or all men insofar as they are rational, as "one Community of Nature," "one Society distinct from all other Creatures." (Pangle 187)

The desire for self-preservation may be innate to human beings, but the practical principles that lead them to cooperate with others and to respect their fellow creatures is not. The abstract truth of natural right on which Locke establishes his social contract theory is a

consequence of reason mingling with the passions. Reason serves to satisfy the passions and operates in a calculating manner. Human beings, according to the account offered by Locke, are not naturally sociable creatures. They are motivated to enter into social contracts with one another for the sake of preserving their freedom while ensuring their self-preservation. The end of reason is self-preservation.

Wollstonecraft offers a very different understanding of human reason. She argues that principles of truth are innate. Because reason connects human beings to the divine, the end of human reason is the perfection of our nature. Indeed, Wollstonecraft tells her readers that the expectation that "every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason" is an innate principle and it is on the basis of this innate principle that Wollstonecraft asserts the equality of women:

> These may be Utopian dreams – Thanks to that Being who impressed them on my soul, and gave me sufficient strength of mind to exert my own reason, till, becoming dependent only on him for support of my virtues, I view, with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex. (55)

The soul, which "is stamped with the heavenly image" (*Rights of Woman* 74) as it is described by Wollstonecraft is very different than the human mind that is described by Locke as "white paper, void of all characters without any ideas."

The relationship between reason and the passions also differs in Wollstonecraft's account of human nature. For Wollstonecraft reason is the means by which human beings struggle with the passions in order to acquire knowledge (28). Wollstonecraft puts the passions in the service of reason. This is an important difference from Locke who explains that reason is mingled with the passions for the sake of satisfying the passions. Given this understanding of human reason, the end of reason or education is not simply to secure freedom or self-preservation, as Locke has described it. Rather, Wollstonecraft argues for the rights of woman, including liberty, for the sake of a more noble purpose. "Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature" (56). The end of reason is the fulfillment of human nature and political societies are established to foster that fulfillment. As we shall see, the private or domestic

relationships must also be based on reason and virtue in order to contribute to the fulfillment of a woman's human nature and to a healthy political society.

Other scholars suggest that Rousseau – who was so influential to her in writing her earlier novels – continues to inform Wollstonecraft's thinking while writing *Rights of Woman*. Jean Grimshaw insists, "it is above all the philosophy and other writings of Rousseau which form a backdrop of Wollstonecraft's work, and central to this is Rousseau's account, in *Emile*, of female nature, his prescriptions for female upbringing and female virtue" (Grimshaw 14). Grimshaw maintains that Rousseau's influence persists and may be seen in *Rights of Woman*. "Wollstonecraft remained attracted to the idea that women have special qualities, which while not in themselves virtues, could lead to virtue (Grimshaw 18). In her work, *Family Feuds*, Eileen Hunt Botting argues that Wollstonecraft and Rousseau are friendly critics of the English Enlightenment. Wollstonecraft and Rousseau understand that human beings are moved by their passions, their benevolent affections for other human beings, rather than by mere self-interest as Thomas Hobbes, but also John Locke as I have suggested, contends. Botting reminds us that Wollstonecraft and Rousseau "also argued that the stability, independence, and ethical quality of any political society depended on the cultivation and direction of the affections toward the future subjects or citizens" (12). For Rousseau, the affection that human beings have for one another is a way of overcoming fundamental challenges to social contract theory: why and how do naturally solitary human beings form political societies? Although Wollstonecraft is not motivated by the same philosophic puzzle, she also appreciates that genuine human affection among men and women may restore political life.

Wollstonecraft objects to Rousseau's education for girls and for women because she believes that he cultivates sensibility at the expense of reason and affection. Wollstonecraft argues that Rousseau's education renders women dependent on men and, therefore, contorts the benevolent passions. As a consequence, the relationship between men and women – the affections that Wollstonecraft and Rousseau find so important to fostering a healthy political society – is marked by "cunning and lasciviousness" (*Rights of Woman* 103). In her chapter, "Animadversions of Some Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt," Wollstonecraft begins with a critique of Rousseau, though

she also treats Dr. Fordyce and Dr. Gregory in turn. Because these authors all privilege women's ostensibly greater sensibility, they share much in common. We will see that Rousseau differs from Fordyce and Gregory in that Rousseau's social contract theory is marked by the character to which Wollstonecraft objects. Wollstonecraft begins by taking on Rousseau's fundamental premise that woman ought to make herself pleasing to men in order to compensate for her relative physical weakness and for her need for male assistance, especially during pregnancy and childbirth. By making themselves pleasing to men, women gain some power over men but they are simultaneously dependent on them. The civilized woman is rendered savage in Wollstonecraft's account:

> Gentleness […] bears on its front all the characteristics of grandeur, combined with the winning graces of condescension; but what a different aspect it assumes when it is the submissive demeanour of dependence, the support of weakness that loves, because it wants protection; and is forbearing because it must silently endure injuries; smiling under the lash at which it dare not snarl. (51)

Not only does Wollstonecraft condemn this "system of cunning and lasciviousness" (103), she also objects to Rousseau's identification of "the brutal desire for self-preservation as the grand spring of all her actions" (103). Just as the "brutal desire for self-preservation" determines the nature of the relationship of women to men, it also determines the relationship of human beings in the last stages of the state of nature and informs their reasons for establishing a social contract (N. F. Taylor 89-111). Implicit in these objections to Rousseau's treatment of women is Wollstonecraft's belief that human beings are by nature benevolent and sociable.

Dr. DeLucia mentions, the Scottish Enlightenment differed from John Locke's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Enlightenment "which privileged reason and the politics of the social contract instead of the social mechanics of the civilizing process" (DeLucia 114). We have seen that both Locke and Rousseau consider human beings solitary by nature. Although Locke and Rousseau have differing conceptions of reason and its relation to the passions, both argue that human beings form political attachments due to their desire for self-preservation and identify man's more selfish passions as the basis for the social

contract. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers offer an alternative to social contract theory. Although there was an interesting debate between these thinkers on particular elements of their philosophies, they were engaged in a common philosophic endeavor. They sought to discover the general causes that explain human behavior and patterns of civilization. The moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment emphasizes the natural sociability of human beings. The expansion of knowledge and increasing commercial wealth gave evidence of progress in the eighteenth century. As we will see women are central to the Scottish Enlightenment's notions of progress.

The Scottish Enlightenment must have been compelling to Wollstonecraft given her continued hope in the progress of mankind. There is ample evidence that Wollstonecraft was familiar with authors of the Scottish Enlightenment (Rendall 158). She may well have been introduced to them by the Dissenters, who were so important to Wollstonecraft both intellectually and professionally. Although there are significant differences between the Dissenters and the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, many of the Dissenters would have spent some time at a Scottish university. As Dr. DeLucia observes, Wollstonecraft was drawn to the Scottish authors of conduct books when compiling her own *The Female Reader*. Although she is more critical of sensibility in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft allows for the importance of sensibility in her earlier novel. Daniel I. O'Neill's *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* is a full-length treatment of how the Scottish Enlightenment's account of progress informed Wollstonecraft's writing on the French Revolution. The influence of the Scottish Enlightenment may also be found on the pages of *A Vindication* as well. In her treatise on the rights of woman, Wollstonecraft is still wrestling with the importance of sensibility and she articulates her hopes for the progress of mankind, which depends on the dignity of women. On this point, Dr. DeLucia and I may disagree slightly. While I agree that Wollstonecraft levels a critique of sensibility, I find that its notions of the civilizing process provide the basis and the rhetoric for her to demand a change in the condition of women. However, Wollstonecraft must finally reject the Scottish Enlightenment's explanation of the civilizing process in favor of human beings' *natural* capacity for reason and virtue. This is one of the important insights of Dr. DeLucia's essay, which I hope to elaborate more fully below.

True Civilization

In this section of my essay, I will elaborate the reasons that scholars have taken an interest in the Scottish Enlightenments' influence on Wollstonecraft, giving particular attention to the Scottish philosophers explanation of human beings' natural sociability and their efforts to explain the civilizing process. However, to echo the claim that Sapiro makes about Locke's influence on Wollstonecraft, Wollstonecraft was not a late-eighteenth-century Scotsman in drag. Wollstonecraft departs from the Scottish Enlightenment in fundamental ways. I will conclude this essay by demonstrating how Wollstonecraft confronts the tensions within the Scottish Enlightenment's notion of civilization and offers her own solution, vindicating herself as a female philosopher.

In her work, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Karen O'Brien notes the impact of early eighteenth-century philosopher, political economist, and satirist Bernard de Mandeville on Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, including David Hume and Adam Smith. In *The Fable of the Bees* Mandeville explains how a creature governed only by passions and appetites suppresses the potentially destructive passions for the sake of society. According to Mandeville, self-restraint, or what Christians and moralists call virtue, requires an estrangement from our nature and the manipulation of pride (O'Brien 22). Mandeville's account of human nature invited responses from other Scottish philosophers. Although Hume and Smith are not always in perfect agreement, they both refute Mandeville's moral philosophy, offering instead a moral philosophy based on human beings more benevolent passions. Hume objects to Mandeville's characterization of moral and legal strictures as artificial and imposed upon human beings. Instead, Hume suggests, the moral and legal guidelines by which we live developed historically (O'Brien 26). Barbara Taylor gives a stronger statement about Hume's view that human beings are naturally sociable: "[f]ar from inimical to virtuous sociability, Hume singularly argued, in polite societies the 'friendship and mutual sympathy' generated by erotic desire becomes a fount of social sentiment" (37-38). Taylor explains why a philosophic effort to establish society on human beings benevolent passions made sense historically: "In a nation still licking its wounds from decades of civil strife, gentle manners were definitely at a premium" (40). Taylor does not mention here that John Locke's political philosophy is implicated to some extent in that civil strife. As

the author of the *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke offered the philosophical justification for the Glorious Revolution. Taylor calls upon John Pocock to further explain the appeal of an explanation of political life that emphasizes human beings' natural sociability and the promise of fostering their more benevolent passions. "'When the polite man of commercial and cultivated society looked back into his past […] what he saw […] were passions not yet socialized […] that British philosopher turned to women, arguing that without women's soothing influence men were 'dangerous animal[s] to society'" (B. Taylor 40).

Starting from the premise that human beings are naturally sociable, the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers seek to explain how general causes lead to the formation of societies and a process of civilization. In the eighteenth century "civilization" is a single, coherent concept. John Millar, in his *Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society*, is credited with first using the word (Rendall 156). Jane Rendall points to Millar to explain the Scottish Enlightenment's notion of the civilizing process. "Such histories of civilization are for the most part stories of improvement, stories of progress. To John Millar, quite simply: 'There is in human society, a natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude to civilized manners, the several stages of which are usually accompanied with peculiar laws and customs'" (Rendall 156). The Scottish philosophers developed the idea that history consists of the narratives of societies moving through four stages from "savagery," "barbarism," to "civilization." The four stages – hunting, herding, farming, and commerce – named for a mode of subsistence, have far reaching significance for political life. As O'Neill points out, "'[c]ivilization' was not just a marker for material improvement for the Scots but also a normative judgment about the moral progress of society" (10).

Women are central to the Scottish Enlightenment's explanation for the origins of society and to its notion of progress. Millar, Hume, and Smith, for example, all differed from Locke on the origins of society. Rather than locating it in the social contract between rational individuals, calculating the best means of self-preservation, they locate the origins of society in families and rely instead on the attachments between human beings (O'Brien 69-70). Once societies were established women remain important to these philosophers' notions of progress. The treatment of women by men is a measure of the civilization's progress. One assumption of the Scottish

philosophers "was to equate female progress with liberation from work, especially onerous domestic work, brought about by the division, and extension into new areas, of male labor" (O'Brien 87). Having been liberated from work, women were free to become the pleasing companions of men, rather than servants to them: "In a series of works documenting the beneficial impact of the civilizing process on European women, Scottish Enlightenment historians identified medieval chivalry as a decisive stage in women's transition from barbaric oppression to their current happy position as the "friends and companions of man'" (B. Taylor 35). Not only are women a measure of civilization, but they also play an important part in the process:

> The home was women's realm, enlightened opinion-makers agreed, but so too the world of polite sociability, for which certain traits ideally fitted them, namely love of peace, natural refinement of manner, and most crucially, instinctive tenderness or sympathy for others… it was through feminine influence that men, that bellicose and uncivil sex, became "softened" into social beings. (B. Taylor 37)

In the opening pages of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft reveals the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on her. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is dedicated to Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Pèrigord, an early advocate of public education in France, in the hopes that he will improve the education afforded to girls at the time. In making her case for "the rights of woman and national education" (*Rights of Woman* 15), Wollstonecraft conveys her faith in progress and her certainty of women's role in achieving progress. "Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue" (16).

In order to examine the compatibility between Wollstonecraft and the Scottish Enlightenment, it is helpful to recall Wollstonecraft's engagement with Rousseau. Wollstonecraft shares Rousseau's concern that false refinement that results from a political system of rank has corrupted civilization. She writes that "[t]he desire of dazzling by riches, the most certain pre-eminence that man can obtain, the pleasure of commanding flattering sycophants, and many other complicated low calculations of doing self-love, have all contributed

to overwhelm the mass of mankind" (29). In response to the corruption, Rousseau seeks to restore human beings to their natural integrity. An inquiry into what is natural for human beings is the subject of both Rousseau's so-called *Second Discourse*, *The Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, and *Emile*. As a modern political philosopher, Rousseau seeks the natural condition of human beings in their origins, prior to and outside of political life. Rousseau considers human beings motived by their simple passions, which become increasingly more complicated and malevolent as they come into great contact with one another. Subordinating those passions to the general will is the means by which human beings find security in a social contract. The social contract, or political society, is an artificial construct necessitated by human beings' malevolent passions. (In this regard, Rousseau has something in common with Mandeville.) For Rousseau, human beings' benevolent passions are associated with their original, solitary condition. Emile describes the education that would restore the benevolent passions to human beings in civil society. It is a painstaking effort to overcome man's naturally solitary condition. Even Rousseau is ambivalent about the success of such a painstaking effort and his readers are left with the premise of his *Second Discourse*: human beings are naturally solitary.

Wollstonecraft explicitly rejects this notion of human nature: "Impressed by this view of misery and disorder which pervaded society, and fatigued with jostling against artificial fools, Rousseau became enamoured of solitude, and being at the same time an optimist, he labours with uncommon eloquence to prove that man was naturally a solitary animal" (30). The problem according to Wollstonecraft is that Rousseau indicts civilization when the corruption may be attributed to a lack of progress: "Disgusted with the artificial manners and virtues, the citizen of Geneva, instead of properly sifting the subject, threw away the wheat with the chaff, without waiting to inquire whether the evils which his ardent soul turned from indignantly, were the consequence of civilization or the vestiges of barbarism" (32). The corruption that Rousseau and Wollstonecraft find is, according to Wollstonecraft, a residue of barbarism, a stage in civilization that she associates with arbitrary power and hereditary distinctions. "He did not perceive that regal power, in a few generations, introduces idiotism into the noble stem, and holds out baits to render thousands idle and vicious" (32). While

the aristocracy is certainly the fount for "this baneful lurking gangrene," other professions, which are organized on the basis of rank, such as the military or the clergy, also foster corrupt manners:

> But the nature of the poison points out the antidote; and had Rousseau mounted one step higher in his investigation, or could his eye have pierced through the foggy atmosphere, which he almost disdained to breathe, his active mind would have darted forward to contemplate the perfection of man in the establishment of true civilization, instead of taking his ferocious flight back to the night of sensual ignorance. (*Rights of Woman* 35)

In refuting Rousseau's conception of human nature as solitary and maintaining that progress may bring reform to the corrupt morals of eighteenth-century civilization, Wollstonecraft seems to have much in common with the Scottish philosophers. Yet, despite the compatibility, Wollstonecraft's conception of human nature and the origins and purposes of political life differs significantly from the Enlightenment philosophers – Locke, Rousseau, as well as the Scottish philosophers.

The Scottish Enlightenment's explanation for the civilizing process and women's central place in it is an ambivalent legacy for a female philosopher arguing for the improved condition of women. On the one hand, it offers a philosophical framework in which Wollstonecraft can advocate for change in women's education and rights. Taylor notes that the relativist element in the Scottish Enlightenment's account of history undermines claims that women are by nature inferior to men. "As well as introducing a relativist element into enlightened thinking about gender-power relations, historicist accounts like these served to counter doctrines of innate female character. After all, if women's way of life was amendable to historical transformation, might not their personality traits be equally susceptible to change?" (B. Taylor 35). Indeed, the introduction of *Rights of Woman* begins with such a choice between nature and civilization:

> After considering the historic page, and viewing the living world with anxious solicitude, the most melancholy emotions of sorrowful indignation have depressed my spirits, and I have sighed when obliged to confess, that either nature has made a great difference between man and man, or that civilization

> which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial. (23)

Weighing the choice between nature and civilization, Wollstonecraft determines that it has been civilization that has made a great difference between man and woman. Education, not nature, has "enfeebled [women] by false refinement" (*Rights of Woman* 23). And, so, Wollstonecraft argues for change in the manner by which girls and young women are educated. As we will see, she calls for change consistent with human nature.

Wollstonecraft, I believe, recognizes that leaving women's "personality traits susceptible to change" also leaves women vulnerable. Without a recourse to natural attributes by which to demand the improved condition of women, women may be "render[ed] insignificant objects of desire" (*Rights of Woman* 27). Taylor argues that the political attachments between men and women founded on women's refined sensibility and politeness were an innovation, rather than "gothic" as Wollstonecraft describes them. In other words, the corruption that she and Rousseau abhor was not a vestige of barbarism, but something new and particular to the eighteenth century. "[T]he constellation of ideas described as 'gallant' by eighteenth-century British writers, while owing much to elite etiquette traditions, was not in itself 'gothic' residue but an innovation linked to the development of middle class intellectual culture" (B. Taylor 33). Taylor points to James Fordyce in particular as complicit in this innovation. "[H]e did not 'merely reinforce a patriarchal structure which he found already existing in British society, but […] helped to lay a new foundation for male superiority'" (33). The politeness of civilized society merely masks the subordination of women. "In civilized nations it is rituals of deference rather than brute coercion with which men enforce their dominion over women: gallantry is the non-violent expression of male ascendancy (B. Taylor 39). Taylor acknowledges that Wollstonecraft may not have fully understood that the gallantry promoted by Fordyce and others was something new, but Wollstonecraft did correctly perceive the threat to women:

> This principle of power-turned-polite – 'contempt […] disguised; authority concealed,' in Hume's trenchant formulation – was at the heart of British Enlightenment: which

> is why Wollstonecraft's attack on it […] had significance beyond her feminism." (40)

In order to protect women from the relativism introduced by the Scottish Enlightenment's explanation of the civilizing process, Wollstonecraft argues for women's equality on the basis of their unchanging attributes, their nature. In this regard, we may notice a superficial similarity between Wollstonecraft and Rousseau. Each responds to the threat that civilized politeness poses to women in the eighteenth century by appealing to human nature. But unlike John Locke and Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Wollstonecraft does not begin *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a treatise ostensibly about rights, by rehearsing the basic tenets of natural rights doctrine in which reason is employed to satisfy human beings' desire for self-preservation. Rather, she affirms her "first principles" in order to correct mistaken notions of excellence. "In the present state of society, it appears necessary to go back to first principles in search of the most: simple truths, and to dispute with some prevailing prejudice every inch of ground" (*Rights of Woman* 28). Wollstonecraft distinguishes human beings from animals by their capacity for reason and by their capacity to quiet their passions in order to foster virtue:

> In what does man's pre-eminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole, in Reason. What acquirement exalts one being above another? Virtue, we spontaneously reply. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes, whispers Experience. (*Rights of Woman* 28)

From these first principles we are able to discern another important difference between Wollstonecraft's conception of human nature and the Enlightenment philosophers. For Wollstonecraft, human nature is determined by their ends or *telos*, to borrow from ancient philosophy, rather than human beings' crude origins. The nature of women, as well as men, is to foster reason and virtue. Women, considered in "the grand light of human creatures, who in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties" (*Rights of Woman* 24).

Given this notion of human nature, Wollstonecraft tells her readers that human beings' happiness is to be found in noble pursuits and not

simply in pleasure or the absence of pain. True civilization will foster the happiness of human beings by promoting virtue:

> Consequently the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguishes the individual, and direct the laws which bind society. (28)

Due to her understanding of human nature and political life, Wollstonecraft explicitly rejects Rousseau's account of man's natural condition as a solitary animal, Wollstonecraft writes

> Had mankind remained forever in the brutal state of nature, which even his magic pen cannot paint as a state in which a single virtue took root, it would have been clear, though to the sensitive unreflecting wanderer, that man was born to run the circle of life and death, and adorn God's garden for some purpose which could not be reconciled with his attributes. (30)

It is important to note that Wollstonecraft's explicit critique of Rousseau's state of nature contains in it an implicit critique of the Scottish Enlightenment. We have noticed that the Scottish Enlightenment's moral philosophy, which is ground on the natural sociability of human beings must have been compelling to Wollstonecraft. However, for Wollstonecraft, human beings are not merely sociable, they are political. They do not live in civil society because they are moved by benevolent passions. They live in political society because they are rational and political life is the occasion for unfolding the faculties. In this regard, Wollstonecraft has more in common with ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle, than she does with the Scottish Enlightenment (Aristotle 1252b29 -1252 and 1253a8 -19).

As we have already seen in Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau's political philosophy, the fundamental assumptions about the nature of human beings and the origins and purpose of political life reflect in the relationship between men and women. Sensibility or the differences between men and women, which Rousseau relies upon to overcome the solitary nature of human beings, results in a system of "cunning and lasciviousness":

> Riches and hereditary honours have made cyphers of women to give consequence to the numerical figure; and idleness has produced a mixture of gallantry and despotism into society, which leads the very men who are the slaves of their mistresses to tyrannize over their sisters, wives, and daughters. (*Rights of Woman* 42)

Wollstonecraft condemns the Scottish authors of conduct books for fostering the same character of women. Still, Wollstonecraft seeks to preserve the benevolent passions between men and women:

> I shall only observe, that whoever has cast a benevolent eye on society, must often haven been gratified by the sight of a humble mutual love, not dignified by sentiment, or strengthened by a union in intellectual pursuits. The domestic trifles of the day have afforded matters for cheerful converse, and innocent caresses have softened toils which did not require great exercise of mind or stretch of thought: yet, has not the sight of this moderate felicity excited more tenderness than respect? (42-43)

Wollstonecraft does not rest satisfied with such a scene of domestic tenderness, but argues that it must be ennobled by reason: "An emotion similar to what we feel when children are playing, or animals sporting, whilst the contemplation of the noble struggles of suffering merit has raised admiration, and carried our thought to that world where sensation will give place to reason" (43). Women's domestic roles must reflect human nature and contribute to the pursuit of their "nobler ambition" (23):

> Connected with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue. (*Rights of Woman* 43-44)

"The grand end" may be pursued along with her husband if a woman eschews the fleeting passions of love and a desire to reign over her husband: "Let the honest heart show itself, and *reason* teach passion to submit to necessity; or, let the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge raise the mind above those emotions which rather imbitter

than sweeten the cup of life, when they are not restrained within due bounds" (*Rights of Woman* 49-50). It is the friendship between man and woman that Wollstonecraft imagines will allow women to fulfill their human nature and to restore the corrupt eighteenth-century political life.

While considering the nature of human beings, particularly that of the female sex, and the political life that best suits that nature, Wollstonecraft engages with the thought of leading Enlightenment philosophers. A moral philosophy and an account of the civilizing process emerged from the Scottish Enlightenment that offered Wollstonecraft a means by which to privilege human beings' benevolent passions and to anticipate a change in women's weak and servile character. Yet, Wollstonecraft differs from the Scots by emphasizing that women are by their nature rational and capable of virtue. It is only by fostering women's reason and virtue that mankind can progress. Wollstonecraft's vindication of female virtue is a rigorous critique of prevailing political philosophies and makes her deserving of a place in the western canon as a philosopher.

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A Delicate Debate: Mary Wollstonecraft, the Bluestockings, and the Progress of Women

JoEllen M. DeLucia

This essay compares Wollstonecraft's liberal equality feminism to eighteenth-century Bluestocking feminism, which understood men and women as essentially different. Arguing that Dr. John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* has become a straw man for Wollstonecraft's more complex relationship to Bluestocking feminism and the Scottish Enlightenment, this essay revisits Wollstonecraft's treatment of Gregory in both her anthology *The Female Reader* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. By recovering Gregory's connections to Scottish Enlightenment philosophy and the Bluestocking movement, this essay argues that Wollstonecraft's "revolution in manners" participated in a larger Enlightenment debate over women's contribution to the civilizing process, particularly the social value of delicate manners and sentiments. This larger conversation included her female contemporaries as well as Scottish literati like Gregory and Adam Smith. The framework of Enlightenment feminisms provides an important historical context for continuing debates in feminist and gender studies over a number of issues, including the gendered registers of emotion as well as the value of feminist theories based on sexual difference instead of equity.

In her attack on female manners in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft rails against the Edinburgh physician Dr. John Gregory's *Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774). Her troubles with Gregory are manifold. Like other male writers, she accuses Gregory of having "contributed to render women more artifical, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society."[1] Traditionally, Gregory's treatise along with his contemporary James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) have been read as partially responsible for concretizing the boundary between private and public spheres and contributing to the creation of the repressive Victorian figure of the domestic "angel" (Dwyer 133). Wollstonecraft's celebration of women's ability to reason as men and citizens has been understood as challenging Gregory's depiction of the inherent

differences between the sexes. Where Wollstonecraft argues that women and men have equal abilities, Gregory sees the female sex as possessing superior and more delicate powers of feeling. Although it would be impossible to deny that Gregory's tract contributed to rigid Victorian notions of gender, another potential reading of his *Legacy* emerges if the eighteenth-century philosophical origins of his work are considered.

A popular Edinburgh doctor, Gregory was an active member of the Scottish Enlightenment and like his contemporary David Hume believed that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (Hume 266). Gregory was best known during his lifetime as the author of *The Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with Those of the Animal World* (1765), which Mary Catherine Moran has argued shaped his understanding of the relationship between female manners and social development in his more famous *Legacy*. Like other treatises of the Scottish Enlightenment, his *Comparative View* charts humanity's progress from savagery to civilization by contrasting various ages and societies. In this regard, the Scottish Enlightement differed from John Locke's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Enlightenment, which privileged reason and the politics of the social contract instead of the social mechanics of the civilizing process. Although not a skeptic like Hume, Gregory also argued in his *Comparative View* that "Reason is indeed but a weak principle in Man" and cited "our tempers, our passions and tastes" as the "impelling principles of Action" (Gregory 15, 14). As well as contributing to the Scottish study of history and society, Gregory was also involved with the Bluestockings, a group of largely upper-class eighteenth-century women and men who helped shape the artistic, literary, and philosophical tastes of the late eighteenth century. Sympathetic to the Scottish Enlightenment's discourse of feeling that Gregory draws on in his educational tract, the Bluestockings were also proponents of the view that, as the respositories of fine feeling and delicate manners, women were a civilizing force and key motors of social development. A close friend and physician to Elizabeth Montagu, the famous salonnaire and Queen of the Bluestockings, Gregory shared the Bluestockings' view that women played a unique role in the civilizing process.

By examining the philosphical and cultural contexts out of which Gregory's *Legacy* emerged, this essay complicates Wollstonecraft's

place within Enlightenment studies and feminist studies by understanding Gregory's work as not just that of a male conduct book writer but as a product of the Scottish Enlightenment and the mid-century Bluestocking movement. Whereas Wollstonecraft argued that "delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness" (*Rights of Woman* 12), her Bluestocking and Scottish contemporaries, who were also concerned with the social status of women, valued delicate feelings and refined manners as women's greatest attribute, a sign of their superiority, as well as a marker of civilization's advance. Studies of Wollstonecraft by Karen O'Brien and Jane Rendall have examined the influence of Scottish Enlightenment thought on her "diagnos[is] of female manners, under the present, partial state of civilization" (O'Brien 184); however, less attention has been paid to her relationship with her female contemporaries, other than the similarly minded Republican Catherine Macaulay. The debate over the value of feeling, manners, and politeness often pits Wollstonecraft against men, whether it be Rousseau, Locke, Edmund Burke, or even Gregory. As a result, with the exception of the work of Gary Kelly and Mitzi Myers, her engagement with the Bluestockings has been largely overlooked.

Elizabeth Montagu, one of the founding members of the Bluestocking movement, not only corresponded with luminaries of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Hugh Blair and Lord Kames but also assisted Gregory in composing his *Father's Legacy to His Daughters*. In a letter to Montagu from Gregory written before the publication of his tract, he thanks Montagu for the attention she paid to his daughters on their recent visit to Montagu's estate East Denton Hall in Northumberland and requests that she continue advising him on their education:

> A thousand thanks for all your uncommon care and tenderness for them. Yet I agree in this case you will find virtue its own reward. If you could find ten minutes spare time, may I beg you would write down what you think they should do when they return both as to reading and every part of their education. I know your general view of them and I think I could make out a better plan of female education from your letters than I have yet had the good fortune to see or ever effect to see but that I here beg of you some plan or directions what they are to do which you can contain in a page of paper. (HL MO1070 December 23, 1766, John Gregory to Elizabeth Montagu)

Montagu continued corresponding with Gregory until his death in 1773, and it appears as if she did in fact generate a "plan of education" for his daughters that Gregory found quite useful. In 1767 Gregory wrote to Montagu thanking her for such a plan, writing "I approve your plan of their study in every respect and it shall be as punctually put in execution as lies in my power" (HL MO1072 February 12, 1767, John Gregory to Elizabeth Montagu). How closely this plan resembled Gregory's published work is not certain, but Montagu's letters reveal that she did approve of its results. Gregory's daughter Dorothea became a great favorite of Montagu, living with her periodically before his death and almost exclusively for a decade after he died until Dorothea's marriage to Archibald Allison, a curate of whom Montagu did not approve (Rizzo 137-138).

Gregory turned to Montagu for advice because he viewed her as a model of femininity. In 1772, he thanks her for advising him to keep Dorothea away from the influence of decadent London society: "The reasons you give for her not remaining in London during the winter are to me perfectly satisfying. They discover in the strongest manner that delicacy of sentiment and of judgment in regard to female manners for which I have ever admired you" (HL MO1089 Dec 14 1772, John Gregory to Elizabeth Montagu). Unlike Wollstonecraft, Montagu believed that delicacy and the culitvation of fine feeling signified feminine strength and not weakness. The Bluestockings' and Wollstonecraft's different valuations of feeling and delicacy point to two potentially different strands of Enlightenment feminism, an egalitarian and liberal Wollstonecraftian tradition and a Bluestocking feminism that privileged feeling and sensibility and was based on essential differences between men and women.[2] Significantly, both approaches grew out of an engagement with the Scottish Enlightenment's efforts to trace the progress of civilization and women's contribution to this process. Gregory's debt to both the Bluestockings and the Scottish Enlightenment suggests that Wollstonecraft's "revolution in manners" participated in a larger Enlightenment debate over women's contribution to the civilizing process, particularly the social value of delicate manners and sentiments. This conversation included her female contemporaries as well as Scottish literati like Gregory and Adam Smith. These Enlightenment feminisms provide an important historical context for continuing debates in feminist and gender studies over a number of issues, including the gendered registers of emotion as well as the value

of feminist theories based on sexual difference instead of equity. The first part of this essay tracks Wollstonecraft's engagement with the Bluestockings and complicates her relationship to the Enlightenment discourse of sentiment and its role in the civilizing process. The second half of this essay rereads her *Rights of Woman* as a comment on the civilizing process and pays particular attention to her citations of Gregory and her reworking of Scottish Enlightenment theories of feeling.

Wollstonecraft and Bluestocking Philosophy

Wollstonecraft's relationship to the Bluestockings and her response to their understanding of female manners can be traced to her citations of Catherine Talbot, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone as well as Gregory in *The Female Reader* (1789), an anthology edited pseudononymously by Wollstonecraft and rediscovered in the 1970s. Gary Kelly has persuasively argued that *Rights of Woman* acts as a feminist and revolutionary response to the collection of conduct books, devotional works, and essays she excerpts in her *Female Reader* (112). This early text appears in Kelly's study as "hackwork" that prepared Wollstonecraft for her original contributions to female education (73); other scholars have read it as an artifact of an early stage of Wollstonecraft's career when she, if not embraced, accepted established patriarchal modes of thought. When Moria Ferguson first wrote about Wollstonecraft's *Female Reader* in *Signs*, where she claimed that taken together Wollstonecraft's

> original contributions [to this work] and the anthology itself freshly expose the uneven quality of Wollstonecraft's thinking. Explicitly laid bare is the central tension in her early works between her conviction that women must be educated and her acceptance, before the French Revolution, of a social view of women that affirmed and perpetuated their subjugation. (945)

The shift Ferguson notes seems more complicated than a move from an acceptance to a rejection of women's "subjugation." I would argue that Wollstonecraft's understanding of the origins of women's "subjugation" shifted between her work on *The Female Reader* and her *Rights of Woman* as she set herself and her philosophy apart from her Bluestocking contemporaries. What Ferguson describes as

Wollstonecraft's pre-Revolutionary acceptance of women's "subjugation" might better be understood as an embrace of Bluestocking feminism and its emphasis on the particular ways in which women contribute to the cultivation of manners and feelings within advanced societies. In *The Female Reader*, the increased social value placed on delicacy and elegance becomes a measure of the progress of women and civilization; in her *Rights of Woman*, the cultivation of delicate feelings and manners that accompanies the civilizing process stunts female development and distorts society.

Published by Joseph Johnson under the pseudonym of Mr. Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution, *The Female Reader* was modeled after the Dissenter William Enfield's *The Speaker* (1774), which taught elocution and advocated for educational reform (Ferguson 946). Similarly, Wollstonecraft's educational tract champions the reform of female education:

> The main object of this work is to imprint some useful lessons on the mind, and cultivate taste at the same time—to infuse a relish for a pure and simple style, by presenting natural and touching descriptions from the Scriptures, Shakespeare, &c. Simplicity and sincerity generally go hand in hand, as both proceed from a love of truth. (*Female Reader* 949)

Wollstonecraft continues in her introduction to position her anthology as a tool for cultivating taste and the passions: "Reasoning must be tedious and irksome to those whose passions have never led them to reason; and examples of virtue will ever most forcibly illustrate precepts of morality" (*Female Reader* 950). Wollstonecraft's effort to balance reason with passion recalls the Scottish Enlightenment's understanding of the foundational role passion plays in driving human development. Many of the excerpts Wollstonecraft included in her anthology reflect the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on her work. Fiona Price has recently discussed how the anthology's excerpts from *Letters on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), written by the popular University of Edinburgh professor Hugh Blair, shaped Wollstonecraft's understanding of aesthetic development and her critique of fashion in *Rights of Woman*. In *The Female Reader*, she also cites from the historian William Robertson and David Hume. Most notably, excerpts from John Gregory's *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with those of the Animal World* as well

as his *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* appear throughout the anthology. She cites Gregory as an authority on a number of issues including politeness, dress, as well as the important role of music in female education.

In addition to the Scottish works found in her *Female Reader*, she cites several popular pieces by well-known Bluestockings, such as Hester Chapone, Catherine Talbot, and Elizabeth Carter. Her citations of Chapone and Talbot in a section entitled "Didactic and Moral Pieces" demonstrate the importance of politeness, delicacy, and manners to women's development. The Bluestockings, as Elizabeth Eger has recently argued, made female education and intellect a part of the public sphere. Bluestocking sociability, which developed in the salons of Montagu, was understood by the Bluestockings and their Scottish interlocutors as a civilizing force. Montagu dubbed this brand of sociability "bluestocking philosophy," which combined "literary and cultural patronage with a sense of social duty" (Eger 67). In shaping her philosophy, Montagu not only read texts like Kames's *Sketches*, Hume's *Essays*, and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*, but also relied on Smith's "vocabulary of encouragement, refinement, and employment" (Eger 79). Montagu developed this philosophy in tandem with her fellow Bluestockings, encouraging, for example, the recently widowed Hester Chapone to write a book on female education to supplement her meager income as well as correcting Chapone's finished manuscript.[3] Demonstrating the influence of the Bluestockings' educational theories on Wollstonecraft's thought, several excerpts from Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) appeared in *The Female Reader*, including a small piece from Chapone's work entitled "False Sensiblity." The excerpt suggests that the Bluestockings and Wollstonecraft shared a desire to separate the affectation of "false sensiblity" from real feeling. In the short passage, Chapone mocks faux sentiment through the example of a woman who refuses to visit her dying friend because her delicate feelings are "not able to support such things" (Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader* 87). This anecdote illustrates the difference between true and false sentiment:

> [T]he poor selfish creature has persuaded herself that she had finer feelings than those generous friends who are sitting patiently in the house of mourning; watching, in silence, the proper moment to pour in the balm of comfort; who suppressed

> their own sensations, and only attended to those of the afflicted person; and those tears flowed in secret, whilst their eyes and voices were taught to enliven the sinking heart with the appearance of cheerfulness. (87-88)

Chapone's example illustrates the sort of fine feeling balanced by stoic self-control that Smith advocates in his influential *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* in which he argues, "[t]he man of the most perfect virtue, the man whom we naturally love and revere the most, is he who joins, to the most perfect command of his own original and selfish feelings, the most exquisite sensibility both to the original and sympathetic feelings of others" (Smith 175). Despite her departure from the Scottish Enlightenment's discourse of feeling and the tenets of Bluestocking philosophy in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft singles Chapone out as one of the few women writers on female conduct worth reading: "Mrs. Chapone's Letters are written with such good sense and unaffected humility, and contain so many useful observations, that I only mention them to pay the worthy writer this tribute of respect. I cannot, it is true, always coincide in opinion with her; but I always respect her" (*Rights of Woman* 132). Wollstonecraft retains "respect" for Chapone's Bluestocking sentiments, but she admits in *Rights of Woman* that their opinions on female manners do not "always coincide."

Alongside this selection from Chapone appears an excerpt from another Bluestocking, Catherine Talbot, who rarely attended Montagu's salons but was the intimate friend of Elizabeth Carter and celebrated as a paragon of virtue by Samuel Richardson and others. Talbot published little during her lifetime, but Carter collected her friend's work posthumously and published *Essays on Various Subjects* in 1772. Wollstonecraft included in *The Female Reader* a piece entitled "On Politeness" from Talbot's essays. Like Chapone's, Talbot's work attempts to find a balance between feeling and self-command. She defines politeness as "a restraint laid by reason and benevolence upon every irregularity of the temper, which, in obedience to them, is forced to accommodate itself even to the fantastic cares which custom and fashion have established" (Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader* 84). She views reason as suppressing the temper, but she also fully acknowledges the essential nature of feeling, arguing that politeness "must be accompanied with an elegance of taste and a delicacy to oblige; and, though its foundation

must be rooted in the heart, it can scarce be perfect without a complete knowledge of the world. In society it is the medium that blends all different tempers into the most pleasing harmony" (84). By excerpting Talbot's essay, Wollstonecraft acknowledges the value of politeness and accepts both "elegance of taste" and "delicacy" as important feminine attributes; the development of these traits requires a feeling heart and a certain worldliness that comes only through mixing in society. Although it would not be surprising for the Wollstonecraft of *Rights of Woman* to advocate women's access to "complete knowledge of the world," the emphasis her *Female Reader* places on politeness and delicacy and the role they play in developed society is less easy to reconcile. Wollstonecraft's citation of Chapone and Talbot shows her early interest in the role of feeling in the development of female intellect and civilization's advance, and her quotations of Gregory within the reader further complicate her perspective on the relationship between the heart, the progress of women, and the development of civilization.

More surprisingly for readers of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft in *The Female Reader* often quotes Gregory and echoes his sentiments. Their two perspectives closely correspond on the importance of religion. In a footnote to *The Female Reader's* introduction, she attributes to Gregory an accurate sense of the importance of religion in female education: "A late amiable writer has asserted that, amidst the scenes of silent unobserved distress, in which women are very frequently involved, religion is their only solace and support" (vii). She continues to stress the importance of the cultivation of "devotional habits" in women (vii), which reinforces Barbara Taylor's recent work on the centrality of religion to her thinking. Beyond religion, Wollstonecraft shares some of Gregory's thoughts on female dress as well as taste. The section "Moral and Didactic Pieces" includes an excerpt from his *Legacy* that recommends against elaborate dress: "Vanity, levity, slovenliness, folly, appear through it. An elegant simplicity is an equal proof of taste and delicacy" (Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader* 64). Immediately after, Wollstonecraft includes a quotation from her own *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1788): "The body hides the mind [. . .] dress ought to adorn the person, and not rival it. It may be simple, elegant, and becoming, without being expensive; and ridiculous fashions disregarded, while singularity is avoided" (Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader* 64). Wollstonecraft appears to agree with Gregory on the

value of simplicity and elegance and their agreement extends to Gregory's understanding of true taste, which she also quotes in the same section. Gregory argues that focusing on "blemishes and deformity can have no good effect either on the temper or the heart" (Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader* 99). Instead, he advocates, as Wollstonecraft does, for a simplicity and openess that complements nature instead of masking it: "an intimate acquaintance with the work of nature and genius in their most beautiful and amiable forms humanizes and sweetens the temper, opens and extends the imagination, and disposes the most pleasing views of mankind and providence" (99). The Gregory of *The Female Reader* looks much different from *Righs of Woman*'s Gregory, who Wollstonecraft depicts as inviting women to hide their true nature instead of embracing it. She leaves the passages from Gregory cited in *The Female Reader* behind and instead describes Gregory as "recommend[ing] dissimulation" and the repression of female intellect and desire (46). Wollstonecraft's view of women and their contribution to the civilizing process shifts between the two works as she moves away from Bluestocking philosophy and toward a more radical egalitarian feminism. Although Wollstonecraft's tone in *Rights of Woman* is notably passionate, her essay (as we will see in the next section) recommends against indulging in the feminine feelings and sentiments so valued by Scottish philosophers and their Bluestocking contemporaries and invites women to be guided by reason and the intellect.

Wollstonecraft, who has often been discussed as the mother of a liberal and egalitarian brand of feminism, appears to have struggled in her intellectual life with Bluestocking philosophy or a feminism based on sexual difference and not the essential similarities between men and women. In this context, it is significant that Wollstonecraft begins her anthology with a quotation from Gregory establishing the essential differences between the sexes: "As the two sexes have very different parts to act in life nature has marked their characters very differently, in a way that best qualifies them to fulfill their respective duties in society" (Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader* A5). Wollstonecraft condones and disseminates this sentiment in *The Female Reader*, and lays out a plan of education appropriate for the "respective duties" women are expected to perform within society. In *Rights of Woman*, she famously established the intellectual and behavioral similarities

between men and women, recommends similar plans of education, and finds differences based not on "nature" but society.

Representations of Feeling in *Rights of Woman*

In chapter two of *Rights of Woman*, "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed," Wollstonecraft mounts her critique of Gregory's plan of education. She writes, "[b]ut Rousseau, and most of the male writers who have followed his steps, have warmly inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point: – to render them pleasing" (*Rights of Woman* 45). Wollstonecraft's critique of sensibility in *Rights of Woman* has been understood as part of her evolving feminism: "During the 1790s she would come to see Sensibility as less a form of bourgeois revolutionary culture than an appropriation of courtly ideology by the bourgeois cultural revolution especially in gender relations" (Kelly 37). As a result of this shift, Gregory transforms between *A Female Reader* from a celebrated influence to a target of Wollstonecraft's ire: "The worthy Dr. Gregory fell into a similar error. I respect his heart; but entirely disapprove of his celebrated Legacy to his Daughters" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 46). She takes particular issue with Gregory's assessment of sensibility, which he understands not as a weakness but as "the power of woman" (Gregory, *Legacy* 87). In his *Legacy*, Gregory writes to his daughters, "You will see, in a little Treatise of mine just published, in what an honourable point of view I have considered your sex; not as domestic drudges, or the slaves of our pleasures, but as our companions and equals; as designed to soften our hearts and polish our manners" (6). The treatise Gregory cites is his *Comparative View*, which takes progressive positions that Wollstonecraft endorsed, including advocating against "the confinement of stays" and for "women nursing their own children" (2; 24). Wollstonecraft takes issue with the *Legacy's* claim that women's superior powers of sensibility elevate their sex. In Gregory's view, sensibility becomes women's greatest strength and the most powerful contribution they can make to society: "Your superior delicacy, your modesty, and the usual severity of your education, preserve you, in a great measure, from any temptation to those vices to which we are most subjected. The natural softness and sensibility of your dispositions particularly fit you for the practice of those duties where

the heart is chiefly concerned" (Gregory, *Legacy* 10). The emphasis Gregory and his Scottish contemporaries place on feeling and social development allowed them to appreciate the "softness and sensibility" as well as the "superior delicacy" and "modesty" often associated with the female sex in a way that differed from Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, who was more invested in reason and the politics of the social contract; they also raise questions about the ways in which Wollstonecraft maps her class critique of courtly society onto gender relations in *Rights of Woman*. As wealthy Bluestockings such as Elizabeth Montagu evidence, the superior sensibilities attributed to women of wealth and power were not always productive of aristocratic ennui and frivolity but could result in influential positions within political and social circles.

According to the Wollstonecraft of *Rights of Woman*, by cultivating sentiment at the expense of reason, Gregory's plan of education, far from preparing women to contribute to society, curtails women's development and renders them dependent on men. His deepest failure is his emphasis on the power of feeling, and she claims that he "shew[s] how absurd and tyrannic it is thus to lay down a system of slavery; or to attempt to educate moral beings by any other rules than those deduced from pure reason, which apply to the whole species" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 51). The softer emotions and the desire for beauty, elegance, and approval create in women a "servility" that Wollstonecraft likens to a courtly dependence on a "tyrannic" ruler: "Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to be fair, raise emotions instead of inspiring respect: and this ignoble desire, like the servility in absolute monarchies destroys all strength of character" (56). Interestingly, Wollstonecraft cites Adam Smith's comments on the nobility in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as "descriptive of women" (*Rights of Woman* 79). She finds his claim that people of rank desire only "[t]o be observed, attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation" as appropriate to women, who are "localized [. . .] by the rank they are placed in" as courtiers are made servile and "swallowed up" by their dependence on a king (80). Here we see Wollstonecraft's Revolutionary critique of rank and class stratification shaping her egalitarian approach to the question of sexual difference. She continues this class critique, claiming that "gentlewomen are too indolent to be actively virtuous, and are softened rather than refined by civilization" (*Rights of Woman* 100).

In her portrait of the gentlewomen, Wollstonecraft relies heavily on her experiences as a governess to the notably indolent and vain Lady Kingsborough, who was very different than the intellectual and philanthropic upper-class Bluetsockings. By taking Lady Kingsborough as representative of her class, Wollstonecraft is able to liken feminine sensibilities to class affectations – products of a civilizing process that she condemns as producing artifical feelings and desires.

She extends this analogy to include the purportedly despotic cultures of the east made famous in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* (1721) and often referred to in the historical and philosophical treatises of the Scottish Enlightenment. According to Wollstonecraft, Gregory invites women "to use art and feign a sickly delicacy" (*Rights of Woman* 47). She describes this "sickly delicacy" as a trait to be found in a "sergalio" (47), associating delicacy with the upper classes of the overindulgent East, which represented a late stage in the civilizing process. Unlike the West, where civility and morals were cultivated, the East represented a malformation of civilization in which luxury and pleasure are developed above morals and manners. The feminine characteristics associated with modernity and civilization lead her to shift Hume's claim that "reason is a slave to the passions" and apply this sentiment only to women: "Yet to their senses, are women made slaves, because it is by their sensibility that they obtain present power" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 83). She views women's excessive sensibility as a product of the civilizing process:

> Civilized women are, therefore, so weakened by false refinement, that, respecting morals, their condition is much below what it would be were they left in a state nearer to nature. Ever restless and anxious, their over exercised sensibility not only renders them uncomfortable themselves, but troublesome, to use a soft phrase, to others. (83)

Instead of taking on the difficult task of differentiating "false refinement" and "natural sensibility" as she did in *The Female Reader*, Wollstonecraft subordinates emotion to intellect and encourages women to see themselves as reasoning agents instead of "troublesome" and feeling creatures.

By educating women to cultivate sensibility and working from what she understands as the false tenet that they were made "rather to feel than reason" (*Rights of Woman* 84), Wollstonecraft suggests that the whole civilizing process is thrown out of whack:

> Still, if advice could really make a being gentle, whose natural disposition admitted not of such a fine polish, something towards the advancement of order would be attained; but if, as might quickly be demonstrated, only affectation be produced by this indiscriminate counsel, which throws a stumbling block in the way of gradual improvement, and true amelioration of temper, the sex is not much benefited by sacrificing solid virtues to the attainment of superficial graces, though for a few years they may procure the individuals regal sway. (52-53)

Unlike Gregory and the Bluestockings, who believed that the culivation of sentiment was a sign of the progress of civilization, Wollstonecraft argues that the "polish" and "graces" that appear to mark "the advancement of order" throw a "stumbling block in the way of gradual improvement" and prevent the "true amelioration" of the female "temper." Although the Wollstonecraft of *A Female Reader* and her later *Letters Written from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) engages in the cultivation of feminine sensiblity and draws from the Scottish Enlightenment to map social progress,[4] Wollstonecraft in *Rights of Woman* reverses the Scottish Enlightenment's alignment of the progress of women with the progress of civilization and instead sees women and civilization as contrary terms.

Throughout *Rights of Woman*, she develops this critique of the civilizing process: "It is a melancholy truth; yet such is the blessed effect of civilization! The most respectable women are the most oppressed; and, unless they have understandings far superior to the common run of understandings, taking in both sexes, they must, from being treated like contemptible beings, become contemptible" (181). She continues to invert the Scottish view of humanity's progress from savagery to civilization, instead seeing this movement as a regressive one:

> For civilization prevents that intercourse which creates affection in the rude hut, or mud hovel, and leads uncultivated minds who are only depraved by the refinements which prevail

> in society where they are trodden under foot by the rich, to domineer over them to revenge the insults that they are obliged to bear from their superiors. (*Rights of Woman* 207)

In Wollstonecraft's view, civilized society's emphasis on the senses, refined feeling and pleasure cultivates not developed sensibilities but savage appetites: "An immoderate fondness for dress, for pleasure, and for sway, are the passions of savages; the passions that occupy those uncivilized beings who have not yet extended the dominion of the mind, or even learned to think with the energy necessary to concatenate that abstract train of thought which produces principles" (224). Ultimately, the way in which women cultivate sentiment becomes in *Rights of Woman* not an extension of their natural capabilities but an "overstretched" social distortion that "relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others" (83). Feeling leaves women out of control, dependent, and lacking the "sovereignty" gained only through reason. Ultimately, Wollstonecraft's analysis makes reason and intellect "sovereign" and turns Hume's portrayal of reason as the passions' "slave" on its head, undoing what she sees as the debilitating effects of the discourse of sensibility on women. Attending to Wollstonecraft's critique of the Scottish Enlightenment and Bluestockings philosophy provides a richer background upon which to situate Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* within Enlightenment evaluations of the import of feeling and attempts to provide a new context for ongoing feminist discussions that struggle to balance abstract universal rights while recognizing the persistent cultural and even biological links between women and emotion.

Other contemporary scholars have begun to reconsider Wollstonecraft's relationship to this larger Enlightenment. Recently, Amartya Sen, in his *Idea of Justice*, has grouped Wollstonecraft's work alongside Adam Smith's as representative of a comparative strand of Enlightenment thought that runs counter to the more familiar social contract tradition associated with Locke and Rousseau; Daniel O'Neill has argued that "Wollstonecraft engaged in a sustained critique of Scottish Enlightenment moral theory" (17); Natalie Fuehrer Taylor has found that "Lockean liberalism" provides an "[in]adequate theoretical framework for Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (5), and her study has emphasized Wollstonecraft's

"critique of state of nature theories, in particular those put forth by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke" (7). Attending to Wollstonecraft's investment in the Scottish Enlightement's empirical study of the progress of society, which involved a close analysis of the role of women in the civilizing process, as opposed to her response to Locke, Rousseau, and the social contract tradition from which women are either absent or devalued, alters our understanding of Enlightenment attitudes toward women and takes us beyond Carole Pateman's influential *Sexual Contract*, which sees women as largely absent from dominant Enlightenment narratives. Modern feminist theories are often thought of as either an extension of the Enlightenment discourse of equal rights or a reaction to an Enlightenment that is often portrayed as an Age of Reason, which devalued women's special purchase on embodied emotions and experiences. These narratives are too simple and reductive. In light of Wollstoncraft's familiarity and investment in Scottish Enlightenment thought, feminist theorists might begin thinking about Enlightenment feminisms—some of which value feeling as well as reason—as opposed to a singular Enlightenment tradition. Wollstonecraft's Revolutionary feminism would have looked much differently if instead of universalizing reason as a characteristic shared by all humanity it built on the foundations of her Bluestocking predecessors and contemporaries and considered the possiblity of an equality built on difference instead of similarity.

NOTES

[1] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* eds. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao. New York: Longman, 2007. (39). Hereafter referred to as *Rights of Woman*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.

[2] Gary Kelly also discusses the differences between the Bluestockings and Wollstonecraft in his *Revolutionary Feminism*. He claims that Bluestocking feminism "aimed to feminize gentry capitalism by purging the gentry of court culture and modifying capitalist management of landed estates to provide better for the agrarian working class" (50). For more of Kelly's important work on the Bluestockings, see his six volume series *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785*.

[3] See Zuk's "Talbot, Catherine (1721-1770)."

[4] In *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, Wollstonecraft draws on the comparative methodology of the Scottish Enlightenment to measure the commercial and social progress of these various nations against the progress of Great Britian. We also see her concern with the cultivation of her daughter Fanny Imlay's sensibilities. Her reservations about Fanny's education provide a much more ambivalent view on the value of sentiment: "I dread lest she should be forced to sacrifice her heart to her principles, or principles to her heart. With trembling hand I shall cultivate sensibility, and cherish delicacy of sentiment, lest, whilst I lend blushes to the rose, I sharpen thorns that will wound the breast I would fain guard—I dread to unfold her mind, lest it should render her unfit for the world she is to inhabit—Hapless woman! what a fate is thine!" (See Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence* 97)

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Mary Wollstonecraft's Religious Characters

Simon Swift

A number of readings of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, from Godwin onward, seek to account for what they take to be its argumentative ruggedness and polemical uses of reason as an expression of the immaturity of its author. I argue that in interpreting the text biographically, such readers fail to notice the importance of an idea of character to Wollstonecraft's social philosophy. Paying attention to character in Wollstonecraft's writing, especially in *Rights of Woman*, resituates what appear to be contradictions or discontinuities in Wollstonecraft's argument as aspects of a religious philosophy that argues for the continuity between providence and human error. I situate this reading both in relation to the reappearance of "character" in recent cultural theory, and demonstrate how attention to Wollstonecraft's religious characters can also help to account in a new way for her relation to interlocutors such as Edmund Burke and Adam Smith. Finally, I compare the argument of *Rights of Woman* to Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, published one year later. Both Kant and Wollstonecraft set out from a critique of Rousseau's doctrine of natural goodness, and argue instead for the historical and cultural purposiveness of evil. I suggest that each argument risks atheism in its departure from prescribed interpretations of scripture, and explore the ways in which each mobilizes an idea of character in order to think through the continuities between the Supreme Being and reason. Finally, I explore how these arguments are supported by a model for reading scripture allegorically.

> I may be allowed to doubt whether woman were created for man; and, though the cry of irreligion, or even atheism, be raised against me, I will simply declare, that were an angel from heaven to tell me that Moses's beautiful, poetical cosmogony, and the account of the fall of man, were literally true, I could not believe what my reason told me was derogatory to the character of the Supreme Being.
> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

> One philosopher, and one only, has appeared, who, superior to all prejudices, invariably treated the female sex as beings who were to be taught the performance of duty, not by arbitrary

> regulations confined to particular parts of conduct, but by the knowledge of principles which enlighten the understanding and improve the heart […] his name was JESUS CHRIST. He was the first philosopher who placed the female character in a respectable point of view.
> Elizabeth Hamilton, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800)

> Nothing so true as what you once let fall,
> 'Most women have no Characters at all'
> Alexander Pope, "Epistle II. To a Lady: Of the Characters of Women" (1735)1

Wollstonecraft and the Religious Character

What might be described as a "characterological" analysis of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* long damaged its reputation vis-à-vis Mary Wollstonecraft's narrative writings. In the case of the later *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark,* a work notably lacking in the Christian philosophy of *Rights of Woman* has found special critical favour, from William Godwin onwards. The shift from *Rights of Woman* to the *Letters* can easily be made to look like a record of Wollstonecraft's shuffling free of the uncomfortable "dialectic of enlightenment" that, for Janet Todd, accounts for the shortcomings of the earlier writing (115). So too, Wollstonecraft's praise in the later work for Norwegian free-thinkers who deny the divinity of Christ, can comfortably make this shift look like an example of a familiar narrative of secularization.[2] Everything in the former reading depends upon a specific view of the development of Wollstonecraft's character. The successes of her writing, by this reading, are consequences of her succumbing to melancholy, and her abandonment of an enlightenment discourse of improvability; her acceptance, in other words, that she might only write well "in character." As Mary Poovey wrote of Wollstonecraft in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer,* "[t]he frustrations behind the contradictions evident in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* her strongest polemic, would be dispelled only when she found a way to allow the writer and the woman to speak with one voice" (81). There are in the *Rights of Woman,* observed Godwin in his *Memoirs* of its author, "occasional passages of a stern and rugged feature,

incompatible with the true stamina of the writer's character. But, if they did not belong to her fixed and permanent character, they belonged to her character *pro tempore*; and what she thought, she scorned to qualify" (Godwin 231). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* fails, for Godwin, because, as rugged polemic, it is not a true expression of Mary's permanent self. Yet it gives a snapshot of Mary's character *pro tempore,* in the way that it reveals her refusal to qualify her thoughts. For Godwin, *Rights of Woman* seems to gesture, precisely *because* of its unguarded style, towards what that permanent self might be.[3]

There are a set of assumptions at play between Poovey and Godwin about the relation between a writer's style and her character; especially, they each evidence a concern that style be able to disclose character. So too, these kinds of judgements disclose a pervasive commitment to a developmental view of Wollstonecraft's life as seen through her writing, a desire especially to see her move away from masculine, rational ruggedness, contradiction and frustration towards feminine, embodied smoothness. Behind this concern, I want to suggest, lies a further set of assumptions about the relation between philosophy and character that it is part of the purpose of this essay to challenge. I shall argue that, rather than its being evidence of failure, Wollstonecraft actually embraces contradiction in the *Rights of Woman,* and that a view of contradiction as the dynamo of character development is key to her rational theology. Godwin, and after him Mary Poovey and Janet Todd assume that character is itself an unphilosophical, and also sentimental category; that the evolution of a woman's character is only distorted by her entry into the vicissitudes of rational debate. In just this way, the whole arc of Wollstonecraft's development as a writer is determined by a story of her character that captures her moving away from philosophy and towards melancholy and creativity, away from religious and rational optimism and towards dejection.

The consequence of such a reading of her is to ghettoise what Godwin determines as Wollstonecraft's "fixed and permanent character" into a damaged sensibility which manifests itself in wounded forms of self-expression. The traces of her real character are to be found in Godwin's preferred works, the unfinished *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* and especially the *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, which testify to the ways in which a delicate sensibility lent to the melancholy that

attended their authors' numerous disappointments in love further strength of character. Candidly describing Wollstonecraft's blighted love life, Godwin writes that

> Some persons may be inclined to observe, that the evils here enumerated, are not among the heaviest in the catalogue of human calamities. But evils take their rank more from the temper of the mind that suffers them, than from their abstract nature. Upon a man of a hard and insensible disposition, the shafts of misfortune often fall pointless and impotent […] On the other hand, we not unfrequently meet with persons, endowed with the most exquisite and delicious sensibility, whose minds seem almost of too fine a texture to encounter the vicissitudes of human affairs, to whom pleasure is transport, and disappointment is agony indescribable. This character is finely portrayed by the author of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Mary was in this respect a female Werther. (241-2)

Writing thirty years later in his essay "Characteristics," Thomas Carlyle described "Wertherism" as something that moderns grasp at as "the old ideal of Manhood has grown obsolete."[4] Yet for Godwin's Wollstonecraft, female Wertherism offers an important model, and perhaps signpost, for a female self entangled between enlightenment optimism and proto-romantic melancholy.

Godwin here develops a key aspect of Wollstonecraft's own view of the character of the genius, and makes it into a touchstone for judging the qualities of her work. A particularly gifted character's response to the world suggests its disposition both to fly and to fall, in comparison with the responsiveness of a less extraordinary self which, as a consequence of its hardness, is less likely to feel transport and agony at life's opportunities and disappointments. In making this claim, Godwin develops Wollstonecraft's dialectically complex sense of the benefits and dangers of "mistakes of conduct" for those endowed with different natural talents, a sense that she had explored in *The Wrongs of Woman*.[5] A view of the philosophical importance of the question of character does however plausibly account for the slippage between first and third-person modes that Wollstonecraft apologises for in the "Advertisement" to the *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*. Her plan, she writes there, had been to offer something like an objective account of her travels, "a just view of the present state of the countries I have

passed through"; yet this proved impossible, she goes on, as "I found I could not avoid being continually the first person – 'the hero of each little tale'" (Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 62). The power of this text may be found precisely in its incapacity *not* to heroise and to foreground the self that otherwise seeks to give an objective view of the countries that it passes through. This incapacity is reflected in the way that that self performs the continual arrival of the first person, from the "Advertisement" onwards.

I shall consider in more detail Wollstonecraft's sense of the heroic character in what follows. For now, I want to underline that Godwin's lauding of Wollstonecraft's romantic character overlooks the crucial role that an idea of character plays *in* her philosophy. I would contend that critical neglect of Wollstonecraft's treatment of character contributes significantly to the widespread view of her philosophy, in *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman,* as fundamentally confused or somehow caught in a rhetorically-charged mimicking of masculine reason. Character is, I want to argue instead, key to the unfolding of Wollstonecraft's Christian philosophy in *Rights of Woman*. It is, crucially, what guarantees a subtly-argued continuity between providence and reason.

Godwin marginalizes the importance of Wollstonecraft's religion, as did most of her sympathetic readers up to Barbara Taylor; and this marginalization seems to take place through a collapsing of religious belief into sublime introspection.[6] Because her mind "constitutionally attached itself to the sublime and amiable," Godwin writes in the *Memoirs*, "[h]er religion was, in reality, little allied to any system of forms," it was, instead, "almost entirely of her own creation" (215). Such claims arguably bind Wollstonecraft into a narrative of secularization, described by one of its most sensitive critics as "that highly persuasive and fully naturalized story of modern development in which the secular comes to be identified with the state, and with reason, while the religious is privatized and localized" (Jaeger 54). Godwin's Wollstonecraft is left somewhere in the dead-end of tracing a process of secularizing interiorization, whereby religion becomes a sentiment for the sublime, under the sign of melancholy. Undoubtedly, this is a dead-end that could become a source of strength to later feminist and postmodern studies of "abjection" and melancholy.[7] Yet for the Wollstonecraft of *Rights of Woman* quoted in my epigraph, on the contrary, it is precisely the capacity of our power of reason to intuit the character of the Supreme Being that assures us that the

stories of Scripture – the account of the fall of man and "Moses's beautiful, poetical cosmogony," are just that – stories, or beautiful, poetical fictions. That is, scripture is "privatized" as literature precisely because a public power of reason preoccupies itself with the philosophical question of the character of the Supreme Being. Through contact with this character, the experience of the sublime becomes foundational to the art of character-building that it is the key task of the rational female self to cultivate. To this extent, sublimity is a supplement or lesson, rather than substitute for faith.

As Molly Desjardins' essay in this volume makes clear, an interest in the formative and educative power of the sublime for female selves is an interest we share. Desjardins' (proper) insistence that Wollstonecraft's physiological account of the sublime is closer to Burke than to Kant may seem to put distance between our arguments, since Kant's view of moral character will form an important resource for the exploration of character in Wollstonecraft that follows. Consequently, Desjardins' claim that Wollstonecraft's physiological sublime aims "to prove that bodily choices affect moral life" may seem at a significant remove from my exploration of Wollstonecraft's investment in a public power of reason (170). In fact, Desjardins' nuanced description of the ways in which the sublime allows a training of the imagination that has material effects in the forming of new neural pathways which enable women to develop virtuous habits of conduct suggests a powerful image of the embodiment of reason that I would want to endorse. We both see the sublime in Wollstonecraft as "fully integrated with her religious beliefs" (Desjardins 157). I take Desjardins' claim to be that Wollstonecraft invested in a physiological account of mind out of a commitment to the transformation of female character; thus Desjardins shows that, for Wollstonecraft, "animal spirits are dangerous aspects of mental experience because they cannot be controlled by reason or the will, yet are central in determining how one's passions influence one's emotional and intellectual composition – that is, one's character, or temperament." Such a claim facilitates a fine delineation of the difficulties and struggles that women face in taking rational control of their characters. How, as Desjardins has Wollstonecraft asking, "can women be expected to make a rational choice to re-educate themselves by rejecting 'a sexual character' of mind when that mental sexualization is precisely what prohibits them from making such a choice?" (164).

Desjardins shows how Wollstonecraft used the resources of the late-Enlightenment intellectual milieu to which she belonged, and especially Priestley and Burke, in order to essay an unravelling of this knot. My approach to this same dilemma might be framed as a function of my investment in bringing Kant and Wollstonecraft together. In the *Critique of Judgement,* Kant deems Burke the 'foremost author' of physiological treatments of our aesthetic judgement. Burke's physiological account of the sublime is, says Kant, "exceedingly fine" and provides "rich material for the favourite investigations of empirical anthropology" (139). But because Burke's judgements remain bound, according to Kant, by the bodily gratification offered by charm or emotion, and are especially to be understood as organized by fundamental sensations of pleasure or pain (a way of organizing sensory experience that Kant endorses), in making these judgements "we also must not require anyone *else* to assent to an aesthetic judgement that *we* make" since "about that sort of liking each person consults only his private sense" (139). Consequently, with that restriction, "all censure of taste will cease" (139-40). A physiological account of our aesthetic experience cannot, then, capture what Kant calls the "pluralistic" quality of our judgement of taste, a quality that derives from the fact that "we must acknowledge it to be a judgement that is entitled to claim that everyone else ought also to agree with it" (140). Of course Wollstonecraft had no such theory of the subjective universality of aesthetic judgement. It is the fact that we cannot but think that others "ought" to agree with our judgements of taste, no matter how much they may continue to refuse to do so, that guarantees the communicability of those judgements and the hope that they can be refined and improved through such communication. I continue to believe that Kant's critique of judgements of taste proposes a pathway towards the kind of rational self-articulation that will allow subjects to identify one another as virtuous agents, and that will enable an escape from just the vicious circle of entrapment that Desjardins teases out of Wollstonecraft.

Desjardins shows the ways in which Wollstonecraft adopts and adapts Burke's physiological sublime to the end of cultivating virtue in women; in what follows, I shall allude to some of the ways in which her rhetorical style, too, has been shown to be indebted to Burke. But I think that an understanding of Wollstonecraft and Kant as common readers of Burke and Rousseau suggests important ways

in which a Kantian frame provides answers to some of the restrictions that Wollstonecraft encountered in empirical philosophy. I want to suggest especially that the ways in which the claim for rational autonomy that characterises humanity in what might be termed Kant's transcendental anthropology can usefully thicken our understanding of Wollstonecraft's account of moral selfhood. Desjardins has offered us in her essay an important new light on the ways in which Wollstonecraft's argument was enabled by the culture of late enlightenment science and materialism. My analogies between Wollstonecraft's and Kant's ideas about intelligible character in what follows will, it is hoped, suggest something of their shared restlessness with the social foundations of aesthetic judgements in British empiricism – a frustration that is foundational at least to Wollstonecraft's reading of Burke in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men,* and, as I shall argue, her critique of Smith *in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Once granted a shared concern for the issue of intelligible character, the importance of Wollstonecraft and Kant's shared critique of Rousseau also comes into view in a new way.

Wollstonecraft's ambitious claims for character in *Rights of Woman,* in fact, concern two types of character, as well as the relation between them – the character of the Supreme Being and the character of woman. In the course of her invective against sexual virtues, a key cornerstone of Wollstonecraft's argument is, as the title of Chapter 2 makes clear, to attack the "prevailing opinion" that there is such a thing as a "sexual character." And, as the title of Chapter 6 underlines, this attack proceeds through a Lockean and associationist account of experience by animadverting on the effect that an "early association of ideas" has on the formation of character. To this extent, ideological notions of female character, freighted as they are with values derived from a literary-philosophical-theological history of depictions of female character, from Genesis through *Paradise Lost* and on into *Émile* and beyond, are a major target for Wollstonecraft's invective. In opposition to the "sexual character" formed through an early association of ideas and through literary examples, I want to argue that Wollstonecraft taps into another, richer strain of thinking about character, which emphasises human autonomy, and the capacity of the sincere heart, when guided by a moral example (especially the ultimate example of the sincere heart of Christ), to unfold its rational potential. This claim depends upon an alternative account of the fall which relocates it as a narrative of the individual's experiential

discovery of reason and autonomy. Such a relocation implicitly gives women, allegorically represented by the person of Eve, an active and *positive* role in the necessary unlocking of rational autonomy and the subsequent departure of mankind from the state of nature. Wollstonecraft's claim is that God asks us, through our power of reason, to "break loose from his providence" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 30). Such an argument also finds Wollstonecraft defending the role that evil plays in the development of culture, and, as we will see in what follows, here her reading of positive evil shares in Kant's critique of Rousseau and Rousseauvian ideas of natural innocence. Crucially, in making this powerful set of arguments in defence of the vicissitudes of experience, Wollstonecraft relies on a rational idea of "the character of the Supreme Being" which is, as she argues, the "only solid foundation for morality" (*Rights of Woman* 65).

Character is the alpha and omega of *Rights of Woman*. It determines and helps to identify Wollstonecraft's philosophical theology, as much as a concern for character shapes her awareness of the deforming powers of female education. Wollstonecraft's debunking of Rousseau's portrayal of female character in his Sophie traces the causes of his contradictory social philosophy to his enslavement to "voluptuous reveries," demonstrating Wollstonecraft's powerful awareness of the importance of the philosophical life that Rousseau's own *Confessions* and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* had done so much to revive (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 42). The text of *Rights of Woman* is littered with character-sketches of bad and good mothers, prostitutes, rakes and flirts. Even as women are seen as "levelled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance," (*Rights of Woman* 121) Wollstonecraft mobilizes the attack on women's (lack of) character found in the writing of Pope and Swift into a rational reformulation of what character might be. Character provides an important way of reading the Bible as the history of a divinely-licensed struggle to become free and mature, a struggle that people enter into with themselves. Such a reading of the Bible as the story of the development of human attributes in relation to the divine marries Wollstonecraft's theology and her social philosophy through some of *Rights of Woman'*s more extraordinary claims: "Jesus Christ was modest, Moses was humble, and Peter vain," she declares at one point (152). Christ's modesty is held out as an example for men and women, against the pharisaical insistence on form and conduct that, for

Wollstonecraft (as for Elizabeth Hamilton's Dr. Orwell eight years later, and quoted in my epigraph), determines contemporary expectations of female behaviour. Christ's is the sincere and simple heart that provides an imitable example for men and women in the required reformation of contemporary manners.

Wollstonecraft, to this extent, shares with Kant the sense that Christ, as Susan Shell has recently put it, offers an "unequalled moral example." This is so because human beings "cannot experience the transcendental without sensible clothing, cannot conceive of the force of their own moral *Analge* [predisposition] – infinite as it is – other than by representing it as surrounded by obstacles and yet – amidst the greatest temptations – victorious." The "wonder" generated by the moral-educative force of the story of the passion helps to heighten the individual's awareness of her own moral predisposition as she encounters material, worldly obstacles (Shell 204). In the conflict between the philosophical and theological faculties that he sought to adjudicate in the early 1790s, Kant was to argue that in its borrowings from, and allegorical readings of scripture, philosophical theology made moral inquiries which should remain independent of the historical authority of biblical theology. In Kant's view, a concentrated attention to the philosophical and moral question of character or personality liberates the philosopher's reading of the Bible to understand itself anthropologically, as a study of characters that offer guiding examples for the good heart, rather than as absolute justifications as to what a good heart might be. Such a justification, at least for Kant, must now be a product of reason.

The main positive role of Christianity, Susan Shell goes on, "lies in the historically unequalled pedagogic power of the story of Christ's passion" (204). The task of the moral agent who seeks to develop their personality or character is to embody Christ's example, to make out of the stories recounted in the Gospels an interior model for the cultivation of a sincere conduct of thought or *Denkungsart,* as well as a sincere heart. I would suggest that this felt need also partly accounts for the particular uses to which Wollstonecraft puts her intertextual appropriations of the New Testament in *Rights of Woman*, particularly the Gospel of Matthew. "Be whole, and sin no more, said Jesus," (*Rights of Woman* 218) and Wollstonecraft wants to oppose the performative strength and simplicity of this pronouncement, and the internalization of a moral message that it calls for, to the tendency of contemporary female character to play along the surface. As she

writes a little earlier, "a constant attention to keep the varnish of the character fresh, and in good condition, [is] often inculcated as the sum total of female duty" (*Rights of Woman* 168). The taking of a moral example into the heart that Christ's message offers is clearly opposed in such passages to the preservation of a hard, shiny impermeable surface that figures, for Wollstonecraft, the contemporary aestheticization of female character governed by rules of conduct.

Instead of the aesthetics of the picture with its impermeable surface, such attention to the example of Christ's character makes of character-building itself an essential aesthetic activity.[8] And yet, as we will see, the false, varnished character can also be understood as purposive, as a spur to the cultivation of what real character might be. For Wollstonecraft, woman's role in the development of a morally mature humanity is therefore all the more important; as rational subject she needs, like man, to follow the example of Christ, but as the shiny surface of the contemporary woman *à la mode* she embodies the temptation to vice. The sense of character as itself a moral-aesthetic activity, and the place of evil within self-cultivation is an idea most obviously associated with the notion of *Bildung* in German Romanticism. Kant sought to put strict delimitations on the nascent sense that there is such a thing as an aesthetics of the moral character.[9] So too, a careful reading of Wollstonecraft's attention to the rational foundations of character-formation necessarily questions any attempt to read her as a kind of female Werther, after Godwin.

The first sentence of the introduction to *Rights of Woman* has Wollstonecraft overcome by "the most melancholy emotions of sorrowful indignation" as she contemplates "the historic page" and the "living world with anxious solicitude" (*Rights of Woman* 23). The cause of this sorrow is the state of contemporary education, and the chief ill of that is the inculcating of a sexual character in women, such that "woman" as rational subject remains to be created. Yet just a few pages on, the melancholy cloud has somewhat dissipated as Wollstonecraft proclaims that "elegance is inferior to virtue, [and] that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex" (*Rights of Woman* 25-6). Rather than being seduced by the explanatory power of melancholy in Wollstonecraft's own life and writing, it may be time to examine the ways in which a philosophical idea of character provides a rational hope that counterbalances her sorrow. The claim is worth pursuing, I want to go on to suggest, not least because character is

once again a key term in cultural theory, in ways that are suggestive for my proposed rereading of Wollstonecraft's philosophical importance.[10]

Recent critical attention to Kant's notion of intelligible personality, and its relevance to his ideas of humanity and of the development of culture, can also serve to shed new light on Wollstonecraft's idea of character in *Rights of Woman*. The entry of a moral example into the heart also means, for both of Wollstonecraft and Kant, a recognition of the historically and culturally purposive role that evil plays in human development. As two careful readers of Rousseau, Kant and Wollstonecraft each participate in a concerted negotiation with Rousseau's view of history, and with the agency of positive evil within it. *Rights of Woman* and Kant's *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,* published a year later in 1793, both open with a robust defence of the idea of radical evil. Both authors knew that they risked the charge of atheism by beginning in this way; but for each this was understood as a necessary risk in the context of their attacks on spurious doctrines of innocence. In both the case of Kant and Wollstonecraft, an argument about the historical purposiveness of evil emerges out of a reading of Rousseau's claims about natural goodness. Like Wollstonecraft's, Kant's account of character in the *Religion* sets out from an engagement with the famous first sentences of Rousseau's *Émile,* and similarly seeks to challenge the neo-Stoic view of nature proposed there. Before looking at their arguments in any greater detail, though, I would like to situate my reading in relation to a recently-renewed interest in the notion of "character" in literary studies, cultural theory and philosophy. Drawing attention to this renewal helps to explain why it is that readings of Wollstonecraft have been shaped by a dominant strain of melancholy and anti-rationalism in recent years. The links between eighteenth-century ideas of ethos and the place of character on the right of contemporary cultural and political life can help to account for the side-lining of an idea of character in recent cultural theory, which has in turn skewed our appreciation of the importance of character to Wollstonecraft's rational theology. Learning to read character otherwise, with the aid of Kant's idea of intelligible personality, instead promises for a significant reappraisal of Wollstonecraft's philosophical importance.

Character in Cultural Theory

A foundational term for literary study, character has, in recent years, been viewed with a measure of suspicion. Yet recent critical discourse has evidenced a marked turn back towards ancient questions of ethos, character and the notion of the examined, philosophical life which is typififed in the turn to virtue ethics.[11] This turn takes place in reaction both against a perceived formalism and over-professionalization of recent philosophical writing, and against a perceived impasse that identity politics, in the sphere of cultural and literary studies, have written themselves into. Especially, recent advocates of character notice a contradiction in identity politics and its intense theorisation. Often, theoretical accounts of identity cover the same terrain as character, but deliberately occlude the term, as well as related notions of "ethos" and "phronesis," since character, and the discourse of heroism that has often been attached to it in public and political life, is perceived to have been colonized by the political right. This leads to something of a paradoxical situation, as Amanda Anderson has argued in *The Way We Argue Now* (2006). On the one hand, argues Anderson, an "insistence on the subjective, psychological, or irreducibly human elements of ostensibly imperious or objective theories informs much of contemporary scholarship in the humanities." Yet on the other hand, "a key dimension of subjectivity in the tradition of ethics and in the practical criticism of many literary genres – character or ethos – has suffered a kind of exile from theoretical work in the field of literary and cultural studies." Anderson is convinced that the familiar terminology through which cultural studies examine subjectivity, – taking in terms such as identity, hybridity, performativity, disidentification, and embodiment – "simply fail to capture key features of character or ethos" (134). Yet, and crucially, one of the key sources for this recent fracturing of identity, that is Michel Foucault, was by no means inclined to exile character and ethos from his analysis, at least in its later manifestation as a doctrine of care of the self.[12]

Anderson's noticing that resistance to the terminology and history of character is political, and especially that notions of character as striving and self-creation have been both conceded to and colonised by the right, helps to account for the peculiar half-life of the term in recent theoretical work. Sociological analysis of fractured, performative and embodied selves bypasses the question of character,

according to Anderson, in reaction against a "conservative rhetoric of character" that "persistently peddles the view that the solution to larger social and political problems lies within the (potentially heroic) individual rather than in larger forms of restructuring that result from political projects, institutional changes, and the systemic analyses that make them possible" (137). But the openness of character to appropriation by a reactionary, heroic individualism does not diminish the critical and progressive resources of the term, that have been laid aside by recent sociological criticism as a consequence of its deconstruction of notions of identity. For Anderson, "there is another tradition that allies notions of character and self-crafting to the progressive projects of liberalism and socialism." One salient example of this is found in Martha Nussbaum's appeal to Aristotle in her rethinking of public ethics, which makes significant use of the literary imagination in its account of sympathy. Nussbaum's "attention to character and self-cultivation," writes Anderson, works from the assumption that "practices of knowledge are always framed by questions of how one should live" (15).

The theorisation of character and heroic individualism in the work of Eighteenth-Century British social philosophers might well be understood as a precursor for the reactionary tone attributed to the recent discourse of character. But so too, in the work of a writer such as Wollstonecraft, the nascent politics of character is already being undermined. However, given that Wollstonecraft's work moves towards something like a "deconstruction" of character, she differs from recent cultural criticism on the left which, at least according to Anderson, has avoided the term altogether. Gary Kelly has written about Edmund Burke's reliance on the classical rhetorical technique of *ethos* in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). According to Kelly, the rhetoric of ethos works from the assumption that the "known character of the speaker, embodied in his style, is the most persuasive form of argument" (86). Yet Kelly perceptively notes that Wollstonecraft's rhetorical strategy, both in her response to Burke in *Rights of Men* as well as in *Rights of Woman*, "turns the tables" on Burkean ethos by adopting it and adapting it for the writing of a public female self. Wollstonecraft's rhetorical strategy in *Rights of Woman* works, writes Kelly, "by constructing a textual persona as one who knows whereof she writes and who exemplifies, in the way she writes, the rights of women to full moral, intellectual, social and civic being"

(108). To this extent, according to Kelly, Wollstonecraft "adopts the argument for ethos" (108).

Perceptive as he is in noting Wollstonecraft's inversion of the rhetoric of Burkean ethos, Kelly fails to note that her effort is underwritten by a specifically Christian view of what character and character-formation might be. The importance of this moral position can be shown through Wollstonecraft's response to another key aspect of character, that is heroism, and the study of it in the work of another key interlocutor for *Rights of Woman,* Adam Smith. Heroism, for Adam Smith, involves the kind of porousness of self that allows an individual, usually male, to substitute for self-interest a sense of the wider interests of the polity.[13] Thus, as Smith argues in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), a young officer who risks his life "to acquire some inconsiderable addition to the dominions of his sovereign" does not do so because he considers such an acquisition "an object more desirable than the preservation of his own life." Rather, "when he compares these two objects with one another, he does not view them in the light in which they naturally appear to himself, but in that in which they appear to the nation he fights for" (Smith 224). So too, when Brutus led forth his sons to execution for conspiring against Rome, Smith goes on, "he viewed them, not with the eyes of a father, but with those of a Roman citizen. He entered so thoroughly into the sentiments of this last character, that he paid no regard to that tie, by which he himself was connected with them" (225). The capacity of Smith's hero to translate himself fully into the character of a fully public citizen, to become, in effect, the public interest, is keyed in with the virtues of public spirit and generosity, and opposed to the lesser feminine sentiment of "humanity." The fair sex, Smith writes, "who have commonly much more tenderness than ours, have seldom so much generosity." Humanity consists "merely in the exquisite fellow-feeling which the spectator entertains with the sentiments of the persons principally concerned." Yet, he goes on, "the most humane actions require no self-denial, no self-command, no great exertion of the sense of propriety" (Smith 223). Humanity is rather a mode of purely sympathetic identification with others considered as spectacles, rather than an active mode of civic virtue. To this extent, it participates in the same kind of questionable morality that attaches to aestheticized displays of suffering that Rousseau explores in his *Lettre à d'Alembert sur les Spectacles* (1758).

In the course of her invective against codes of female propriety in *Rights of Woman,* Wollstonecraft invokes a further claim of Smith's, that it is rare for an innocent man to be wrongly accused of a crime. She does so in order to claim, with Smith, that an individual's character is always intelligible to the majority through habit and quotidian conduct. Drawing on the etymological meaning of character as impress or stamping, Wollstonecraft endorses what she takes to be Smith's claim that "the daily conduct of the majority prevails to stamp their character with the impression of truth. Quietly does the clear light, shining day after day, refute the ignorant surmise, or malicious tale, which has thrown dirt on a pure character" (*Rights of Woman* 165). A virtuous character, both for Smith and Wollstonecraft, will always prevail. Yet following close on from this invocation of the authority of Smith, which she uses to reinforce her advocacy of conduct governed by the heart in place of specious convention, Wollstonecraft subtly Christianizes Smith's views of heroism and humanity. She counter-poses Smith's example of Brutus with a famous Roman woman, contending that "[w]e should never, perhaps, have heard of Lucretia, had she died to preserve her chastity instead of her reputation." This shows that the substance of virtue has become confused with the shadow:

> If we really deserve our own good opinion we shall commonly be respected in the world; but if we pant after higher improvement and higher attainments, it is not sufficient to view ourselves as we suppose that we are viewed by others, though this has been ingeniously argued, as the foundation of our moral sentiments. Because each by-stander may have his own prejudices, besides the prejudices peculiar to his age or country. We should rather endeavour to view ourselves as we suppose that Being views us who seeth each thought ripen into action, and whose judgment never swerves from the eternal rule of right. (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 166-7)

I do not mean to consider the issue of how good a reader of Smith Wollstonecraft is here, which would raise the issue of whether Smith's impartial spectator is, as Wollstonecraft hints, secularized, a public authority standing in the place of God. The "we" in this passage, given the allusion to Lucretia and also to what Smith had written about the limits of female sympathy and humanity, is plausibly limited to what Wollstonecraft calls "the female world" (*Rights of Woman* 166). But

her point is that a concern for reputation, as well as a lack of porousness, a failure to participate in, or to heroically embody public sentiment, is a common human failing, which can usefully be read out of the restrictive moral sentiments which women have been encouraged to cultivate. Indeed, the varnish on female character, the license to dissemble that they are accorded through a gendered education, is just what activates a wider claim for humanity in Wollstonecraft. Remarkably, this activation takes place through an account of evil. It is in the still moments of contemplation of the Supreme Being, Wollstonecraft continues, that "man discovers the germ of those vices, which like the Java tree shed a pestiferous vapour around." Wollstonecraft thinks out loud on behalf of such a man:

> If I, he may thus argue, who exercise my own mind, and have been refined by tribulation, find the serpent's egg in some fold of my heart, and crush it with difficulty, shall not I pity those who have stamped with less vigour, or who have heedlessly nurtured the insidious reptile till it poisoned the vital stream it sucked? [….] No! no! The agonized heart will cry with suffocating impatience – I too am a man! and have vices, hid, perhaps, from human eye, that bend me to the dust before God, and loudly tell me, when all is mute, that we are formed of the same earth, and breathe the same element. Humanity thus rises naturally out of humility, and twists the cords of love that in various convolutions entangle the heart. (*Rights of Woman* 167)

Sympathy, by this reading, is a product of the kind of inward reflection that allows the individual to identify with the vices that he finds in others, and that he hides from others in himself. The movement of Smith's hero outwards into a self-abnegating identification with public character is inverted, as a reconditioned view of female humanity is made available for both sexes through inward-looking humility. The reference to the serpent's egg, as the editors of the Longman *Rights of Woman* make clear, is to Shakespeare's Brutus in *Julius Caesar* who, in order to justify Caesar's assassination, imagines him "as a serpent's egg/ Which, hatch'd would, as his kind, grow mischievous" (Julius Caesar 2.1.32-3). Where Smith's Brutus can substitute for private sentiment the public character of a hero by bringing his own sons to capital punishment, Wollstonecraft's buried reference to the Roman hero

figures sympathy through a characteristically Christian recognition of our shared propensity to vice.

Radical Evil

Evil is the starting place for Wollstonecraft's argument in *Rights of Woman,* where she works to understand it as licensed by the character of the Supreme Being contemplated from the point of view of reason. Wollstonecraft's argument begins, then, with a brief character-study both of God and of Rousseau. Rousseau was, she claims "[m]islead by his respect for the goodness of God" to the point where "he consider[ed] evil as positive, and the work of man; not aware that he was exalting one attribute at the expense of another, equally necessary to divine perfection" (*Rights of Woman* 30). Thus, and paraphrasing the famous opening sentences of *Émile*, Wollstonecraft attacks Rousseau's doctrine of the state of nature. The paradoxical exclamation, she writes, "that God has made all things right, and that error has been introduced by the creature, whom he formed, knowing what he formed, is as unphilosophical as impious." Instead, she goes on:

> When that wise Being who created us and placed us here, saw the fair idea, he willed, by allowing it to be so, that the passions should unfold our reason, because he could see that present evil would produce future good. Could the helpless creature whom he called from nothing break loose from his providence, and boldly learn to know good by practising evil, without his permission? No […] Had mankind remained for ever in the brutal state of nature, which even his magic pen cannot paint as a state in which a single virtue took root, it would have been clear, though not to the sensitive unreflecting wanderer, that man was born to run the circle of life and death, and adorn God's garden for some purpose which could not easily be reconciled with his attributes. (*Rights of Woman* 30)

The capacity of present evil to produce future good, and the capacity of our passions to lead to virtue, are expressions of our continuity with a Supreme Being who has licensed our autonomy. His having set us free is an act proportionate to the "attributes" of man's character, especially his capacity to be free. To insist on the goodness of God at

the expense of other qualities in his character, such as generosity, is both unphilosophical and impious, and justifies an existence in the 'brutal state of nature.' The historical purposiveness of our capacity for evil is, instead, understood here as a kind of guarantor of providence. Or as Wollstonecraft puts it, "[f]irmly persuaded that no evil exists in the world that God did not design to take place, I build my belief on the perfection of God" (*Rights of Woman* 31).

In his late essay *Theodicy,* Kant makes the following claim: "God himself, through our reason, becomes the interpreter of his will, announced through creation; and we can call this interpretation an authentic theodicy" (qtd. in Shell 191). A persistent target of Kant's moral philosophy is the Stoic idea of a law of nature. Susan Shell has shown how Kant moves away from the Stoic model of self-rule based in the control of the passions as the basis for moral selfhood, and towards a set of extraordinary claims about moral autonomy. In place of the Stoic theory of a law of nature, Kant derives morality, according to Shell, from a claim about our "immediate, practical awareness of a moral 'law' that sets certain necessary limits (and related) goals to free action" (Shell 2). But alongside of his attack on Stoicism, Kant takes issue, like Wollstonecraft, with the Rousseauvian view of positive evil as a first move in the *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793). The opening of Part 1 of the text, "Of the Radical Evil in Human Nature," sees Kant offer a daring challenge to conventional religious views about the presence of evil in the world. That "the world lieth in evil," writes Kant, "is a complaint as old as history, even as old as the older art of poetic fiction; indeed, just as old as that oldest among all fictions, the religion of the priests" (*Religion* 69). Kant sets this ancient complaint against the more recent, though far less widespread claim of the Enlightenment, that "the world steadfastly (though hardly noticeably) forges ahead in the very opposite direction, namely from bad to better" (*Religion* 69). The evidence of the world around us surely contradicts this claim, Kant argues; experience suggests that the claim of progress is, "rather, just an optimistic presupposition on the part of the moralists, from Seneca to Rousseau, intended to encourage the indefatigable cultivation of that seed of goodness that perhaps lies in us" (Kant, *Religion* 70). Kant quotes the passage from Seneca that Rousseau uses as an epigraph to *Émile:* "We are sick with curable diseases, and if we wish to be cured, nature comes to our aid, *for we are born to health*" (*Religion* 70). He notices a continuity between Rousseau and the

ancient Stoic idea of preconception, that is the notion that we contain a "seed," a predisposition towards or a foreknowledge of virtue in our souls, which puts us fundamentally in harmony with the universe in ways that make of any human wrongdoing the work of a curable sickness rather than flawed design. But both this ancient pagan view of a seed of goodness, and the Christian view that "the world lieth in evil" claim positive knowledge of what cannot, from a Kantian view, be known, that is to say, a knowledge of man's objective or noumenal predispositions. To this extent, they are both fictions that smooth over the inherent contradictions in intelligible moral character.

As Walter Benjamin wrote, "it is impossible to form an uncontradictory concept of the exterior of an active human being whose core is taken to be character" (302). Character, both for Kant and Wollstonecraft, licenses a contradictory view of the active human being; it suggests a reconcilable view of virtue and evil that suggests a possible morality for an advanced consumer society. While this morality depends on a view of the character of the Supreme Being in order to manage the contradictions of character through reference to the thinkable attributes of such a character, for Wollstonecraft, such a view also makes room for the philosophically serious question of female character.

NOTES

[1] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, eds. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao. New York: Longman, 2007. (103). All further references to this edition will be included in the text. Hamilton 103; Pope 560.

[2] On Wollstonecraft's approval for "free-thinkers" in Norway, see Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 95. Taylor describes this moment in the *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* as a *volte-face*, when read alongside the orthodox religious sentiment of Wollstonecraft's first published work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.

[3] Wollstonecraft clearly thought *Rights of Woman* to be something of a portrait of its author, and an accurate one at that, at least at the time of its composition. Writing to William Roscoe in October 1791 of the portrait of her that he had commissioned,

Wollstonecraft mused that "I do not imagine that it will be a very striking likeness, but, if you do not find me in it, I will send you a more faithful sketch – a book that I am now writing, in which *I* myself…shall certainly appear, head and heart." Quoted Poovey 69.

[4] Carlyle quoted in Wolfson 243.

[5] See Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* 270. On "mistakes of conduct" see also Swift 6-7.

[6] For an exception, see Carpenter's treatment of Wollstonecraft, prophecy and female creativity in relation to the book of Job, in "Sybilline Apocalyptics."

[7] For a summary of these approaches insofar as they pertain to Wollstonecraft, see Khalip, "A Disappearance in the World."

[8] So argues G. Felicitas Munzel: "As the work specific to human beings, character formation is the effect (*Wirkung)* we produce, that which we are obligated to bring about in the world, in relation to nature, as a result of our own act (*Handlung*). As such, character formation turns out to meet Kant's general definition of what may be properly called a work of art" (9).

[9] See especially Kant's critique of Schiller in his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793). As part of his defence of moral autonomy, Kant dismisses both orthodox religious appeals to the absolutism of Mosaic, sublime law and the claim among younger contemporaries that morality suggests a predisposition to the performance of graceful moral acts. Kant insists on the sublimity of dutiful action in place of the awe-inspiring sublimity of the Mosaic law itself. But making such a claim also allows him to insist, against what he describes as Schiller's "latitudinarian" tendency in *Thalia* (1793), that duty is attended by, but not founded on, grace. See Kant, *Religion* 72.

[10] For significant feminist readings of character, see especially Cixous's "The Character of 'Character,'" and Ahmed's "Wilful Parts." Work on character is not, however, restricted to interventions into contemporary cultural politics: Susan J. Manning's recent work offers a timely study of the question of character in the Eighteenth-Century science of man, especially insofar as a philosophical idea of character is understood to play a crucial role in Hume's effort to reconcile philosophy to common life. See Manning's co-edited collection with Thomas Ahnert, *Character, Self and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Ahnert's own contribution to this volume, a study of Hugh Blair's sermons, makes the point that "'[c]haracter' very often had a significant religious dimension, which was not separate from its other, more secular, moral aspects but intimately related with them" (67). Blair's development of a notion of character in his sermons is shown to articulate a "particular understanding of salvation and its relationship to individual moral reform" (68), and to play a vital role in Presbyterian moderatism's efforts to distinguish itself from Calvinist orthodoxy. There would be ample scope to develop Wollstonecraft's ideas about character in relation to the discussions it receives in the Scottish Enlightenment (the role of female character in James Fordyce's advice literature being another, more overt point of contact for Wollstonecraft); however, as will become clear in my essay, it is Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau's theory of natural goodness, which I take to be foundational to her and Kant's understandings of rational theology, that turns the present essay towards the international context.

[11] See, for example, the work of Martha Nussbaum, especially *Love's Knowledge*; and also MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.
[12] See Foucault's *The Care of the Self*.
[13] My reference to porousness of self here is to Taylor's *Sources of the Self*.

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A "Foretaste" of the Hereafter: Mary Wollstonecraft's Physio-Religious Sublime

Molly Desjardins

In this essay, I ask: what is the relationship between Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs and her account of the aesthetic imagination? To answer this question, I look at the ways in which Wollstonecraft's references to sublime experience across her texts add up to a prescription for the reeducation of the female mind. By drawing on both Edmund Burke's physiological sublime and the religious sublime of early-eighteenth-century poets, Wollstonecraft develops a plausible account of how women with a sexual "character," or temperament, can be reeducated and, thus, made capable of actively participating in what she hopes will become a more democratic British state.

Much of the scholarship on Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* subordinates, if not ignores, the importance of religion in Wollstonecraft's vision of the ideal female citizen.[1] Barbara Taylor has questioned this omission and has worked to re-situate Wollstonecraft's political and ethical theory within a religious context, arguing that "it is impossible to understand [Mary Wollstonecraft's] political hopes, including her hopes for women, outside a theistic framework" (4). For Taylor, this theistic framework can be understood as a kind of religious *eros*, one that makes use of "Christian Platonism, with its celebration of earthly affections as the vehicle for transcendent devotion" (109). Though Christian Platonism includes a complex and varied system of beliefs,[2] Taylor's claim primarily refers to Diotima's suggestion in Plato's *Symposium* that loving "the beauties of earth" will lead one to "mount upwards" toward the divine. Here, Diotima proposes that sensual love can lead to divine love and that an appreciation of sensual beauty can lead to an appreciation of divine beauty. Because Wollstonecraft scholars have long debated how Wollstonecraft construes the relationship between the sensual and supersensible, Taylor's characterization of Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs brings with it a number of questions. Primarily of interest to me is: what is the relationship between

Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs and her account of the aesthetic imagination?

The concept of the aesthetic has an intellectual history of its own too extensive to trace here. Consequently, I will use "aesthetic" (Gk. of or relating to sense perception) in a general sense to refer to "the experience that results from close attention to the sensuous features of an object or to an imaginary world it projects" (Stecker 142). Though a number of studies have worked to characterize Wollstonecraft's attitude toward the aesthetic, rarely have these studies been combined with an inquiry into Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs. In this volume, my interlocutor, Simon Swift, investigates the relationship between the two by considering the way some of Wollstonecraft's readers have connected religion and the aesthetic imagination by "collapsing [. . .] religious belief into sublime introspection" (Swift 135). As Swift shows, Wollstonecraft's readers have sometimes turned away from the explicitly Christian lexis of *Rights of Woman* (1792) in order to focus instead on *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), which appears to substitute the Christian religiosity of *Rights of Woman* for a nondenominational, abstract spirituality of subjective reflection. These readers may get their cue from William Godwin, who summarized Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs as follows:

> Her mind constitutionally attached itself to the sublime and the amiable. She found an inexpressible delight in the beauties of nature, and in the splendid reveries of the imagination. [. . .] When she walked amidst the wonders of nature, she was accustomed to converse with her God. To her mind he was pictured as not less amiable, generous and kind, than great, wise and exalted. In fact, she had received few lessons of religion in her youth, and her religion was almost entirely of her own creating. (34-35)

According to Swift, Godwin's picture of Wollstonecraft's religion as "little allied to any system of forms" (Godwin 34) "bind[s] Wollstonecraft into a narrative of secularization" (135). Swift's essay, as I see it, questions this narrative by making a case for the enduring relevance of Wollstonecraft's "specifically Christian view" of character (Swift 145). This Christian view of character is directly related to Wollstonecraft's attitude toward the aesthetic, Swift argues,

as Wollstonecraft sees character building as a "moral-aesthetic activity" that creates the female self through a characterological, rather than doctrinal, reading of Christ's character in the New Testament (141). For Swift, the experience of the sublime [. . .] [is] foundational to the art of character-building that it is the key task of the rational female self to cultivate. To this extent, sublimity is a supplement or lesson, rather than substitute for faith" (Swift 136). I agree that sublimity is foundational in Wollstonecraft's program for creating intelligent female citizens. In fact, I argue that we should see the sublime in *Rights of Woman*, and indeed across all of Wollstonecraft's work, as fully integrated with her religious beliefs. In what follows, I claim that the sublime and the religious come together in Wollstonecraft's version of what David B. Morris has called the "religious sublime," a "Christian supernaturalism" present in eighteenth-century literature and characterized by its existence "outside the rigorously moral and systematically theological realm of [. . .] orthodox belief" (9-10). In Wollstonecraft's version, literature creates new female selves by retraining women's minds through an embodied experience of moving from "the beauties of the earth" to "divine beauty." Recognizing the "embodied" experience of Wollstonecraft's religious sublime is imperative, because, as I will show, for Wollstonecraft sublime meditation had physiological effects. That is, when we trace Wollstonecraft's references to the sublime across her texts, we see that Wollstonecraft's proposal for female reeducation required divine meditation.

In this essay, I read Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* alongside her posthumously published treatise "On Poetry," to show that, for Wollstonecraft, meditation on the divine in nature or in "natural" literature could literally alter the structure of the female brain by erasing old mental associations and replacing them with new mental associations. For Wollstonecraft, it is only through this rewriting of mental associations that a vicious woman with "weakness of mind" (*Rights of Woman* 215) can become a virtuous woman with the "strength of mind" to exert a "rational will that only bows to God" (55).[3] The relevance of viewing Wollstonecraft's program for female reeducation as originating in what I am calling her physio-religious sublime is twofold: firstly, it asserts that Wollstonecraft's proposal for the reeducation of the female mind relies on the aesthetic imagination, a mental faculty to which she has sometimes been seen as hostile. Secondly, it reasserts and develops the relevance of religion in

Wollstonecraft's program for transforming the female mind. To establish this argument, I will first outline how Wollstonecraft's educational program for creating more intelligent female citizens begins with a moral problem – the problem of virtue. Next, I will explain how Wollstonecraft saw religious meditation as a method for fixing this problem. Finally, I will make a case for the relevance of Wollstonecraft's version of the physio-religious sublime in her moral philosophy.

The Problem of Virtue

Wollstonecraft's creation of a physio-religious sublime was ultimately an effort to solve a political problem raised by the specter of the French Revolution. Like Jacques Necker, the French Finance Minister beloved by revolutionaries, whose *The Importance of Religious Opinions* she translated in 1788, Wollstonecraft turned to religion for answers about how to create social order in what she hoped would be a more egalitarian republic. As I intend to show, whereas Necker advocated religious meditation as a deterrent against factionalism and party interest, Wollstonecraft advocated religious meditation as the most efficacious way to enlarge women's capacity for citizenship. Early Wollstonecraft criticism interpreted the definition of citizenship in *Rights of Woman* as an extension of the Lockean doctrine of rationality, rights, and duties to women.[4] Virginia Sapiro has since argued that Wollstonecraft's vision of female citizenship begins not with "juridical rights, contracts, and individualism," but with virtue (xx). In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft expresses her fear that "vicious" women were in danger of "retarding" the progress of civilization toward a greater diffusion of reason and virtue (230). As she saw it, women were more "vicious" than virtuous because their education had convinced them that their entire power lay in physical beauty and "sensibility," which led them to nurture feelings of pride, vanity, and sensual love at the expense of virtue (*Rights of Woman* 83). Vain, vicious women, Wollstonecraft suggested, could not be (and perhaps should not be) citizens in the reformed British state she envisioned: a more democratic republic inspired by the French Revolution.

Though Wollstonecraft traces virtue back to an exercise of God's will, she suggests that female virtue (and thus women's potential for

citizenship) cannot be created unless women are able to couple reason and feeling in a healthy "brain-mind" (Richardson 148). My use of the word "couple" here is not incidental. In one of her most vivid metaphors, Wollstonecraft figures the production of virtue as heterosexual copulation between male feeling and female reason:

> Sacred be the *feelings* of the heart! concentred in a glowing flame, *they* become the sun of life; and, without *his* invigorating impregnation, *reason* would probably lie in helpless inactivity, and never bring forth *her* only legitimate offspring – virtue. But to prove that virtue is really an acquisition of the individual, and not the blind impulse of unerring instinct, the bastard vice has often been begotten by the same *father*. (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men* 33, emphasis added)

As we see in this passage, contrary to the persistent assumption that Wollstonecraft establishes a gendered binary opposition between reason and feeling where reason (the male) dominates feeling (the female), here male feeling inseminates female reason. Some critics who insist on a gendered binary interpret the relationship between reason and feeling in Wollstonecraft's work as part of a larger project that disavows "female" feeling. Timothy Reiss, for example, contends that Wollstonecraft's entrapment in the dominant discourse of Enlightenment rationality keeps Wollstonecraft's "revolution in female manners" from being "truly revolutionary." According to Reiss, in order to be "truly revolutionary," Wollstonecraft would have had to disavow a typically Enlightenment faith in reason (the male) and, instead, promote the political and creative potential of feeling, irrationality and imaginative linguistic excess (the female) (21). Mary Poovey claims that Wollstonecraft champions wisdom and virtue as the products of reason while disparaging sensibility and imaginative thought. In Poovey's words, Wollstonecraft vacillates "between denying her female feelings altogether and falling hostage once more to the very categories she was trying to escape" (48). Cora Kaplan names Wollstonecraft's vacillation as the source of the "fateful choice" that feminists feel they have to make "between the opposed and moralized bastions of reason and feeling" (155). By representing reason and feeling as a binary opposition, we miss that Wollstonecraft

saw the two as necessarily interactive in the production of both virtue and wisdom, as seen in the above passage.

John Whale has read the above passage as a demonstration that Wollstonecraft "polarizes" feeling and reason (78). But if we consider reason and feeling to be polarized, we should consider them polarized in the sense of two elements that create a polar bond in a chemical reaction. That is, they are different elements that come together to form a third compound structure that retains contributions from both. I purposefully invoke a chemical metaphor here because, as we already see in the above quotation and will see more clearly later on, Wollstonecraft borrows the language of chemistry in order to explain how thought and feeling can either regulate or dysregulate the mind.[5] The above passage suggests that when the mind is dysregulated the same psychical structures (feeling and reason) can produce different consequences depending on the configuration of their relation: if one presumes that feeling alone can create virtue, one risks the chance of a "bastard" (i.e. "vice") "begotten by the same father," i.e. by the "feelings of the heart," (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men* 30, emphasis added). Only when impregnated by feeling does reason give birth to "her only legitimate offspring – virtue" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men* 30). This implies that both psychic structures are needed for the creation of virtue and make distinct contributions that merge in order to create a third entity that shares a genealogy with both. In Wollstonecraft's model of the mind, the progenation of virtue goes awry when feeling (the father) is assumed to be the place of gestation. Instead, reason (the mother) must be the place of gestation. However, both are necessary for the generation of virtue. This model of mind, introduced in the *Rights of Men*, forms the basis for Wollstonecraft's suggestion in *Rights of Woman* that women were, in general, "by ignorance rendered foolish or vicious" (*Rights of Woman* 230) because their minds were "not in a healthy state" (23). Therefore, when Wollstonecraft claims women are prone to vice, we should assume that this is, in part, because they have not formed the right mental conditions for the interaction of reason and feeling.

As seen above, Wollstonecraft tellingly makes the birth of virtue the product of gendered heterosexual copulation in *Rights of Men*. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft implies that in order to regulate their minds, women must bring heteronomous entities into contact through intellectual intercourse. Rather than repressing feeling, women must bring feeling into contact with reason. In Wollstonecraft's model of

mind, when women are discouraged from engaging in intellectual intercourse, feeling reproduces itself rather than entering into a relationship with reason. This reproduction of the same creates an "overexercised sensibility" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 83) that is "nurtured at the expense of the understanding" and limits women's capacity for citizenship (107). Wollstonecraft blames the over-production of sensibility on the "sensual error" of female education, which trains women for "life," or earthly existence, rather than the afterlife (*Rights of Woman* 74). To rectify this error, Wollstonecraft maintains that women must direct their minds toward the supersensual and the supreme heteronomous – the divine. This becomes clear in the portrait Wollstonecraft paints of a widow, who directs her imagination "beyond the grave" (*Rights of Woman* 220). Wollstonecraft celebrates this woman because she has escaped the "ignorance" of her sentimental education by cultivating her own independence and a "tolerable understanding" (*Rights of Woman* 118). While her husband was in this world, she may have weakened her mind by making him the focus of her imagination. But now that he is beyond this world, she must focus her imagination on the world to come if she hopes for a reunion with her husband. Wollstonecraft's celebratory portrait exposes her belief in the salutary capacity of the apocalyptic imagination.

Though this woman manages to focus her imagination properly, everything conspires to keep the majority of women from fruitfully employing their imaginations. Most women, then, require assistance to reorient their imagination and engage in divine meditation. Rather than speaking of Wollstonecraft's proposal for female education, we should speak instead of her proposal for female reeducation. As I will show in the next section, Wollstonecraft's proposal for accomplishing this reorienting of the female imagination relies on a force that will obviate, rather than require, the use of reason. As Wollstonecraft consistently insists, female education keeps the rational faculty in most women in "helpless inactivity." In order to be reeducated, then, these women thus need the "invigorating impregnation" of feeling – an affective experience to refocus their imagination and begin the process of producing both wisdom and virtue. Because Wollstonecraft's model of mind is, indeed, anchored in Lockean epistemology, she believes that mental content is created through sensory experiences registered in the mind. Yet, because God's active relationship with humanity is central to Wollstonecraft's theism, she

also focuses on the way that divine interaction directly transforms the individual. Wollstonecraft represents religious meditation as the first step for regulating the emotions and "complet[ing] the imperfect work of legislation" by binding individual hearts to the common good through a love of God (Necker viii). Religious meditation, she suggests, regulates women's emotions by redirecting their imagination from the sensual and earthly to the supersensible and heavenly. Once regulated, the mind becomes capable of producing individual virtue. Once virtuous, formerly "foolish" and "ignorant" women become capable of active citizenship (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 228).[6]

Temperature, Temper, Temperament

Though Virginia L. Muller claims that Wollstonecraft's use of the term virtue is "independent of religious beliefs" (53), I believe that when we contextualize Wollstonecraft's language regarding virtue in terms of her model of mind, we see quite clearly that, for her, virtue originates with God and is created in the ethical subject through religious meditation. Wollstonecraft's political theory cannot be wholly understood as an eighteenth-century version of Lockean liberalism; however, Wollstonecraft and Locke wrote about virtue itself in similar terms. For example, both Wollstonecraft and Locke define virtue as an exercise of God's will and establish a necessary link between private virtue and public happiness.[7] The differences in their accounts of how virtue is created, then, are all the more striking. Whereas Locke defines reason as "discover[ing]" virtue, Wollstonecraft establishes reason as *necessary* but not *sufficient* for the production of virtue ("Virtue B" 287). To put it another way, Locke suggests that a human subject uses reason to uncover immanent virtue; Wollstonecraft insists that virtue does not exist until a woman forms the appropriate mental conditions for creating it. Wollstonecraft's revision of Locke put her in a difficult position, as she now had to theorize how women, whom she had established were incapable of rational volition due to their confined education, and so could not choose to become more virtuous, could create these mental conditions. Though Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman* are often read as "hastily polemical," a characterization Wollstonecraft herself promoted, there is a canny and consistent logic underlying both texts that offers a plausible program for re-education

without reverting to Locke's characterization of virtue (Rajan 175). In this section, I suggest that the logic underlying Wollstonecraft's proposal for female reeducation entails a revision of Edmund Burke's theory of the "physiological sublime" – a theory that insists aesthetic experience can affect the physiology of the mind without the action of the will. Though they may agree on little else, Wollstonecraft and Burke both imply that one's mind can be transformed even if one does not will such a transformation.

Vanessa Ryan has convincingly shown that eighteenth-century theories of the sublime, including Burke's, were not merely an anticipation of a Kantian version of sublimity that replaces the primacy of the object with that of the subject, including the object of the brain with the subject of the mind. In addition, Ryan shows that the British thinkers were reluctant to give up the social and ethical possibilities of sublime experience (266). Ryan offers an important reading of Burke and his emphasis on physiology, one that helps to illuminate Wollstonecraft's revision of Burke's aesthetic theory. Ryan notes Burke's interest in the unconscious during aesthetic experience and that "Burke's aim is to show that the fundamental effect of the sublime is to exclude the power of reason" (270, emphasis added). Though she has very different political ends in mind, Wollstonecraft shares Burke's aim. Burke's exclusion of reason, of course, is part of his critique of the Jacobinical "conquering empire of light and reason" (Burke 114). Wollstonecraft's exclusion of reason, however, is the first step toward transforming the female mind so that it will be prepared to participate in the empire of light and reason heralded by the French Revolution. Both Wollstonecraft and Burke see sublime experience as causally motivated by the passions and as having explicitly physiological effects, but Wollstonecraft combines Burke's sublime with the language of religious sublimity to provide a plausible argument for how the female mind can be reformed and made capable of citizenship. Wollstonecraft's comments about the spiritual exercise of the sublime in *Rights of Men* are continued and practicalized in *Rights of Woman*. In both works, Wollstonecraft creates a catalytic model of sublime imagination that does not recall Kant, as Daniella Mallinick claims, but rather one that opposes Kant (1). Not only does Wollstonecraft's model place far more emphasis on the interaction between mind and body than Kant's does, but she also explicitly contradicts Kant's definition of the sublime:

> Mr. Kant has observed, that the understanding is sublime, the imagination beautiful—yet it is evident, that poets, and men who undoubtedly possess the liveliest imagination, are most touched by the sublime, while men who have cold, enquiring minds, have not this feeling in any great degree, and lose it as they cultivate their reason." (Wollstonecraft, "Hints" 102-103)

Further, though Kant limits knowledge to phenomena and designates speculative metaphysics as off-limits, Wollstonecraft's sublime relies on metaphysics. Therefore, I see Burke's "physiological sublime" as more relevant than Kant's transcendental sublime for understanding Wollstonecraft's attitude toward the aesthetic.

Though Wollstonecraft draws on Burke's physiological sublime, she revises it to include aspects of Lockean and Hartleian associationism.[8] She does so in order to suggest that until mental associations can be effaced, a woman will be enslaved to the temperament created by her education. In their current condition, as Wollstonecraft describes it in a chapter entitled "The Effect Which an Early Association of Ideas has Upon the Character," women were incapable of rational volition, as:

> every thing [women] see or hear serves to fix impressions, call forth emotions, and associate ideas, that give a sexual character to the mind. False notions of beauty and delicacy stop the growth of their limbs and produce a sickly soreness, rather than delicacy of organs; and thus weakened by being employed in unfolding instead of examining the first associations, forced on them by every surrounding object, how can they attain the vigour necessary to enable them to throw off that factitious character? – where find strength to recur to reason and rise superior to a system of oppression, that blasts the fair promises of spring? (*Rights of Woman* 145-146)

Wollstonecraft here asks: how can women be expected to make a rational choice to reeducate themselves by rejecting a "sexual character" of mind when that mental sexualization is precisely what prohibits them from making such a choice? Wollstonecraft blames traditional eighteenth-century female education, including mothers, nurses, and conduct books, for dysregulating the female mind by habitually retracing associations with "mechanical exactness" through the deadening sameness of a woman's daily occupations (*Rights of*

Woman 145). These associations, which are first "forced" (145) upon women, ultimately become so ingrained in the female mind that women identify themselves with beautiful, useless "play-thing[s]" created to be the "toy of man, his rattle" which must "jingle in his ears, whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused" (52). To put it another way, women become victims of what Marx would later call "false consciousness."[9] How, then, can women "attain the vigour necessary" to change the character of their minds when their minds are that which is diseased? Because women have had their reason forcibly weakened by their education, Wollstonecraft must appeal to a force outside reason, and indeed outside the will, in order to regulate their minds and create the mental conditions necessary for reason and feeling to generate virtue. The force she appeals to is the sublime, which acts on the brain-mind without the influence of the will.

Wollstonecraft revises Burke's physiological sublime by turning to Locke's theory of mental associations. Wollstonecraft divides the association of ideas into two modes: that in which association proceeds from education and that in which association is instantaneous. Although the former can be influenced by reason, the latter can be influenced only by the "temperature of the mind" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 144). Absent in Locke's chapter on the association of ideas, "the temperature of the mind" is a pivotal concept in Wollstonecraft's theory of mind and central for understanding the relationship between religion and aesthetics in *Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft combines associationism with older physiological psychologies, including humoral psychology, in order to create a connection between physical temperature and mental temperament.

Mental temperament was of primary importance for Wollstonecraft, who sought to reeducate women in a way that would efface their "sexual *character* of mind" (emphasis added). Although some assert that Wollstonecraft roots this reeducation in rational volition,[10] Wollstonecraft clearly establishes that the "temperature" of one's mind cannot be determined by the will, but, rather, by something that exceeds the will: one's "animal spirits" (*Rights of Woman* 144). Orrin N.C. Wang reads Wollstonecraft's use of the term" animal spirits" in *Rights of Woman* as an equivalent for sexuality (131). I, instead, understand this in the context of Wollstonecraft's overall model of the mind. The animal spirits, a concept borrowed from Galenic medicine via Descartes, function in

Wollstonecraft's model as a bridge between the feeling body and the reasoning mind. John Sutton explains animal spirits as being

> neither animals nor spirits. Coursing through brain and nerves, they long remained candidates for the role of bearers of neural information: in philosophy, neurology, and medicine, this old physiological psychology was still all but ubiquitous in the early eighteenth century. (23)

The once ubiquitous animal spirits were quickly becoming an outdated explanation for nervous function by the 1780s. In 1787, for example, Scottish "common sense" philosopher Thomas Reid argued that the existence of animal spirits was "mere conjecture" and, using the evidence of anatomy, forwarded his hypothesis that "fibrous" nerves "may be divided and subdivided, till its fibres escape our senses" (82). The obsolescence of animal spirits makes Wollstonecraft's retention of them all the more curious. Why would someone widely read in what was called "the science of man," and who made use of updated eighteenth-century versions of associationism in her own science of man, recur to such an archaic explanation for nervous function? I propose that her adoption of the doctrine of animal spirits was strategic. Like other eighteenth-century thinkers who held tenaciously to the doctrine of animal spirits throughout the end of the century, Wollstonecraft was eager to justify that contemplation of the divine directly affected the material world.[11] The animal spirits, half-spiritual, half-material entities that were believed to communicate between spirit and body, were an extremely useful concept for those who were invested in proving that a human's relationship with God had immediate consequence in daily life. The doctrine of animal spirits enabled religious writers to offer a plausible argument for the ways in which religious contemplation not only prepared one for the afterlife, but also directly contributed to making life on earth more morally just.

For Wollstonecraft in particular, the animal spirits helped to explain how religious meditation could be used to efface the mental associations created by a confined female education. Though Wollstonecraft seems also to have been influenced by the work of David Hartley, particularly Joseph Priestley's 1775 reprinting of Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749), the connection between animal spirits and materialist associationism is already present in

Locke's *Essay*, a text whose influence on Wollstonecraft has been well-remarked.[12] In his chapter on association, Locke writes that:

> Custom settles habits of Thinking in the Understanding, as well as of Determining in the Will, and of Motions in the Body; all which seems to be but Trains of Motion in the Animal Spirits, which once set a going continue on in the same steps they have been used to, which by often treading are worn into a smooth path, and the Motion in it becomes easy and as it were Natural. (*Essay* 2.33.6)

Although Locke did not make a connection between animal spirits and the warmth of the mind, he did make a connection between "animal spirits" and physical motion: "warmth as it is in our hands, is nothing but a certain sort and degree of motion in the minute particles of our nerves, or animal spirits" (*Essay* 1.8.21). Wollstonecraft builds on Locke to maintain that the naturalized associations produced by the customary "false" system of female education had been created through the motions of animal spirits. The consequence, according to Wollstonecraft, was an unregulated mental "temperature" (*Rights of Woman* 144). Because she acknowledges that reason cannot undo associations that have made women vicious, her own logic required her to name a force other than reason that was capable of reforming the mind. Wollstonecraft identifies this force as religious meditation. To explain how religious meditation can work outside the will and regulate mental temperature, Wollstonecraft seems to draw on David Hartley's thought on theopathy in *Observations on Man*:

> [. . .] the frame of our nature, and particularly its subjection to the power of association, has an obvious and necessary tendency to make the love of God, in fact, superior to our other affections. If we suppose creatures subject to the law of associations to be placed in the midst of a variety of pleasures and pains, the sum total of the first being greater than that of the last, and to connect God with each as its sole cause, pain will be overpowered by pleasure, and the indefinite number of compound pleasures resulting from association be at last united entirely with the idea of God. (2.7.71)

In her own model of mind, Wollstonecraft blends Lockean and Hartleian associationism with both Galen's theory of human

temperament and Descartes's revision of Galen in *Passions of the Soul*. William Enfield, an eighteenth-century writer contemporaneous with Wollstonecraft explains Descartes's theory as follows: "the passions are feelings of the soul, produced and continued by the action of animal spirits; the chief effect of the passions is, to excite the soul to volition" (552). According to Descartes, passions ignited by animal spirits come into struggle with the soul and challenge its ability to exert rational control. Compare Wollstonecraft:

> The understanding, it is true, may keep us from going out of drawing when we group our thoughts, or transcribe from the imagination the warm sketches of fancy; but the animal spirits, the individual character, give the coloring. Over this subtile electric fluid, how little power do we possess, and over it how little power can reason obtain! (*Rights of Woman* 144)

For both Descartes and Wollstonecraft, the animal spirits are dangerous aspects of mental experience because they cannot be controlled by reason or the will, yet are central in determining how one's passions influence one's emotional and intellectual composition—that is, one's character, or temperament. Because of her religious commitment and her criticism of hard materialism, one might expect Wollstonecraft to downplay the materialist components of Descartes's theory borrowed from Galen. Instead, she highlights them. Specifically, she insists upon the role of animal spirits in regulating mental "temperature."

Galen had claimed that the animal spirits were central in regulating mental temperature because they communicated bodily temperature to the mind. Galen based his teachings on the humoral psychology of Aristotle's *De Anima*, in which the four elements (fire, water, air, and earth), and their qualities (heat, moisture, coldness, and dryness) form the model for how "humors" in the body (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) interact to create a bodily temperature that, in turn, created an individual's temperament (Ochs 24-25). Although she is hostile to gross materialism, Wollstonecraft admits in a footnote that:

> I have sometimes, when inclined to laugh at materialists, asked whether, as the most powerful effects in nature are apparently produced by fluids, the magnetic, etc. the passions might not be fine volatile fluids that embraced humanity, keeping the more refractory elementary parts together – or whether they were

> simply a liquid fire that pervaded the mere sluggish materials, giving them life and heat? (*Rights of Woman* 144, n. 3)

The editors of the *Longman Cultural Edition* of *Rights of Woman* read the above note as evidence that "MW is jesting at the form of science that would locate life and passion in something like a measurable fluid or electric current" (144, n. 3). I read the above note differently. Because Wollstonecraft consistently describes the imagination, the senses, and the passions as "heated," (90, 98, 168, 206) "inflammable" (62), and "inflamed" (82, 116, 175) and develops a model of mind that consistently uses the language of physiological chemistry, I read the above note as sincere. Here, Wollstonecraft admits that though she has been "*inclined* to laugh at materialists" (my emphasis), she has *nevertheless* wondered if their reasoning might be extended to the realm of the passions and the spirit. Though Wollstonecraft's description of passions as "heated," "inflammable" and "inflamed" is consistent with eighteenth-century theories of the passions, I claim here that she uniquely proposes that passions are, quite literally, a combustive force that suffuses the body, causing the body and the mind to exercise themselves. Throughout her works, the "liquid fire" of the passions acts like a chemical catalyst, heating the mind and the body by inflaming both reason and the imagination by means of a physiological reaction in the nervous system. They are the "vital heat" that stokes reason into exercising itself, and ultimately prompts moral action in the world (*Rights of Men* 6). Certainly, Wollstonecraft disdains materialism when it restricts its focus to the sensual world. However, in the model of mind that I am tracing here, Wollstonecraft appropriates a Galenic explanation of animal movement (by fluid or by heat) in order to extend it to the passions, in something like an Aristotleian movement of the soul.

Amid her explanation of the fiery passions, Wollstonecraft calls them "spiritual phlogiston." The most proximate reference for Wollstonecraft's account of the passions is the work of Joseph Priestley, with whom Wollstonecraft was familiar both personally and intellectually (Todd 59). Priestley popularized the theory, originated by Johann Joachim Becher and George Earnest Stahl, that something called "phlogiston" (from the Ancient Greek φλογιστόν or *phlŏgistón*, meaning "burnt up," which derives from φλόξ or *phlox*, meaning "fire") existed in all matter and allowed it to burn (Acton 732). Wollstonecraft extends Priestley's account of physical processes to the

spiritual process of imaginative thought. In *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft cites her own religious contemplation, a state where her "passions pursue objects that the imagination enlarges till they become only a sublime idea that shrinks from the enquiry of sense," as evidence that something like "*spiritual* phlogiston" must exist just as physical phlogiston exists (32, emphasis added). In response to Priestley, who (despite his religious commitment) confines phlogiston to a chemical process that animates matter, Wollstonecraft suggests that passions, as "spiritual phlogiston," animate the soul by inflaming the imagination of man so that it amplifies sensory objects (or concepts anchored in sensation) until the mind begins to intuit the supersensible within those objects. [13] For Wollstonecraft, this process is "spiritual" because human imagination holds so fast to an object that the object loses its materiality, and instead exists only as a "sublime idea" (*Rights of Men* 32). The imagination allows us to conceive of the perfect futurity of an afterlife while acknowledging that the "vale of darkness" which obscures our human understanding will not allow us to penetrate beyond it, but instead only to recognize our mind's limits (32). Although this imaginative enthusiasm painfully exposes the "boundary set to human enquiries," its combustive process uses the heat of passion to produce the light of reason (that "which raises us above the brutes") through the very "power of exercising our understanding" (33). Once animated by the passions, our minds become capable of intuiting the divine through the apocalyptic imagination.

Wollstonecraft incorporates materialist philosophy in her model of mind not only to prove the sacredness of the body, but also to prove that bodily choices affect moral life. As I will show in the next section, Wollstonecraft combines dynamic materialism with her own version of the "religious sublime" in order to suggest that by reading literature written from an imagination that was focused on the supersensible, a woman could alter the "temperature of her mind." Once altered, the associations that gave a "sexual character" to the mind could be erased and re-written (145).

The Physiology of the Aesthetic Imagination

Wollstonecraft's explanation of divine meditation as a mental exercise in which the passions stimulate the imagination so that it "enlarges"

material objects until they become immaterial recalls eighteenth-century theories of the religious sublime (*Rights of Men* 32), which often described the soul as *expanding, stretching, or enlarging* when moved by nature or art to imagine the divine (Ryan 267, emphasis added). John Baillie's 1747 treatise, for instance, explains the sublime as that which "fills and *dilates* our soul without [our] being able to penetrate into its nature" (88, emphasis added). Mark Akenside, in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744), credits the sublime moment as "*heightening* some objects beyond their real excellence and beauty" (86, emphasis added). Henry Needler's explanation of religious meditation may be closest to Wollstonecraft's:

> [The contemplation of God] moralis[es] our souls, and regulat[es] our wills and affections. Nothing has a more direct tendency to this than divine contemplation. This refines and elevates our affections; and inspires us with a certain dignity of mind and virtuous pride, which makes us despise the low pleasures of sense, and raises us above the transitory nature of things. This teaches us, that those divine faculties of our souls, reason and understanding, were not given us merely to purvey for the pleasures and necessities of the body, and to contrive the means of supporting for a while a wretched perishing being; but to render as capable of contemplating and enjoying him, whom to know is eternal life! (81-82)

Wollstonecraft's explanation of religious contemplation matches Needler's almost exactly. It would be a mistake, though, to understand either prescription for stretching the mind as necessitating the repression of the "pleasures and necessities of the body." As I have tried to show, the efficacy of religious meditation depends, for Wollstonecraft, on the ductility of what, following Alan Richardson, I have called an "embodied mind" (Richardson 148)**.** Though she certainly questions the value of sexual fantasy, Wollstonecraft outlines what I will call her physio-religious sublime as an exercise that influences the ductile mind by appealing to, rather than repressing, the embodied pleasures of imagination. Barbara Taylor states that, in *Rights of Woman,* the imagination can be both "invidious and emancipatory; a source of corruption and of virtue" (68). I have been suggesting that the imagination yields corruption or virtue depending upon its intentional object. When the imagination is directed toward the sensual world alone, it can become corrupt. When it is directed

toward the supersensible world, however, it initiates an experience of religious sublimity, which regulates mental temperature and creates the mental condition necessary for the generation of virtue.

The most well known writer on the religious sublime, John Dennis, stresses that the best way to stimulate the imagination to intuit the divine is through literature. Dennis writes that "Poetry attains its final End, which is the reforming the Minds of Men, by exciting of Passion" and that "Poetry by the force of the Passion, instructs and reforms the Reason; which is the Design of the true Religion" (6.17). Though Wollstonecraft is often read as firmly opposed to literature because of its ability to seduce women into fantasy (indeed, she is often seen as exiling literature from her ideal republic, just as Plato exiled poetry—and for roughly the same reasons),[14] in her larger republican project Wollstonecraft makes a place for literature that proceeds from a virtuous imagination. In 1797, three years before Wordsworth wrote his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wollstonecraft published "On Poetry," a treatise that distinguished the artificially created poetry of the modern era from the more natural, vigorous poetry "written in the infancy of society" ("On Poetry" 7). For the most part, readers have either bypassed "On Poetry" or read it as signaling a shift in Wollstonecraft's position on the imagination and imaginative literature.[15] However, by reading "On Poetry" alongside Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, we can see that Wollstonecraft's cure for women who are enslaved by their temperaments relies on an unconscious exertion of the aesthetic imagination. For Wollstonecraft, literature created by a virtuous imagination possessed the ability to provide the "invigorating impregnation" required to catalyze the female mind to produce wisdom and virtue and write over the mental associations that interfered with female emancipation.

As Wollstonecraft makes clear, to be able to see divine nature in observable phenomena, one must be able to see "poetically" (*Rights of Woman* 145). Genius poets not only see the sublime themselves, but can also teach others to see it. Because most people lack imagination, their "gross minds" allow them to be moved only by "forcible representations" (*Rights of Woman* 145). Wollstonecraft suggests that the genius poet can provide a service to such dullards by framing the most "picturesque part in his *camera*" ("On Poetry" 10) and "concentrat[ing] pictures" for them (*Rights of Woman* 145). Such an act will force readers to "view with interest" objects from the genius's

own "impassioned imagination" which they passed over in nature (*Rights of Woman* 145). By making the reader feel what the poet originally felt and imbibe ideas allied by Nature, the poet could become a healer for women who were incapable of having an unmediated experience of the religious sublime. Because the poet mediates between the supersensible and the sensible, his poetry can bypass the female reader's damped will and force her to be affected by nature. Wollstonecraft's model of the religious sublime suggests that the poet can use the natural heat of his mind, warm from "smoothly incorporat[ing]" his thinking with "the ebullitions of animal spirits" to make a female reader "warmly interested" ("On Poetry" 7, 9). To put it another way, the genius poet's mental "warmth" is transmitted to the female reader through the genius poem, which then alters the "temperature" of her mind. This alteration does not produce a cooling of the mind. As we have seen, a "cool" mind is consistently allied with rational thought for Wollstonecraft. Though the ultimate goal is to have a "cool," rational mind, a woman must first efface the mental associations produced by her confined education. When the mind of the woman is warmed by the genius poem, its "original temperature of the mind" can be influenced. Once influenced, a woman's animal spirits can rewrite associations in her mind, as directed by the spiritual ideas transmitted by the poem. When a woman restricts her imaginative attention to the sensual world, her passions allow her reason to lie in "helpless inactivity" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men* 33). When a woman becomes warmly interested in divinity, those same passions rouse reason so that it can couple with passion and produce virtue.

Because Wollstonecraft often drew on the philosophy of John Locke and her religious beliefs were strong (if "little allied to any system of forms"), one would expect her model of mind to be a more explicitly *spiritual* version of Lockean epistemology (Godwin 34). But, as I have argued, Wollstonecraft surprisingly revises Locke to make explicit the more *physiological* aspects of his theory. Though Wollstonecraft embraces a materialist model of mind, she does not do so at the expense of her religious commitments. In fact, it is, oddly, by drawing on the work of contemporaneous chemists, such as that of Joseph Priestley, that Wollstonecraft creates an account of sublime experience that reconciles the religious sublime of John Dennis and the physiological sublime of Burke. By describing sublime experience as something akin to a chemical reaction, Wollstonecraft explains that

imagination, reason, and feeling interact in the "crucibles" of bodies to lead minds toward the divine. Wollstonecraft then suggests that by imagining revelation, women are given the "glorious hope, if not a foretaste, of what we may expect hereafter" ("Hints" 5:274). However, those who are taught to use their bodies and imaginations for worldly pleasures (such as domestically-educated women) are never given this "foretaste," and as a result descend into vice rather than virtue, retarding their own spiritual progress and the progress of democracy toward what Wollstonecraft saw as its ultimate *telos*: the afterlife.

NOTES

[1] In *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Gary Kelly famously reads Wollstonecraft's religious rhetoric as a strategy, rather than a genuine investment. Much of the best Wollstonecraft criticism over the past few years has simply had little to say about the presence of religion in *Rights of Woman*.

[2] A useful introduction to Christian Platonism in the eighteenth century is Baldwin and Hutton 179-198.

[3] All references to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* refer to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria,* eds. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao (Longman Cultural Edition). New York: Pearson-Longman, 2007.

[4] See Martin's *Reclaiming a Conversation.*

[5] Throughout this essay, I have used the terms "dysregulate" and "dysregulation" to refer to the mind that Wollstonecraft considers "not in a healthy state" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 23). I borrow this term from affective neuroscience, a field that I believe Wollstonecraft's physiological psychology prefigures. For more information on dysregulation, see Lane and Nadel 371-406.

[6] For a convincing rebuttal to the argument that Wollstonecraft's idea of citizenship is restricted to mothering, and thus, positions her in what Carol Pateman has called "Wollstonecraft's Dilemma," see Sapiro's *A Vindication of Political Virtue.*

[7] In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke inextricably links private virtue to public happiness: "God, having, by an inseparable connexion, joined Virtue and publick Happiness together; and made the Practice therefore, necessary to the preservation of Society, and visibly beneficial to all, with whom the virtuous Man has to do" (1.3.6) In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft avows that "public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue" (171) and maintains that "private virtue" provides the only "security of public freedom and universal happiness" (18).

[8] One would expect that Wollstonecraft's physiological account of associationism drew more on Hartley than it did on Locke, who, as Cathy Caruth has noted, added his chapter on associationism as an afterthought and reserved the term "association" for the irrational combination of ideas. As I argue, she does seem to have been aware of Hartley – if not directly then through Joseph Priestley's Hartley's *Theory of the Human Mind* (1775) – but she never explicitly references Hartley's revision of Lockean associationism. In contrast, we know from elsewhere in *Rights of Woman*, as in her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, that she was intimately familiar with Locke. Her retention of animal spirits theory, which Hartley subsumed under his vibrational model (and Priestley attempted to efface), also leads us back to Locke. See Caruth's *Empirical Truths* for more on Locke's use of the word "association." For the place of animal spirits in the associationism of both Locke and Hartley, see Sutton's *Philosophy and Memory*.

[9] Several Wollstonecraft scholars make this suggestion, including Gary Kelly, in *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, and Todd in *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life*.

[10] For a fairly recent assertion of this claim, see Bannet 157.

[11] An example of a physio-religious text of the 1780s that made use of animal spirits is: *Physiologia* (1780) by Thomas Frewen. Earlier religious texts that mentioned the animal spirits were reprinted throughout the century. For example, *Philosophic Essays on Various Subjects* (1733) by Issac Watts was reprinted in London in 1794 and *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* (1746) by Jonathan Edwards was reprinted in London in 1789.

[12] See, for example, Waters 108.

[13] Because the most famous defender of phlogistical theory was Priestley and he was famous for conducting experiments on material substances, he is probably the "experimental" philosopher Wollstonecraft references here. Wollstonecraft also knew Priestley personally and mentioned him throughout her work.

[14] The view that Wollstonecraft distrusts literature is not confined to feminist criticism. For example, Daniel O'Quinn calls *Rights of Woman* "a polemic against literature" (O'Quinn 762). Susan Wolfson reads Wollstonecraft's posthumously published "On Poetry" as evidence that, for Wollstonecraft, "like the arts a woman is taught to cultivate, poetic art is more disgusting yet [because of its ability to] erode rational power in both sexes" (Wolfson 168).

[15] Harriet Jump sees the esteem for early civilization and natural poetry in "On Poetry" as an aberration in Wollstonecraft's work. Jump asserts that "it will be clear that the arguments of this Essay are in direct contradiction to the view expressed elsewhere in Wollstonecraft's work: that mankind is constantly moving in the direction of greater perfection" (151). Susan Wolfson, too, sees "On Poetry" as divergent from the main lines of Wollstonecraft's thought in that it "seems to relax the reign (and rein) of reason over passion insisted on in *Rights of Woman*" (167).

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Hailing a New Man: The Rights of Women, Constructions of Masculinity and Solidarity

Katharina Rennhak

Drawing on Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation and Judith Butler's theory of performative gender identity, this article claims that in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, Mary Wollstonecraft invests a lot of energy in constructing the male equivalent for her female ideal and in imagining a special kind of domesticity which is based on and enables cross-gender solidarity. It is suggested that Wollstonecraft employs a number of rhetorical and narrative strategies which serve to carve out a subject position for the new male ideal that her texts envision on the discursive level rather than on the level of content. While Wollstonecraft's alternative concept of masculinity is, thus, only vaguely conceptualized and defined, what can nevertheless be traced in Wollstonecraft's writings is the *process* of constructing a new masculine identity.

In her conclusion to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft announces that she must speak bluntly in order to "bring the subject home to reason" (229).[1] What she then hammers home for her less "sagacious reader" (*Rights of Woman* 229) is, famously, that "the greater number of female follies" which must be reformed "[proceed] from the tyranny of man" (231):

> Contending, therefore, that the sexual distinction which men have so warmly insisted upon, is arbitrary, I have dwelt on an observation, that several sensible men, with whom I have conversed on the subject, allowed to be well founded; and it is simply this, that the little chastity to be found amongst men, and consequent disregard of modesty, tend to degrade both sexes. (230-31)

First and foremost, Wollstonecraft suggests, it is the British men who must be reformed, if "a REVOLUTION in female manners" (*Rights of Woman* 230) is to appear feasible at all. In his article in this collection,

Dustin Friedman most convincingly demonstrates how Wollstonecraft sets out in the margins of *Rights of Woman* and, more decidedly, in *Wrongs of Woman* to conceptualize an "aesthetics of productive masculinity"(225). Focusing on Wollstonecraft's address to and definition of the "sensible men" singled out in the passage just quoted – i.e. men who are clearly not 'men of sensibility,' but unite rational and emotive powers in the well-known Wollstonecraftian formula, – I set out to participate in the reconstruction of a broader picture of the conceptualization of masculinities in Wollstonecraft's texts.

With Dustin Friedman I share many preliminary assumptions. Prefiguring Judith "Butler's insight[s]," Wollstonecraft's texts certainly demonstrate "that one can no longer be assured that a particular behavior or that a particular phrase can be unequivocally associated with a particular sex" (Friedman 207). Like Friedman, I also believe that it is more productive to think of Wollstonecraft as what Tim Fulford calls "a theorist of Romantic masculinity," insofar as her emphatic redefinition of women as rational beings necessarily entails a rethinking of masculinity and the language used to represent it. Last but not least, like Friedman, I find one of my major starting points in Andrew Elfenbein's chapter "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Sexuality of Genius." In my case, this is Elfenbein's reminder that Wollstonecraft's "effort to separate heterosexuality from its stifling associations with bourgeois domesticity [...] deserves more respect than it often has gotten from Wollstonecraft's critics" (233).

Until recently, criticism has almost exclusively concentrated on how Wollstonecraft attacks contemporary representations of femininity and on her attempts to carve out new subject positions for women.[2] I do not set out here to argue against the obvious fact that Wollstonecraft's main interest lies in women's rights and in constructions of feminine identities. Still, the future vision most prominent in *Rights of Woman* resides in the hope "that marriage may become more sacred" (*Rights of Woman* 18), and in an idealised conception of "dignified domestic happiness" (228). While the adjective "dignified" signals that Wollstonecraft certainly redefines the dominant sentimental concept of "domestic happiness" and with it the male and female subject necessary to produce it, her vision of a better future is clearly based on a heterosocial and heterosexual domestic economy. With hindsight, many gender critics (myself included) cannot but see Victorian domesticity with its ever more strictly separated spheres lurking on the horizon when they read of

Wollstonecraft's concept of domestic bliss and her ideal of "mothers of the nation."[3] To them, her project of conceptualizing "dignified domestic happiness" seems so ideologically dangerous and suspect that they either concentrate on criticizing her heterosexual bias, or – as in the case of Mellor's *Mothers of the Nation* – focus on how it helps to empower women as active participants in the construction of a new British civil society. Wollstonecraft's attempts to refashion masculine identities so as to provide a domestic partner for the new Wollstonecraftian heroine are either not taken seriously or overlooked.

In this essay, I suggest that in *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* Wollstonecraft invests quite some energy in the project of re-forming heterosexual males, since without a reconstruction of masculinity the "revolution in female manners" does not seem possible. In addition, if domestic happiness (however unconventional its particular form) is the envisioned ideal for the new Wollstonecraftian woman, constructions of femininity and masculinity are so closely intertwined that adjustments to the one must necessarily entail adjustments to the other. As many others have demonstrated (and deplored), in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft is convinced that men must lead the revolution of female manners and entreats them to "generously snap [woman's] chains" (*Rights of Woman* 182).[4] In *Wrongs of Woman*, women certainly seize greater initiative, but that does not mean that Wollstonecraft abandons her project of redefining heterosocial and heterosexual relationships and of reconstructing dominant concepts of masculinity.

For sure, the utopian domestic ideal and with it the new Wollstonecraftian heterosexual domestic male is nowhere thoroughly conceptualized in her works. Indeed, apart from the avuncular masculinity identified by Friedman, I do not see any other positive alternative male gender concept which is thoroughly fleshed out in any of Wollstonecraft's works. On the contrary, her rather vague depictions of the domestic ideal, share a lot with those of Edmund Burke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see Jones 45), whose politics and gender concepts she often attacks as ideologically dubious in *Rights of Woman* and elsewhere.[5] "Sexuality had no language of its own in the eighteenth century" (Elfenbein 228) and Wollstonecraft, certainly, had no proper language for her new vision of domestic heterosexual bliss.

I still claim that Wollstonecraft invests a lot of energy in constructing the male equivalent to her female ideal, – rhetorical and

narrative energies which are often located on the discursive level of her writings rather than on the level of content. What can be traced in her writings is the *process* of constructing a new masculine identity. As I hope to show, many of the rhetorical and narrative strategies which Wollstonecraft adopts in *Rights* and *Wrongs* serve to carve out a subject position for the new male ideal which she envisions, but can only vaguely conceptualize as yet.

Hailing an Ideal Male Reader in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Amy E. Smith has demonstrated in "Roles for Readers in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" that Wollstonecraft's "texts accomodat[e] a dual audience" (556) as it is addressed to men and women.[6] Smith suggests that "Wollstonecraft's addresses to women are more complex than those to male readers and merit closer examination" (558). I would rather stress that Wollstonecraft's whole text is framed by direct addresses to male readers, who are thus obviously put center-stage. The dedication to M. Talleyrand-Périgord has the effect of presenting the whole text of *Rights of Woman* as the message in a communicative situation which features a female speaker and a male addressee. In its very last paragraph – opening with "Be just then, O ye men of understanding!" (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 132) – Wollstonecraft's treatise culminates in one of the most urgent direct appeals of the female speaker to a group of men. Certainly, then, the communicative situation points to the importance of a male readership.

A comparison of the communicative situation at the beginning and end of *Rights of Woman* registers a shift in the position of the addressee from one, clearly identifiable historical male individual, Talleyrand, to a rather indefinite group of men. Such a shift can be found repeatedly in the book and as early as towards the end of the very first paragraph of the dedication. Most critics have assumed that with "men of understanding" or "enlarged minds" (*Rights of Woman* 132, 16) Wollstonecraft addresses the historically specific group of her male republican philosopher friends. I want to suggest that she rather carves out a new subject position for her male readers which no historically existent man occupies as yet, but into which she tries to lure her male readers so as to, eventually, enable them to turn

themselves into the ideal male subjects she envisions. Wollstonecraft's rhetorical agenda could be said to try to effect a kind of Althusserian 'hailing' or 'interpellation' of the male subject.[7] Wollstonecraft, that is, attempts to call upon her male readers to participate in her project of reforming male and revolutionizing female manners. She starts her project as following: "Sir, Having read with great pleasure a pamphlet which you have lately published, I dedicate this volume to you; to induce you to reconsider the subject, and maturely weigh what I have advanced respecting the rights of woman and national education" (*Rights of Woman* 15). The historical male addressed, Talleyrand, is certainly far from ideal and explicitly asked to reconsider his position. As has often been stated, even the most fervent supporters of the revolutionary Republic, like Talleyrand-Périgord, Rousseau or Imlay, are far from providing Wollstonecraft with the ideal male who fights for equal rights for all human beings and not just "JUSTICE for one half of the human race" (*Rights of Woman* 19). Wollstonecraft directly addresses such imperfect republican males at times, I propose, to get hold of some historical personae, some extra-textual referents whose existence proves that revolutions are possible and do, indeed, take place only when supported by rational thinkers. There are signs, she suggests, that give reason to hope that her vision of the sensible man and a reform of heterosexual and heterosocial relationships is not merely wishful thinking.

By the end of the first paragraph of the dedication, which posits the common interest of republican men and women, however, Wollstonecraft turns away from Talleyrand as it were and does no longer put her hope in him, who has argued for a Rousseauvian gendered education that prepares women "for a life of subservience to men" (*Rights of Woman* 15, n. 2). Rather, she envisions a group of more enlightened male contemporaries: "[...] I think it scarcely possible, but that some of the enlarged minds who formed your admirable constitution, will coincide with me" (16). It is rather improbable that Wollstonecraft has some concrete group of kindred spirits in mind. Evidence to the contrary is that she never addresses a single such person directly in *Rights of Woman*. The semi-imperatives and imperatives to the rather indefinite group of "enlarged minds" or "men of understanding," thus, do not seem to refer to any pre-existing audience, but rather serve to construct a new male subject position. Wollstonecraft's hope that "[these enlarged minds] will coincide," in

other words, is of the kind of *idealistic* willing of Percy Bysshe Shelley of which her daughter said: "Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none" (Shelley 269). Wollstonecraft seems to hope that by addressing, she can indeed fashion the will of an audience that can bring about the revolution she envisions.

Amy E. Smith argues a similar point – especially when she speaks of how Wollstonecraft "anticipates" (556) readers; but Smith never quite abandons the idea that Wollstonecraft always addresses a male audience that is somehow prior to the text. Drawing on pre-existing literary types, she suggests for example, that "[m]ale readers fall into two principal categories, the libertines and the men of reason;" and "[t]he first," she continues, "is typified by Lord Chesterfield" (557). Smith, thus, never rigorously contends that Wollstonecraft is engaged in *constructing* a new male subject position. Her lucid observations about Wollstonecraft's use of the rhetorical figures of "direct addresses and references to readers, the selection of examples, and the use of a semi-imperative mood" (Smith 556) can easily be used, however, to substantiate the idea that Wollstonecraft does, indeed, attempt to "anticipate" a revolutionary male identity. I have just demonstrated how the direct and indirect addresses to male readers can be read as attempts to hail such a male subject.

The "significant number of examples [for heterosocial scenarios] aimed primarily at male concerns," which Smith (562) identifies, contribute greatly to the hailing of male subjects as they "represent [...] the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real [and material] conditions of existence" (Althusser 162), and invite male readers to participate in the ideological practices pre-scribed by Wollstonecraft's ideal of a "dignified domestic happiness" (*Rights of Woman* 228; see Althusser 168). The following "portrayal […] of the domestic happiness a man will find with a properly educated woman unfettered by artificial, debilitating models of female behavior," certainly "appeal[s]" to men – in both senses of the word *appeal* (Smith 562):

> I have seen [a good wife] prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who returning weary home in the evening, found smiling babes and a clean hearth. My heart has loitered in the midst of the group, and has even throbbed with sympathetic emotion, when the

> scraping of the well known foot has raised a pleasing tumult. (*Rights of Woman* 174)

By focusing on the activities involved in the coming home of the husband-and-father after a long day's work, this portrayal pre-scribes a ritualistic family practice, which simultaneously constructs and represents domestic happiness (see Althusser 168). A look at the immediate context of this scene makes clear, moreover, that Wollstonecraft, indeed, constructs a domestic ritual to counter other rituals of the dominant ideology: "So singular, indeed, are my feelings [...] that after having been fatigued with the sight of insipid grandeur and the slavish ceremonies that with cumberous pomp supplied the place of domestic affections, I have turned to some other scene to relieve my eye [...]" (*Rights of Woman* 174).

It may come as a surprise to some readers of the *Rights of Woman* that, in her enticing example of domestic bliss, Wollstonecraft takes recourse to rather trite topoi of the discourse of sensibility which – in its crude dominant forms – she aggressively attacks elsewhere. Not only does the scene of the returning husband provide a familiar domestic tableau, but in the second sentence (of the second-last quotation above), Wollstonecraft even stoops to linger on her heartbeat and detail the highly sensitive bodily reaction to the sound of a husband's scraping foot. If one reads *Rights of Woman* as a text which attempts to interpellate male subjects so as to recruit them for a revolutionary re-organization of sex and gender relationships, it is not difficult to explain this recourse to the rhetoric of the cult of sensibility. Wollstonecraft uses the highly successful rhetorical tools, which male authors have employed to give the impression that "woman is naturally weak, or degraded" back at them (*Rights of Woman* 73). Countering sensibility with sensibility is a method which must seem highly promising to her. After all, the most urgent problem with contemporary masculinity which she diagnoses in her male contemporaries is their over-active sensibility and inflated sensuality. All of Burke's "pretty flights arise from [his] papered sensibility" (*Rights of Woman* 6), and "all [of] Rousseau's errors in reasoning arose from sensibility" (116).

My analysis of one of the many passages in *Rights of Woman* whose "main appeal is made to men" (Smith 562), has already begun to identify yet another rhetorical strategy employed repeatedly, namely "subversive mimesis" (Garner 82). Naomi J. Garner has

convincingly suggested that "in [...] *Rights of Woman* [Wollstonecraft] deliberately uses mimicry to reflect men back at themselves, slightly distorted, to reveal their inadequacies and unjust subjectivity" (83). Garner thus tries to defend Wollstonecraft against the well known criticism of "her 'masculine' approach and her adoption of 'manly' tendencies" (82), which are seen as watering down her feminist agenda. In addition, she demonstrates how the strategy of subversive mimicry helps Wollstonecraft "to make her […] main point of the *Rights of Woman*: it is not women who are weak and vain by nature, but men who have made them so." (85)

As in the case of Smith's analysis of *Rights of Woman*, I can also build on Garner's results to substantiate my own thesis that Wollstonecraft's rhetoric seeks to construct a new subject position for a reformed or revolutionary male. In the second last paragraph, I have already demonstrated how mimicry is enlisted for the hailing of male readers in one of the portrayals of "dignified domestic happiness." While I have suggested that Wollstonecraft uses sentimental topoi in earnest, as it were, in order to reach the male sensualists among her readers, the author would probably be delighted if other readers expose this trick and rationally reflect on her strategic use of sentimental conventions as yet another form of subversive mimesis of the ideologically suspect dominant discourse of sensibility.

A particular reading strategy recommended by Wollstonecraft herself in *Rights of Woman* substantiates my argument that "subversive mimicry," as identified by Garner, can be said to instigate and shape the process of male identity re-formation. With regard to the question of how to educate "young girls" to read the right books and to deal knowledgeably with dangerous fictional material, she suggests:

> The best method [...] to correct a fondness for novels is to ridicule them: [...] if a judicious person, with some turn for humour, would read several to a young girl, and point out both by tones, and apt comparisons [...] how foolishly and ridiculously they caricatured human nature, just opinions might be substituted instead of romantic sentiments. (*Rights of Woman* 222)

If we substitute "unenlightened and over-sensitive male contemporaries" for "young girls," "philosophical texts and conduct

books" for "novels," and put Wollstonecraft in the position of the "judicious person," this is exactly what the author does in Chapter IV "Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity […]" and elsewhere in *Rights of Woman*. She reads out, as it were, long passages from Rousseau, Dr. Fordyce, Dr. Gregory and others, comments on the tone, style and content of the quoted passages and demonstrates "how foolishly and ridiculously they caricature" the female sex (Garner 84). Wollstonecraft, thus, puts her imaginary male (and female) readership into the position of someone who is willing to receive an important, character-forming lecture and directly proceeds with her project of "cultivation-through-ridicule" (Bahar 115) that contributes to "the formation of gendered-subject formation which heralds recent feminist theorisation inspired by the Althusserian concept of interpellation" (Bahar 110).[8]

To briefly sum up, in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft draws on a number of rhetorical devices and argumentative strategies like direct addresses, examples and tableaux of domestic bliss, the bodily rhetoric of sensibility, and subversive mimicry, to hail the new male who can serve as an ideal partner for the Wollstonecraftian female ideal.

Imprisoned Masculinity: Communicating Wrongs and Establishing Heterosocial Solidarity in *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*

Is it a coincidence that Darnford is the first reader of Maria's memoirs in *Wrongs of Woman*? – Certainly not. The observation that on the plot-level of her novel Wollstonecraft, indeed, puts a male subject, her heroine Maria's fellow prisoner and lover, into the reader-position initially reserved for Maria's daughter, does not only substantiate the argument just made with regards to the carving out of male subject positions in *Rights of Woman*. The fact that in her last novel Wollstonecraft, once again, has an adult male take the position of a little girl, thus instructing him like she would instruct a daughter, also demonstrates that *Wrongs of Woman* does not give up the project of re-forming men.

Critical articles on *Wrongs* which try to argue this point are scarce, but do exist. Elaine Jordan has stressed that Wollstonecraft insists upon "the possibility of re-forming men" (231). By far the most

dominant critical opinion is, however, that "If *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* had proposed that a new, utopian society based on sexual equality and companionate marriage might be possible, *The Wrongs of Woman* erases this possibility" (Mellor, "Introduction" 242-243). "By the time she wrote her final novel, *The Wrongs*, her thoughts were moving more towards a development of a female community," explains Garner (91-92), picking up – like many others – the powerful argument most forcefully presented by Poovey, Todd and Johnson: "As Janet Todd has aptly put it, Maria's history is marked by two movements, 'one circular and repetitive, and the other linear and developmental. The circular binds her to male relationships [...] the linear tends towards freedom and maturity'" – which, I may add, is associated with women (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 64). Today most critics believe that Wollstonecraft does not only "'prefigur[e]' [...] feminist solidarity" in *Wrongs of Woman* (Kelly qtd. in Johnson, "Wollstonecraft's Novels" 206; also see Bahar). In addition, the attempt to envision an alternative heterosexual plot, and with it an alternative masulinity, is seen as being marked as futile and given up in the process. Johnson states for example: "the Darnford/Maria episodes finally judge male culture to be so corrupt as to make reciprocity between the sexes impossible" (Johnson, "Wollstonecraft's Novels" 204).

It is striking how even critics well-schooled in postmodernist (gender) theories provide rather old-fashioned biographical or structuralist readings in order to present the Darnford/Maria love story as detrimental to the project of challenging the dominant sex-gender system. Darnford is modelled on Imlay, so the biographically oriented interpretation goes, and therefore Wollstonecraft just cannot imagine an alternative heterosexual plot, but falls back into a solipsitic sentimental discourse. Certainly, Maria performs the gendered identity of a sentimental heroine twice, in the love plot with her "monstrous yet also banal husband, George Venables" (Johnson, "Wollstonecraft's Novels" 199); just as well as when she lends "St. Preux, or the demi-god of her fancy, [Darnford's] form" (*Wrongs* 262). But this "repetitive" structure does not necessarily point to an imprisoning "circular [movement]" (Todd qtd. in Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 64). Maria's second attempt to re-form the "being of celestial mould [… which] was then plastic in her impassioned hand" (*Wrongs* 345) can also be read with Judith Butler as a "subversive repetition within signifying practices of gender" (185). As Butler explains,

> "agency" [...] is to be located *within* the possibility of a variation on [... a process of] repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of […] new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (185)

In *Wrongs of Woman*, I suggest, just like in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft draws on the discourse of sensibility, but uses it with a difference to anticipate new heterosocial and heterosexual constellations as well as a new male identity. In *Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft uses elements of the discourse of sensibility to depict the self-assured desire of a *married* woman, who rationally reflects on, but still and quite consciously continues to indulge in her dreams of a lover who promises the kind of domestic ideal she yearns for (see e.g. *Wrongs* 295). Neither Maria's nor Wollstonecraft's repeated attempts to "mould" a man who serves as the ideal partner seem to be particularly successful in the end. But still, the heroine's and the author's project of an imaginative re-organisation of gender relationships certainly does not give up on the male world altogether: "Maria [and Wollstonecraft] want [...] to re-form masculinity, and it would be a mistake to reprimand her for it [today]" (Jordan 232).

My reading of *Wrongs of Woman*, which interprets the heroine's repeated attempt to "mould" a man in the vein of Judith Butler's work, rests on the premise that sensibility and the power of the imagination are for Wollstonecraft and her heroine dangerous, but indispensable and potentially helpful tools in the construction of new gender identities. I am as "unhappy" as Jordan is with the many "readings which overemphasise Maria's erotic imagination as a 'false consciousness'" (Jordan 225):

> Maria repeats with Darnford [...] what she had done with her husband (though she is now under a new set of limitations) [...] A woman's ideal of the lover she wants has a shaping power: it is imaginable that at least for a time he may live up to what she wants of him. This is what the narrator [not Maria!] claims at the point where Darnford and Maria consummate their love. (231)[9]

To add some more observations that further substantiate this argument: "It is far better to be often deceived than never to trust; to be disappointed in love than never to love" (*Rights of Woman* 127), Wollstonecraft stresses in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, because an investment of "heart and mind" in "friendship, love, and marriage" sets free important energies that help to envision a different future (127). Similarly in *Wrongs of Woman*, Maria warns her daughter that conventionally "good women [...] want that fire of the imagination, which produces *active* sensibility, and *positive* virtue" (315; emphasis in original). In addition, the third-person narrator's comment that Maria "was too much under the influence of an ardent imagination to adhere to common rules" (*Wrongs* 270) is hardly a negative characterization for a heroine who fights for a social revolution. If we read the repetition of the sentimental love-plot with Judith Butler, that is, *The Wrongs*'s "ambivalence about the creative imagination" (Poovey 106) must be taken more seriously than it is, for example, in Nicola Watson's adaptation of Poovey's groundbreaking argument, which claims that Wollstonecraft's "radical novel [...] begin[s] to look disturbingly like novels of sensibility" (Watson 57).

It is, of course, true that at the heart of *Wrongs of Woman* lies the daring attempt to imagine a world which allows for revolutionary female bonds. The reconfiguration of domesticity around two motherly female figures, Maria and Jemima, whose friendship "represents the formal center of [the novel]" (Haggerty 109), is certainly the most innovative aspect of Wollstonecraft's novel. And, yes, Darnford will probably prove to be an unfaithful lover and far from ideal in the end, even though it is not obvious that "Maria discovers that Darnford, like Gilbert Imlay, has taken another mistress" (Mellor, "Introduction" 424) in *all* "the scattered heads for the continuation of the story" provided by Godwin (*Wrongs* 354).[10] Still, the Darnford/Maria plot is more than just an abortive final attempt to conceptualize a heterosexual and heterosocial relationship among equals. Again, as in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft uses all the tools which are at her disposal – this time narrative ones – to include the male protagonist in her construction of a new system of interdependent sex and gender identities.

Famously, *Wrongs of Woman* assembles tales of women's suffering in British society to demonstrate that "Maria's case is not unique, but representative" (Mellor, "Introduction" 237). The patriarchal system in general and marriage in particular has "bastilled

[them all] for life" (*Wrongs* 316-17). This collection of tales, some of which are presented orally, some in writing, show "the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various" (*Wrongs* 248). Among these inset tales of female pain and suffering but also guilt and culpability, we find one story which relates the wrongs (again in both senses of the word) of a male "fellow-sufferer" (*Wrongs* 265), who also finds himself imprisoned in the madhouse. Henry Darnford is not only a reader of Maria's memoirs, but also the narrator of his own autobiographical tale. As such Darnford's story must be regarded as one more tale, which shows "the wrongs of different [members of British society] equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various." Rather than to quickly write it off as "Darnford's ludicrously obnoxious account of himself" (Johnson, "Wollstonecraft's Novels" 204), I suggest that we read it as one more story about what is wrong in British society and take its content and its particular form (of an orally presented first-person narrative embedded into a well-defined communicative situation) seriously.

Obnoxious as it may seem, Darnford's story demonstrates that he belongs to the "sensible men" Wollstonecraft constructs in *Rights of Woman* in so far as the main desire that structures all his actions, albeit futile, is the desire for "the sweets of domestic affection" which he "never knew" in his own family (*Wrongs* 206). His search for "dignified domestic happiness" (*Rights of Woman* 228) is hindered, moreover, by a wrong education ("I was taught to love by a creature I am ashamed to mention") and by a lack of women who share his ideal (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs* 266). He did what he could, "retired to the track of land which [he] had purchased in [America]," and full of expectations "cut down the trees, built my house, and planted my different crops" (*Wrongs* 268), but since he cannot find a companion, his desire for "the sweets of domestic affection" remains unfulfilled (*Wrongs* 266). In America, where the republican-minded youth hopes to find circumstances more conducive to the project of establishing his own domestic idyll and "to take up my abode with freedom" (*Wrongs* 267), he does not find a wife he can love and respect as equal, but only bewitching coquettes of the kind that Wollstonecraft castigates in *Rights of Woman*. We encounter a man, that is, who identifies exactly the same wrongs and suggests exactly the same solution as Wollstonecraft does in her *Rights of Woman*.

Darnford's report can be read as a sincere confession of how he was, and still is, unable to escape from the dominant sex-gender system which has – through various social institutions such as family, schools, prostitution, the marriage-market – successfully hailed him as male subject. If it is at all possible to "mould" any British man, the self-reflectivity and sincerity which characterize Darnford's report, however, give hope that he could be the one. At least, he shares Godwin's conviction (also shared by Wollstonecraft) that "there cannot be a subject of greater political importance […] than that of the value of truth" (Godwin 211). Significantly, sincerity positively characterizes Darnford's behaviour towards Maria throughout the narrative that is available. In the passage which leads up to the first sexual intercourse between the imprisoned lovers, the third-person narrator comments, for example, that "he disdained to conceal, that, when he appealed to her reason, he felt that he had some interest in her heart" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs* 344).

Moreover, by dissecting in his autobiographical tale the entanglement of the new republican ideals as established in American society not only with conservative gender norms, but also with commercial greed, Darnford takes up another Wollstonecraftian idea which clearly differentiates him from Imlay and the latter's "profit-driven motives for engaging in illegal trade for the French revolutionary government" (Pollock 197). As Anthony Pollock has demonstrated, in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*

> one of Wollstonecraft's primary aims is to deconstruct the historically specific mode of [mercantile republican] masculine subjectivity that Imlay was asking her to inhabit. In Letter 23 [...] Wollstonecraft launches into a discussion of the ways in which "situation seems to be the mould in which men's characters are formed," focusing especially on how commerce "embrutes" those who practice it. (197)

Wollstonecraft's fictional character Darnford, who explicitly "detest[s] commerce" (*Wrongs* 268), obviously does not simply equal her real-life lover Imlay, but must be regarded as an attempt to construct a better version of the republican real-life model which provides a problematic, but still the most promising masculine identity that seems to be available.

At least as interesting as the content of Darnford's tale of wrongs is its correlation to the other narratives that are assembled in *Wrongs of Woman*. Most importantly, Darnford's tale has the same status as Maria's and Jemima's tales in so far as it is a first-person narrative that is embedded into the third-person narrative (not into Maria's memoirs) and is told within the madhouse. Within the prison walls, the telling of Maria's, Jemima's and Darnford's stories serves to build a community and to achieve solidarity between all people – regardless of their sex – who suffer under and are prepared to challenge the dominant sex-gender ideology. Amidst this group, women are in the majority, but men like Darnford, the narrative structure of *Wrongsof Woman* suggests, can and must be included. As in *Rights of Woman*, the bond between man and woman, Darnford and Maria, is the first step towards something new. The main innovation about the couple envisioned in *Wrongs of Woman* is that their heterosexual love does not exclude others but, on the contrary, is shown to trigger and enable moments of solidarity between members of different classes, between men and women and, importantly, also between women. The heterosexual love between Darnford and Maria unsettles "the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" as conceptualized by Judith Butler (180).

Johnson's reading of the scene which depicts the (communicative) situation that prompts Jemima to tell her tale suggests that "Just when we think we are going to get an idealized, even corny, love scene between Maria and Darnford, Jemima barges in, clearly unwanted, interrupting the panting lovers, and she commences a very long and brutal story that could chill anybody's ardor" (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 204-205). I read the same scene differently, as does Gary Kelly, who summarizes a larger plot-line which connects the first-person narratives by Darnford and Jemima: "Maria is captivated by Darnford's tale, and his narrative unleashes love. This love then arouses Jemima's sympathy and unleashes her narrative, for she 'was so softened by the air of confidence which breathed around her, that she voluntarily began an account of herself'" (Kelly 212).[11] Her narrative, that is, unites all three characters in sex- and genderless solidarity. Maria does not feel disturbed, at all, by Jemima's rather gentle interruption, but immediately appreciates and reciprocates her jailor's sympathy which the latter expresses by a "tear of pleasure" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs* 273). Jemima in turn "felt herself, for once in her life, treated like a fellow-creature" (273). There is not a single hint

that she is "unwanted" by either of the two lovers. On the contrary, Darnford is explicitly included when the third-person narrator comments that "the world contained not three happier beings" (273). Wollstonecraft envisions a moment of solidarity among fellow sufferers whose class or sex is irrelevant as long as they are willing to truthfully acknowledge – in their first-person narratives – the wrongs they have committed and to sincerely sympathize with their fellow sufferers.

I would not quite say that the "prison turns out to be a site of liberation – of 'mind' if not body," but the madhouse certainly turns out to be a place which enables the formation of a new sex-gender system in miniature (Kelly 212). Not only is Maria torn out of her middle-class environment and confronted with the fate of lower class Jemima; the prisoner Darnford, too, stripped of all his male bonds, eventually finds his female equal who is also searching for "dignified domestic happiness" and, moreover, he comes to listen to women's tales with empathy (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs* 285; 288-89). The new hetero- and homosocial solidarity is possible within the prison walls, because they do not only imprison fellow-sufferers but also shut out patriarchal society. This is, why, indeed, "liberty has lost its sweets" for Maria (346). "The way out of her prison" is not so much a way "out of her 'false consciousness'" (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 66), but a re-entrance into the world where the wrongs of woman still corrupt the whole socio-political system.

This is what the plot-development suggests, as it demonstrates how the three fellow sufferers are released into the old, familiar patriarchal world where by "indefatigabl[y] tracing the mysterious circumstances of his confinement," Darnford is quickly and willy-nilly entangled once again in the typically patriarchal business of sorting out a problematic inheritance. Outside the prison walls, Maria does no longer "taste uninterrupted felicity" (*Wrongs* 348) with Darnford, but there is still hope as they continue to re-form each other and work towards the new gender ideals that are only ever anticipated in Wollstonecraft's writings. Thus, the third-person narrator (not a hyper-sentimental heroine) suggests: "Darnford appeared ever willing to avail himself of her taste and acquirements, while she endeavoured to profit by his decision of character" (*Wrongs* 349).Wollstonecraft keeps emphasizing the importance of the new triangular community (in the narrative as it exists, if not in most of the sketched endings). Maria's memoirs, for example, end "abruptly with the names of

Jemima and Darnford" (*Wrongs* 343), which seem to be intrinsically tied to each other for Wollstonecraft's heroine at that stage. More importantly, it is not quite right to claim, as many critics do, that it is Jemima alone who frees Maria from the madhouse. Rather, Jemima herself suggests that it is Darnford who has made their escape possible in the first place when she asserts, "I am much mistaken, if Darnford is not the cause of my master's flight" (*Wrongs* 346).

To conclude with a comparison of the representation of gender identities and heterosocial relationships in *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman*, in her last novel, Wollstonecraft no longer puts man, and man only, into the position of the political trailblazer who must "snap our [women's] chains," but envisions much more powerful and active female characters as well as situations where male and female sufferers interact (*Rights of Woman* 182). No longer just castigating women for their reluctance to think, but emphasizing the importance of female solidarity, Wollstonecraft suggests that men and women must team up to liberate themselves. While the majority of critics during the last two decades have postulated a radical change of mind of the author from *Rights of Woman* to *Wrongs of Woman*, I find it is about time we took notice of the continuities once again. Rather than a final farewell to a "male culture [that is] so corrupt as to make reciprocity between the sexes impossible" (Johnson, "Wollstonecraft's Novels" 204) and "erases [the] possibility [of companionate marriage]" (Mellor, "Introduction" 242), I see *Wrongs of Woman* as elaborating on the notion fundamental to *Rights*, namely that "[t]he two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other" (*Rights of Woman* 171). What is new is that Wollstonecraft tries to re-define the concepts of heterosociality and heterosexuality (and in the process masculine and feminine identities) by triangulating them in a male-female-female constellation in which all participants are driven by their desire for "dignified domestic happiness." Only if all those who suffer under the given sex-gender system join forces, only then is it possible to anticipate a thorough reorganization of society that may end the all-encompassing *wrongs of woman*, i.e. women's suffering and the pain they cannot but cause others as long as the revolution of male and female manners has not taken place.

NOTES

[1] Mary, Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman or, Maria*, eds. Anne K. Mellor and Noelle Chao. New York: Pearson Longman, 2007. All quotations from *Rights of Woman* (abbreviated as *Rights of Woman*) or *Wrongs of Woman* (abbreviated as *Wrongs*) are from this edition.

[2] This is true of most critical approaches to women's writing. For a collection of articles which tries to redress the balance see Franz and Rennhak's *Women Constructing Men*.

[3] To name but two examples: see Landes' seminal study *Women and the Public Sphere* and Mellor's *Mothers of the Nation*.

[4] See, for example, Smith's "Roles for Readers in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*." Smith also summarizes critical positions that have been influential in this context (555-556).

[5] Also relevant in this context is Wollstonecraft eulogy of a male dominated cottage domesticity in the *Rights of Men*: "What salutary dews might not be shed to refresh this thirsty land, if men were more enlightened! […] – A garden more inviting than Eden would then meet the eye […] Domestic comfort, the civilizing relations of husband, brother, and father, would soften labour, and render life contented" (58).

[6] Many critics have noticed Wollstonecraft's targeting of a specific audience. Simpson states: "I do not mean to suggest that Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* is to be received as completely and exclusively the product of a rationally controlled anticipation of audience effects; but I would contend that there is more deliberate artifice than can be allowed by the supposition of her imprisonment within a feminine style" (Simpson 109). Like most critics, Simpson assumes that Wollstonecraft addresses "a readership composed of women of the 'middle class'" (109). For an influential analysis of Wollstonecraft's appeal to male readers see Vlasopolos, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Mask of Reason."

[7] In Althusser's theory it is, of course, always the dominant ideology which interpellates its subjects in a dynamic process of interaction between "Ideological State Apparatuses" and subjects. More recent adaptations of his theory, however, allow for "multiple, simultaneous hails" and for interpellations of subjects and oppositional ideologies. For a brief, recent introduction to Althusser's theory and its reception see Gray's "Althusser, Ideology, and Theoretical Foundations".

[8] Like most Wollstonecraft critics, Bahar is almost exclusively interested in the interpellation of female subjects.

[9] Also see my article "Konstruktionen von Weiblichkeit und Männlichkeit" where I pursue a similar argument and reach the same conclusion without having come across Jordan's article at the time of writing.

[10] See especially "the scattered heads for the continuation of the story" I; also III (*Wrongs* 355). Even Johnson, one of the harshest critics of Darnford, must admit: "The dissolution of Maria's relation with Darnford is hardly depicted at all" (Johnson, "Wollstonecraft's Novels" 207)

[11] For another reading that stresses the "structural complexity of the novel, which does not consist of a plot that imitates an action, but of Maria, Jemima and Darnford telling each other their life-stories" see Rajan 228.

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Beyond Heterosexuality: Mary Wollstonecraft's Aesthetic Masculinity

Dustin Friedman

This essay concerns itself with a reevaluation of Mary Wollstonecraft's attitudes towards sexuality, concentrating specifically on the treatment of non-heterosexual masculinity in her writings. While literary critics have read Wollstonecraft's critique of Edmund Burke's masculine cooptation of the discourse of sensibility as "homophobic," many moments in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) gesture towards a non-authoritarian, socially oriented type of masculine sensibility that concerns itself with aesthetic production rather than with heterosexual reproduction. This socially useful male sensibility finds its literary realization in the character of Maria's uncle in Wollstonecraft's novel *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798). Maria's uncle, though ostensibly heterosexual, exhibits non-normative gender and sexual behaviors that are positively valued because they allow for the sublimation of reproductive energies into an aesthetically productive and didactically useful type of masculine sensibility, one that allows sympathy to be directed outward, unselfishly, towards others. Such a reading of *Righs of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* allows one to recognize in Wollstonecraft's writing a theory of the political importance of non-heterosexual identities within an egalitarian society, as well as helping to inaugurate the character of the "benevolent uncle" as a crucial figure for nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature.

Mary Wollstonecraft's complicated, and at times seemingly contradictory attitudes toward sexuality remain one of the most difficult elements of her work.[1] Critics, especially in recent years, have attempted to reconcile Wollstonecraft's critique in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791) of the "Romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling" encouraged by women's education in the discourse of feminine sensibility with the passionate disposition attested to by her tumultuous romantic relationships with men such as Gilbert Imlay—a disposition which many critics believe to be represented by the character of Maria in her unfinished final novel *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1797). While Wollstonecraft's complex take on

women's sexuality continues to provide evidence for increasingly nuanced and sophisticated interpretations of her feminist project, I share with Katharina Rennhak a desire to, as she states in her article in this collection, "participate in the reconstruction of a broader picture of the conceptualization of masculinities in Wollstonecraft's texts" (Rennhak 182).

I wish to open up this debate to an examination of Wollstonecraft's representation of men's sexuality, especially as those representations engage with the specifically gendered and politicized discourse of eighteenth century "sensibility." As Rennhak so compellingly demonstrates in her essay, Wollstonecraft uses the well known and highly successful rhetorical tools of sensibility, which male authors have employed to give and perpetuate the impression that "woman is naturally weak, or degraded" back at them, in effect using their own weapons against them to attack excessive masculine emotionality (*Rights of Woman* 73). Although Rennhak is right that Wollstonecraft's analysis of masculine sexuality and sensibility in the *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* mostly concerns the ways in which the oppression of women results in the unnatural encouragement and consequent perversion of male sexual desire, I believe that these two texts also offer a subtle consideration of a *positive* form of masculine sexuality, one which is vital to her egalitarian sexual politics. While Wollstonecraft's analysis of masculine sensibility and sexuality necessarily plays a minor role compared to her analysis of feminine sensibility and sexuality in the *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman*, an understanding of her engagement with masculine desire is absolutely crucial for comprehending her vision of a just society founded upon gender equality.

Specifically, many moments in *Rights of Woman* gesture towards a socially oriented and benevolent type of masculine sensibility that concerns itself with aesthetic production rather than with heterosexual reproduction. Wollstonecraft embodies this type of socially useful masculine sensibility in the character of Maria's uncle in *Wrongs of Woman*. Although the novel ostensibly represents this character as heterosexual, Maria's uncle exhibits gender and sexual behaviors that differ both from those associated with eighteenth century concepts of masculine sentimentality as well as male reproductive sexuality. These behaviors are positively valued in the novel because they allow

for the sublimation of reproductive energies into a didactically useful form of masculine sensibility. Furthermore, Maria characterizes her uncle's benevolent, non-reproductive masculinity as absolutely essential to the maintenance of society, insofar as he becomes the example *par excellence* of a socially useful sensibility that allows sympathy to be directed outward, unselfishly, towards others, as well as producing a new concept of marriage, one liable to divorce.

In my desire to recover this alternative form of masculine sexual subjectivity, I share Rennhak's assumption that Wollstonecraft's vision of gender equality required her to carve out new subject positions for men just as well as women. Although my aims differ markedly from Rennhak's focus on what she calls Wollstonecraft's "project of re-forming heterosexual males" as a necessary aspect of reforming heterosexual and heterosocial domestic economy (Rennhak 183), my attempt to describe Wollstonecraft's vision of a non-heterosexual, non-reproductive masculinity takes into account what Rennhak calls the "rhetorical and narrative energies which are often located on the discursive level of [Wollstonecraft's] writings rather than on the level of content" (Rennhak 184). More specifically, both Rennhak's reading heterosexual masculinity in *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* and my own "shift the focus [...] to the *process* of constructive such an identity which can be traced in Wollstonecraft's writings; and [...] many of the (mostly rather well known) rhetorical, argumentative, and narrative strategies which Wollstonecraft adopts in her *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* serve to carve out a new subject position for the new male ideal which she envisions, but can only vaguely conceptualize as yet" (Rennhak 184). Such a reading of *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* allows one to recognize in Wollstonecraft's project a theory of the political importance of non-reproductive sexual identities within an egalitarian society and also, I believe, provides the starting point for an analysis of a particular genealogical branch in the history of sexuality in the figure of the "benevolent uncle," a literary type continued to be a vital figure both for nineteenth-century literature and within the history of sexuality.[2]

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Aesthetic Masculinity

Chapter four of *Rights of Woman*, entitled "Observations of the State of Degradation to Which Woman is Reduced by Various Causes," contains Wollstonecraft's most negative critique of female sexuality and romantic "passion" between men and women. As she states,

> Love, considered as an animal appetite, cannot long feed on itself without expiring. And this extinction in its own flame, may be termed the violent death of love. But the wife who has been thus rendered licentious, will probably endeavour to fill the void left by her husband's attention. (*Rights of Woman* 96)

This condemnation of romantic passion extends into her discussion of masculine behavior as it operates within the codes of "sensibility." It is in this chapter that Wollstonecraft most emphatically declares that sentimentality, insofar as it encourages behaviors typically associated with women, is detrimental to the characters of both genders, emphasizing emotionality for its own sake at the expense of rationality. As a result, both men and women lose the ability to develop socially useful (i.e. "masculine") virtues.

She provides evidence of this by making a comparison between the character traits of the wealthy of both genders and of all women generally, providing a quote from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

> 'To be observed, to be attended, and to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which they see.' True! my male readers will probably exclaim; but let them, before they draw any conclusions, recollect that this was not written originally as descriptive of women, but of the rich. (Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 79)

On the surface, Wollstonecraft makes a rhetorical move common to eighteenth-century social commentary, criticizing upper-class men by ascribing to them traditionally feminine character traits, hearkening back to the parody of upper-class masculinity that could be found earlier in the century in the figure of the "fop."[3] However, she makes

this point by deliberately misleading the interpretive abilities of her readers. By quoting a passage from Adam Smith out of context in order to show there is no distinguishable difference between the characters of the rich and the characters of women in either their behaviors or in the verbal description of those behaviors, she demonstrates that one can no longer be assured that a particular behavior or that a particular phrase can be unequivocally associated with a particular sex. In effect, Wollstonecraft exposes multiple intertwined ideological operations: she shows that rich men display character qualities traditionally associated with women, and that those negative qualities associated with femininity are not essentially determined by the biological sex of women *per se*. She also shows that the culture no longer has a language adequate to differentiate between the genders when "sentimentality" becomes a universal ideal, no language rigorous enough to articulate an essential difference between masculine and feminine sensibilities.

Taking into account contemporary theorizations of gender, one could use Judith Butler's well-known concept of the "performativity" of gender in order to suggest that Wollstonecraft's argument predicts Butler's insight that gender characteristics are themselves no more than an effect of social practices such as language itself. The passage quoted above could be marshaled as evidence for Wollstonecraft's position that there are no innate gender differences because, as Butler argues, gender is the "performance" of an ideological script rather than the manifestation of some biologically determined, "essential" quality of the subject. However, I hesitate to ascribe to Wollstonecraft a theory that, given the intellectual climate of the day, would have been unthinkable or unsayable. As the rest of this essay demonstrates, Wollstonecraft believed that if language could not clearly and definitively express the differences between the genders, there was something fundamentally *wrong* with gender behaviors themselves that must be corrected. Here, Wollstonecraft gestures towards the double bind of her own project as she attempts to argue against current ideologies of gender without having recourse to a descriptive language that can express a reliable distinction between masculine and feminine behaviors.

Wollstonecraft associates this lack of linguistic rigor with the social preconditions that cause noblemen and women to engage in similar behaviors. Wollstonecraft argues that since "excepting warriors, no great men of any denomination have ever appeared

amongst the nobility, may it not be fairly inferred that their local situation swallowed up the man, and produced a character similar to that of women, who are *localized* – if I may be allowed the word – by the rank they are placed in by *courtesy*?" (*Rights of Woman* 79-80). Wollstonecraft shows the extent to which upper-class individuals, whatever their innate potential for being morally, ethically, or politically "great" might be, have that potential stifled and destroyed by the excessive deference shown to them in a society that values rank above merit. Similarly, the extent to which society encourages women to be emotional, irrational, and full of "sensibility" destroys their capacity to achieve moral excellence and virtue. However, the origin of this negative behavior ultimately lies outside of the subject, located in the operations of society's "courtesy" towards the individual, quite apart from any innate or inborn quality residing in the subject. Deference and gallantry, as it is impressed upon the subject by forces located outside of the individual, effectually dictate the ways in which both the rich and women can express themselves in society. To describe this operation, Wollstonecraft feels compelled to resort to the uncommon word "localized" in order to express how the individual loses his or her ability to act morally as the result of his or her entrapment by behaviors that seem, on the surface, to be mere social "courtesy." Her self-awareness that she is operating at the limits of language compels her to coin neologisms in order to write against the dense and complex apparatus of social control embedded in the language of gallantry in such words as "courtesy." Part of Wollstonecraft's project is a struggle to expand the discourse of gender in order to find a language adequate to describe the social and political operations of gender apart from the preexisting rhetoric of sentimentality and chivalry.

As Wollstonecraft attempts to create a new rhetoric to describe the formation of individual character through the intertwined operations of social practice and gender behavior, the descriptive terminology she uses to describe the detrimental effects of sensibility on the characters of both sexes effectually inaugurates a new way of talking and thinking about masculinity:

> In short, women in general, as well as the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization, and missed the usual fruit. It is not necessary for me always to

> premise, that I speak of the condition of the whole sex, leaving exceptions out of the question. Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling. (*Rights of Woman* 82-83)

Though the analysis in this passage appears particularly concerned with women (as implied by "the condition of the whole sex"), Wollstonecraft reminds her readers at the beginning of the paragraph that she addresses herself to all women and to aristocratic men, insofar as their behavior has made it possible for both those groups to be described and addressed with the same descriptive terminology. Significantly, this passage uses vividly sensual language to describe the effect sensibility has on the human body. She speaks of "inflamed senses," and individuals who become "prey" to their emotions, thereby invoking an innate animalistic and bodily sexuality. She focuses on sensibility's ability to make one feel "blown about by every momentary gust of feeling," without self-control, one's movements completely directed by outside forces. This language invokes the image of the vulnerable and violated physical body as a metaphor for the individual held under the thrall of sentimentality and, by extension, serves as a model for the way sensibility works to maintain political tyranny.

This wind-blown body of sensibility has no control over itself due to an excess of passions which Wollstonecraft locates outside of the body, indicating her belief that the root cause of this emotional excess lies in the encouragement given it by social pressures channeled through the concept of "courtesy." Wollstonecraft's rhetoric in this passage, through its prosopopoeic description of the "senses" that "prey" and the "sensibility" that "blows," bears a strong resemblance to the description of the passions by other eighteenth century writers, such as David Hume and Charlotte Smith. According to Adela Pinch, Hume describes the "passions" as having their origins in the "sympathy" that directs itself either toward another person or the representation of another person:

> Sympathy is most forthcoming when the object in question seems most oblivious, when the feelings in question are the imaginary feelings that we – or a narrator – attribute to the

> object. […] This speculation […] consists of sympathetically attributing feeling to a figure to whom we have special access, a figure who is unaware of our sympathy. The lesson about the relationship between persons and passions in the *Treatise* is that feeling may always be vicarious, something we generate in attributing to another figure. (43-4)

Similarly, the poetry of Charlotte Smith (Wollstonecraft's contemporary) calls into question the concept of "authentic emotions" that derive from personal experience and precede the act of writing. Smith, who characteristically cites "conventional" phrases from other poets in order to express her "personal" emotions, calls into question the late eighteenth-century assumption that "sentimental verse is naturally or inevitably a women's genre" by demonstrating that "it is so only by making the feelings she expresses not her own" (Pinch 64). Similarly, Wollstonecraft's description of the "senses" and "sensibility" as forces located outside of the self that nevertheless double back upon the "wind blown" body of sensibility allows her to call into question the connection between sensibility and the female body. By putting women and aristocratic men together in the same category, Wollstonecraft inaugurates a language that puts into the radical political discourse around "negative" sensibility the image of both the violated female body and, equally importantly, the violated *male* body that is emotionally and politically at the mercy of outside forces.

This image of the passive and violable male body occurs again when Wollstonecraft explicitly calls attention to the specifically political implications of emphasizing sensibility at the expense of consistently rational behavior. She states,

> Men and women, should not have their sensations heightened in the hot bed of luxurious indolence, at the expense of their understanding; for, unless there be a ballast of understanding, they will never become either virtuous or free: an aristocracy, founded on property or sterling talents, will ever sweep before it the alternately timid and ferocious slaves of feeling. (*Rights of Woman* 91-92)

Directing attention to the connection between sensibility and sexual excess ("the hot bed of luxurious indolence"), and the necessary

political implications of sensibility (turning men and women into "slaves of feeling" at the mercy of an "aristocracy" of either propertied or monetary wealth), Wollstonecraft calls attention to the anti-democratic implications of sensibility's uniting of the physical body with the political body. Individuals can never guarantee their own liberty against the powerful forces of a genealogical or intellectual ruling class as long as their subjectivity is fundamentally tied to the inconstant and inconsistent affectivity of bodily sensations. While Wollstonecraft implies that the rational, disembodied intellect provides a strong and stable basis for the assertion of one's political liberties, the emotional equivocation of those who are "alternately timid or ferocious" leads to political ineffectuality as one is "swept up," unresisting, by "an aristocracy, founded on either property or sterling talents." Wollstonecraft emphasizes the importance for women and, more significantly given the rhetoric of contemporary political discourse, for *men* to place rational limits upon the demands of their bodies in a bid to guarantee political liberty.

One could argue that Wollstonecraft's association of the concepts of political tyranny and the inconstancy of sensibility simply provides further evidence of an excessive and pervasive abhorrence of the material body in favor of disembodied rationality. As Claudia Johnson states, "[b]ecause Wollstonecraft is confessedly ill at ease with the body, she transforms it from a source of revolting brutishness to the foundation of heroic excellence of which men and women can both partake in kind, if not in degree. In *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft offers only one way of disembruting the bodies of men and women: subjecting both to the disciplinary regime of domestic, specifically parental heterosexuality" (42). However, the very fact that she chooses to introduce the body into her discourse suggests that, whatever her personal feelings might be, she understands the importance of offering an image of the politically progressive male body in order to provide an alternative to Burke's invocation of "the defects of our naked shivering nature" (Burke 77). Though Johnson maintains that the only alternative Wollstonecraft offers is the (male and female) body contained within the limits of monogamous heterosexual reproduction, Wollstonecraft's text also indirectly references another socially acceptable type of masculine body: that of the aesthetically productive and creative man of artistic sensibilities.

While it is true that Wollstonecraft focuses her attention on extolling the political and social virtues of the family, she also

recognizes that certain men do not or cannot direct their energies towards heterosexual reproduction. She hints at this when she describes how men encourage the development of the detrimental type of sensibility in women:

> "The power of the woman," says some author, "is her sensibility"; and men, not aware of the consequence, do all they can to make this power swallow up every other. Those who constantly employ their sensibility will have most; for example, poets, painters, and composers. Yet, when the sensibility is thus increased at the expense of reason, and even the imagination, why do philosophical men complain of their fickleness? The sexual attention of man particularly acts on female sensibility, and this sympathy has been exercised from youth up. (*Rights of Woman* 87)

In this somewhat convoluted paragraph, Wollstonecraft describes the schematics of the relationship between untamed heterosexual desire and sensibility as operating in this way: men direct their "sexual attention" towards women who have been trained from birth to direct nearly (if not all) of their energies to arousing and maintaining the carnal interests of men. Because women's desire to arouse has not been tempered by "rationality," the sexual attentions of men will let loose the full force of women's irrational sexual/bodily desires, which consequently makes them inconstant and "fickle." Wollstonecraft's use of the phrase "swallow up" to describe the effect of unleashed sexuality on women is not only sexually suggestive, but also subtly accesses the concepts provided by theories of the "sublime" in the contemporary eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse.

Many critics have identified the concept of "the sublime," described by Burke as a species of "terror" rendered "delightful" through a process of aestheticization that nullifies its actual potential danger as providing a rhetoric to express repressed female sexuality by displacing it onto a dramatic landscape that "swallows up" rationality and individual subjectivity.[4] Wollstonecraft reinforces this connection between female sexuality and aesthetics by making an explicit comparison between women and "poets, painters and composers" (all of whom, the footnote clarifies, are men), who take their own "sensibility" and channel it through the "imagination" to

create works of art. Rather than possessing the "rationality" associated with "philosophical men" and implicitly allied with monogamous parental heterosexuality, or the personally detrimental irrationality associated with women, these artistic men harness their "sensibility," their highly attuned bodily affectivity and sexuality (a sexuality, the passage implies, that could even be aroused by male sexual attention) in the service of creating art – thus providing evidence of a more than contingent relationship between "the sublime" and "sublimation." In terms of her literary and artistic contemporaries, Wollstonecraft would have found real-life models for this type of masculinity in her publisher and patron, Joseph Johnson, the bachelor-poet William Cowper, and notably "queer" Gothic novelists such as Horace Walpole and William Beckford, who famously rely on concepts of masculine sublimity in their representations of female subjectivity in their works.[5]

Wollstonecraft's footnote to the above quoted passage, providing evidence of her fixation on the position of the artistically creative man within her conceptual framework of sexuality, focuses on the way aesthetic production can replace heterosexual reproduction as a means of disciplining the irrational demands of the body. Coming right after Wollstonecraft's reference to "poets, painters, and composers," the footnote reads: "Men of these descriptions pour sensibility into their compositions, to amalgamate the gross materials; and, molding them with passion, give to the inert body a soul; but, in woman's imagination, love alone concentrates these ethereal beams" (*Rights of Woman* 87). The sensual language Wollstonecraft ascribes to these men, the "passion" with which they use their body to "mold" the "gross materials" of the physical world, implies a redirection of the mental and physical energies of sexualities towards the creation of art. These men, instead of uniting with women to create a child, "amalgamate" elements (paint, sound, or language) in order to "give the inert body a soul." The "sensibility" these men "pour" into their work is a type of non-material seminal fluid, possessing the ability to give a "soul" to otherwise inanimate objects and abstract concepts. Aesthetically productive males, through the use of their aesthetically directed "imagination," temper the potentially destructive irrationality of their sensibility towards producing works of art. Though Wollstonecraft aligns these artistic men with women in terms of their excessive, non-rational emotional responsiveness to the phenomenal world and implicitly opposes them to the non-artistic rational men

who use reason to channel their energies towards the heterosexual family and direct action in the field of politics, they offer a socially viable third way for men to actualize their sensual energies outside of the matrix of reproductive heterosexuality.

The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria and the Parent of the Mind

Wollstonecraft's notion of a masculinity that exists outside a heterosexual framework is definitely beside the main thrust of her argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the discussion confined mostly to margins, digressions, and asides in the main text. As Andrew Elfenbein states, in his study of Wollstonecraft's changing attitude towards the eighteenth century discourse of the "genius" and its ability to "unsettle […] obviously gendered language" and notions of sexuality, *Rights of Woman* had "to be about ordinary women and ordinary love. Much as she admires the genius's gender-bending status and sexual freedom, she insists on clearly marked gender roles for men and women […] because she hopes that doing so will prevent the wrong kinds of gender-crossing and sexuality that supposedly come from moral corruption" (Elfenbein, "Sexuality" 240). However, in *Wrongs of Woman*, Elfenbein finds Maria's marked displays of "sensibility" evidence of the fact that in this novel Wollstonecraft found a "liberation from constrained heterosexual relations," by finding "a utopian sexual possibility, an eroticism that is genuine but not implicated in the impossible tangles of human relations," one that focuses upon an "erotically fulfilling fantasy of a transfigured relationship to nature" channeled through the concept of "genius" (Elfenbein, "Sexuality" 241-3). While Elfenbein focuses on the character of Maria herself in order to discuss the way the concept of "genius" influences her views of women's sexuality, I want to focus on the extent to which the text also brings to the foreground Wollstonecraft's complex consideration of alternative masculine identities.

In many ways, *Wrongs of Woman* dramatizes the conclusions of *Rights of Woman* by representing the various violations brought upon the middle-class Maria and her working class attendant and ally Jemima by a society that systematically produces and encourages the oppression of women.[6] Yet, as Rennhak so compellingly argues,

Wollstonecraft's characterization of Darnford (Maria's love and would-be rescuer) also represents an honest, if ultimately problematic attempt to "include the male protagonist in her construction of a new system of interdependent sex and gender identities" (Rennhak 192). I would assert that Wollstonecraft also includes in this new system another positive male role model in the form of Maria's benevolent uncle.[7] This character represents the paragon of what Wollstonecraft sees as a "positive" sensibility, useful because it directs one's sympathetic impulses out towards the social world. As such, my reading of *Wrongs of Woman* takes part in the revision of Foucault's famous account of "the history of sexuality" suggested by Paul Kelleher. He argues that "Fielding's novel not only accommodates the seemingly unruly forces of lust, but also rearticulates this passion as constitutive of moral feeling and social order," and places his argument in dialogue with the work of political economist Albert O. Hirschman in order to suggest that there might be a way to think beyond Michel Foucault's famous "repressive hypothesis." Using the vocabulary provided by Hirschman, Kelleher argues that it might be possible that modernity's rationalization of sexuality, as suggested by Foucault, was not only accomplished by various discourses that attempted to regulate or "discipline" sexual behaviors, but also by discourses that attempted to positively "harness" the energies of sexuality for socially useful purposes (Kelleher 165-92). As Kelleher argues, *Tom Jones* harnesses male heterosexual desire for the purpose of social benevolence at the expense of equating virtue itself with female sexual chastity, which results in the repression of women's sexual desires. So too Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Woman* attempts to dislodge this association between virtue and male heterosexual passion. Because Wollstonecraft views heteroerotic passion as always already implicated in the reproduction of sexual inequality for women, her envisioning of a version of masculine behavior focused on socially-oriented benevolence necessarily relocates the foundation of that "glorious lust of doing good" someplace other than in male heterosexual passion (Fielding 31).

This is why Maria's uncle, the man who serves as Maria's role model for virtue and moral excellence, does not exhibit traditional masculine heterosexual behaviors. Maria, writing a letter to her newborn daughter from the insane asylum where her oppressive and domineering husband has imprisoned her, tells the story of his traumatic attempt at heterosexual courtship and marriage with "a

young lady of great beauty and large fortune" that he had neither the wealth nor social connections to marry, and his consequentially taking up the "offer of a nobleman to accompany him to India, as his confidential secretary" in order to secure enough money to marry his beloved (*Wrongs of Woman* 295). Already, without necessarily having to enquire into what the duties of a "confidential secretary" might specifically entail, one sees that the alternative Maria's uncle is forced to seek after being prevented from acquiring his initial heterosexual object choice is to place himself under the control of a socially and financially superior male. The exigencies of a social structure that values wealth and rank more than character has forced Maria's uncle into a position where he must prostitute himself (mentally if not necessarily sexually) to a man who serves as the social, cultural, and political agent for the demands of empire. He occupies an implicitly feminized role as "personal secretary" and passive supporter of a British colonial project that is gendered male, effectively occupying an "equivocal" place in British society left unaccounted for by existing gender codes.

Additionally, the novel represents the "femininity" of Maria's uncle not only as an effect of his equivocal social position but also as manifesting itself through the particular makeup of his psychological and sexual identity. Maria's uncle begins his romantic life as one under the sway of the irrational, negative, unproductive type of "romantic" sensibility. Maria narrates, "'A correspondence was regularly kept up with the object of his affection; and the intricacies of business, peculiarly wearisome to a man of a romantic turn of mind, contributed, with a forced absence, to increase his attachment. Every other passion was lost in this master-one, and served only to swell the torrent'" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 295). This passage, ascribing to Maria's uncle a "romantic turn of mind," describes him in a way similar to the representation of feminine sensibility in *Rights of Woman*. Not sufficiently mentally disciplined to invest himself in the "intricacies of business," Maria's uncle lacks the strict rationality that is the domain of the domesticated, socially and sexually productive heterosexual male. He is instead ruled by his "master passion" at the expense of all other mental activities, one which "swells the torrent" of his desire in the same way that sexual attention causes women to be "swallowed up" by their excessive sensibility. However, this excess of sentimentality cannot be entirely associated with Wollstonecraft's

concept of feminine sensibility, since Maria's uncle's "passion" is not encouraged by the sexual attention of another, but rather by the "absence" of the heterosexual love object. His "passion" is increased by the act of writing letters to his absent beloved, as he displaces his sexual energy away from the actual person and onto the process of writing itself, insofar as it enables the creation of an idealized mental construction of the love object. Similar to those creative men who "pour" their sensibilities into "compositions," Maria's uncle creates and sustains his sexual passion through the written composition of letters.[8]

That Maria's uncle's sexual "passion" primarily manifests itself through his written communication complicates Maria's presentation of him as uncomplicatedly heterosexual, in virtue of the fact that his letters are not directly sent to his female beloved. Maria explains: "'While he basked in the warm sunshine of love, friendship also promised to shed its dewy freshness; for a friend, whom he loved next to his mistress, was the confident, who forwarded the letters from one to the other, to elude the observation of prying relations'" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 295). The image of the "dewy freshness" of "friendship," serving as the natural complement to the "warm sunshine" of love, suggests that Maria's uncle's sexual feelings are not entirely concerned with the heterosexual love object. Maria's uncle shows this "friend, whom he loved next to his mistress," an affection that appears different in degree rather than kind from the love directed toward his mistress. As a conduit who receives the love letters before the ostensible heterosexual love object, the letters of Maria's uncle could be as much meant for him as they are for her, especially insofar as they are really addressed to an abstract mental ideal that can mentally amalgamate the characteristics of the two recipients into the single metaphorical image of a warm, dewy day. The suggestiveness of this description is further underlined in the description of the traumatic event that effectually excluded her uncle from heterosexuality: "My uncle realized, by good luck, rather than management, a handsome fortune; and returning on the wings of love, lost in the most enchanting reveries, to England, to share it with his mistress and his friend, he found them – united" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 295). Continuing to emphasize his lack of masculine rational business skills by calling attention to the "luck" rather than "management" that got him his fortune, in addition to the irrational exuberance of his "reveries" on the "wings of love," Maria's

uncle returns to England more "feminine" than ever as he attempts to enter into marital heterosexuality. However, he learns that his love letters have actually succeeded in bringing their two recipients together into a heterosexual union. Not only have they taken his abstract ideal and turned it into concrete reality, they have effected his fantasy combination of the lover and the friend into a single unit from which he is definitively excluded, bringing about the collapse of what has been called the homosocial "erotic triangle." This structure of desire, famously proposed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and derived from Renè Girard's theory of "mimetic desire," describes the circuit of erotic energy that exists where two men vie for the same woman, thereby allowing the men to channel their potentially homoerotic desires through the woman, who is forced to be the mediator of the desire that exists "between men."

As a result of the destruction of the precarious structure of this erotic triangle, the heterosexual union between "the mistress" and "the friend" destroys the precarious structure of Maria's uncle's sexuality, consequently leading him to reject heterosexuality before it rejects him again: "Declaring an intention never to marry, his relations were ever clustering about him, paying the grossest adulation to a man, who, disgusted with mankind, received them with scorn, or bitter sarcasms" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 296). Because the psychological structure of affection that allowed him to maintain an ostensible heterosexual orientation in the face of his social feminization is no longer tenable, Maria's uncle develops "disgust" towards the society of "mankind" whose promotion of heterosexual marriage excludes him from the realization of his sexuality. Maria's uncle is, in Rennhak's words, another character who calls attention to "the formal and structural aspects [that shed] light on the process of identity construction and the re-organization of the British sex-gender system," and is, along with Maria, Jemima, and Darnford, another character who "suffer[s] under and [is] prepared to challenge the dominant sex-gender ideology" (Rennhak 195).

Maria's uncle's abjuration of the social demand for heterosexual marriage brings out his latent aesthetic productivity, hinted at by the "passion" created by and maintained through his writing of letters to his beloved, yet transformed into an impulse for creating for himself a unique personal identity. Borrowing from the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Elfenbein argues in his study *Romantic Genius* that

the growth of the middle class in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries saw the development of the "'cult and culture of the 'person"' which represented "a transformation of the language of genius so that it applies less to creators of artistic works than to creators of a personal lifestyle. […] Bourgeois society places on every individual who desires distinction the responsibility to arrange his or her life so as to achieve an 'exclusive, unique, and original…personal opinion'" which, for Elfenbein, represents the transformation of "the eighteenth-century demand for originality in art" into the "nineteenth-century demand for originality in living" (Elfenbein, *Romantic* 67).

Thus, as the "sensibility" that Maria's uncle "poured" into his epistolary compositions was ostensibly directed towards a heterosexual love object rather than in the service of "giving the inert body a soul" through the creation of art, so Maria's uncle's rejection of marriage encourages him to redirect his latent aesthetic energies towards the self-dramatization of an eccentric personality for the sake of educating Maria:

> He had a forcible manner of speaking, rendered more so by a certain impressive wildness of look and gesture, calculated to engage the attention of a young and ardent mind. It is not then surprising that I quickly adopted his opinions in preference, and reverenced him as one of a superior order of beings. He inculcated, with great warmth, self-respect, and a lofty consciousness of acting right, independent of the censure or applause of the world; nay, he almost taught me to brave, and even despise its censure, when convinced of the rectitude of my own intentions. (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 296)

The character of Maria's uncle, his "forcible manner of speaking," and "wildness of look and gesture," are not simply organic manifestations of personality but are rather a "calculated" self-fashioning for Maria's benefit as he turns his personality and his body into a didactic tool. This causes Maria to think of him as "one of a superior order of beings," existing in a realm above gender and the social demands for gender-appropriate behavior. This is why, despite being a man, he can serve as a role model for Maria by exhibiting character traits such as "warmth," "self-respect," "a lofty consciousness of acting right," and "bravery," that are not specifically associated with the gender codes of either heterosexual masculinity or femininity as such. Maria's uncle

transforms his body into an effectively genderless didactic tool by redirecting his sexual energy into a dramatic self-presentation that Maria describes in specifically aesthetic terms: "Endeavoring to prove to me that nothing which deserved the name of love or friendship, existed in the world, he drew such animated pictures of his own feelings, rendered permanent by disappointment, as imprinted the sentiments strongly on my heart, and animated my imagination" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 296). Maria's uncle channels the bitterness of his unrealizable sexual desire into an aesthetically instructive self presentation consisting of "drawing animated pictures of his own feelings" with such force as to "imprint sentiments strong on [the] heart" and "animate [the] imagination" of his intended audience in a way similar to the "composers" in *Rights of Woman* who "amalgamate the gross materials" in order to "give the inert body a soul."

According to Elfenbein, late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century British society believed that this sort of self-dramatizing personal originality properly manifested itself in the privacy of the domestic sphere, in distinction to a public sphere where the demands of capitalism and commercial exchange demanded an essential uniformity of behavior among men. However, for middle class men, this need for the individual to be "original" in the private sphere always carried with it the suspicion of possessing the "wrong kind of specialness" – that is, having a secret, sexually "deviant," non-heterosexual private life (Elfenbein, *Romantic* 64). However, because Maria's uncle channels his energies into creating an original persona that will teach Maria to manifest a socially oriented type of virtue, he becomes not only an example of non-heterosexual masculinity that nevertheless serves a socially useful function, but becomes entirely essential to the maintenance of society, insofar as he becomes the example *par excellence* of a necessary and positively-valued sensibility that directs sympathy outward, unselfishly, towards other people. Maria, giving advice to her daughter in what could be seen as the ultimate "thesis" of her letter, writes:

> "Your improvement, my dearest girl, being ever present to me while I write, I note these feelings, because women, more accustomed to observe manners than actions, are too much alive to ridicule. So much so, that their boasted sensibility is

> often stifled by false delicacy. True sensibility, the sensibility which is the auxiliary of virtue, and the soul of genius, is in society so occupied with the feelings of others, as scarcely to regard its own sensations. With what reverence have I looked up at my uncle, the dear parent of my mind! when I have seen the sense of his own sufferings, of mind and body, absorbed in a desire to comfort those, whose misfortunes where comparatively trivial. He would have been ashamed of being as indulgent to himself, as he was to others." (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 336)

When one shifts one's attention away from "manners" and "false delicacy" and towards "the feelings of others," sensibility becomes "the auxiliary of virtue" as it allows one to be sympathetic towards the flaws and misfortunes of others while maintaining rigorously high standards of conduct for oneself. As such, "sensibility" in this case functions as a method for applying the rigors of rationally based "virtue" to a social world that requires the exercise of interpersonal "sympathy" in order to continue functioning. Significantly, this type of "sensibility" is neither associated with literature nor the aesthetic as such, and also is not gendered, as Maria sees her uncle as the exemplar of positive sensibility. However, this type of "sensibility" is only displayed by Maria's uncle after he is excluded from heterosexual reproduction – he can only be an effective "parent of the mind" when he no longer has the potential to be an actual parent –only when he has acceded to the role of what Maria calls her "more than father" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 319).

This interpersonal sympathy also underlies what is perhaps Maria's uncle's most radical position in the novel – his advocacy of divorce. Maria's uncle states that a woman need not conceive of marriage as "indissoluble […] in case her husband merits neither her love, nor esteem" (Wollstonecraft, *Wrongs of Woman* 320). Calling marriage without love or esteem an "abjectness of condition, the enduring of which no concurrance of circumstance can ever make a duty in the sight of God or just men," Maria's uncle's advocacy of divorce ultimately rests upon his belief that the dissolution of marriage is valid when that marriage harms the dignity of women by infringing upon their intellectual freedom. As he says, speaking of the laws of separation, men maintain their honor by merely financially supporting their estranged wives, while a woman "is despised and shunned, for

asserting the independence of mind distinctive to a rational being, and spurning at slavery" (*Wrongs of Woman* 320). It is ultimately Maria's uncle's own feelings of rational benevolence for the dignity of women that prompts him to advocate for divorce as a legal means to dissolve women from the "slavery" entailed by an affectionless marriage. Additionally, Maria's uncle's advocacy for the reformation of divorce laws carries with it the implication that men will be freed from society's demand for "compulsory heterosexuality," giving them an honorable way of extricating themselves from marriage and thereby granting them the potential freedom to pursue relationships which fall outside the domain of monogamous, reproductive heterosexuality.[9]

This figure of the "benevolent uncle," who serves as an exemplar of benevolence through his abjuration of marriage and heterosexual reproduction, not only appears in the writings of Wollstonecraft, but also in the work of her contemporary, Elizabeth Inchbald. One of the most popular women writers of the late eighteenth century, Inchbald was part of Wollstonecraft's social circle, and close friends with William Godwin who, after unsuccessfully proposing marriage to Inchbald, eventually became the husband of Mary Wollstonecraft.[10] Although the uncle-figure in her plays does not stand as the paradigmatic example of moral virtue to the extent he does in Wollstonecraft's novel, plays such as *I'll Tell You What* (1786), *The Child of Nature* (1788), and *To Marry or Not to Marry* (1805) make use of the unmarried uncle as a minor figure who kindly manipulates and controls the machinations of the courtships of his nieces and nephews in order to bring the play to its properly comedic conclusion. The existence of the benevolent bachelor uncle in Inchbald's work not only suggests that this figure was a character type familiar to members of Wollstonecraft's social set, but also that the figure of the benevolent bachelor uncle was not unique to Wollstonecraft's particular political vision alone. Although no other writer analyzes the specific political importance of non-heterosexual masculinity to the extent Wollstonecraft does in *Wrongs of Woman*, his appearance in Inchbald's plays indicates that the kindly, unmarried uncle was becoming crystallized as a general character type at the end of the eighteenth century, one which would continue throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-century.

The figure of the benevolent unmarried uncle lives on in the figure of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has termed "the avunculate." In her

analysis of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*, Sedgwick discusses the ways in which aunts and uncles, whose "intimate access to children needn't depend on their own pairings or procreation" have the potential to occupy an important role in the cultural politics of the family, providing children with "the possibility of alternate life trajectories" including "nonconforming or nonreproductive sexualities" (Sedgwick, "Avunculate" 63) Yet while Sedgwick historicizes her account of the figure of the uncle in Wilde's late-Victorian writing by turning to anthropological accounts of kinship networks in pre-capitalist societies, this study has contended that the origin of the figure of the "avunculate" lie much closer to home, within the gender and sexual politics of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Britain. Indeed, as Richard Sha has argued, advances made in the biological sciences and aesthetic philosophy made the Romantic period in Britain a time when art and sexuality, by sharing a common distrust of function, became sites where radically egalitarian national and familial relationships could be imagined. The avunculate, therefore, can be interpreted not so much a throwback to a pre-modern model of kinship that complicates modern notions of the nuclear family, but as a marker of Romantic-era feminism's at times ambivalent legacy within nineteenth-century literature, a figure for the subject's education and initiation into the cultural politics of gender.

Perhaps the most notable nineteenth century example is that of John Jarndyce in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852-53). Mr. Jarndyce, although not literally the uncle of first-person narrator Esther Summerson, is her older cousin and benefactor. Esther continually refers to him as her "guardian" (with all of that term's financial, emotional, and religious implications intended) and as an exemplar of benevolent behavior directed outward from the domestic sphere towards the larger social world, in contrast to the socially malevolent force of the High Court of Chancery. Although he reliably manifests irritation whenever he encounters selfish behavior in others (an excess of sensibility which he always ascribes to the "east wind" and which he confines to a room he calls "the Growlery"), he serves as Esther's model for virtuous behavior throughout the *Bildung* that is her portion of *Bleak House*'s narrative. Roughly halfway through the novel, Jarndyce proposes marriage to Esther after she is physically deformed by smallpox; she gratefully (if somewhat equivocally) accepts the proposal. However, by the end of the novel Jarndyce has released her from that engagement so that she may marry her true

love, Allan Woodcourt. As a wedding present, Jarndyce builds the couple an exact replica of Bleak House for her to manage because, as he states, he "would not have my Esther's bright example lost; I would not have a jot of my dear girl's virtues unobserved and unhonoured" (Dickens 914). In effect, Jarndyce releases Esther from her engagement when he realizes that she would have married him out of a sense of duty, regardless of her own personal preferences – thus, that she has fully learned the virtues of selflessness from his own example. The novel's supreme moment of selflessness, the moment when Esther finally becomes a model of virtue in her own right, comes explicitly as the result of Jarndyce's abjuration of marriage. *Bleak House*, following *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, constructs an exemplar of masculine behavior who constructs himself as one who gains virtue through his rejection of heterosexual reproduction, casting himself as a moral "parent of the mind" rather than the sexually reproductive parent of the body.

Although this particular representation of avuncular non-normative masculinity in the figure of the benevolent uncle is decidedly ambivalent in its gender politics – one could easily interpret Esther's plot as the disciplinary narrative her initiation into self-abjuring ideal of Victorian femininity – I do not believe it is accurate to call such a representation "homophobic." On the contrary, rather than representing heterosexual reproduction as the *only* morally acceptable behavior in an egalitarian society, authors such as Wollstonecraft and Dickens emphasize the supreme importance of an aesthetically and/or didactically productive masculinity closely associated with the creative recuperation of stereotypically feminine behaviors for purposes that could be interpreted as socially beneficial, while remaining outside the matrix of reproductive marital heterosexuality. Indeed, an examination of the literary history of the benevolent uncle reveals an especially malleable figure that, rather than being allied to a specifically radical political program, had the potential to be used for a variety of cultural ends. Far from being monolithically opposed to non-heterosexually reproductive behaviors, therefore, Wollstonecraft can be seen to occupy a significant place within a literary genealogy that attempts to recognize, represent, and theorize the political and ethical importance of non-heterosexual identities.

NOTES

[1] This essay looks back to my article "'Parents of the Mind': Mary Wollstonecraft and the Aesthetics of Productive Masculinity," but branches out in new directions thanks to the insights of Prof. Katharina Rennhak, whose essay also appears in this volume. Parts of this essay have appeared in Friedman, "'Parents of the Mind': Mary Wollstonecraft and the Aesthetics of Productive Masculinity," *Studies in Romanticism* 48 (2009): 423-46.

[2] For background information on eighteenth century sexuality, I am especially indebted to Randolph Trumbach's *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*. Trumbach emphasizes the transition from the Restoration figure of the aristocratic bisexual libertine whose sexual license is authorized by his class prerogatives, to the development in the eighteenth century of the figure effeminate "molly" as the member of a "third sex." Because the men described in *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* are neither "mollies" nor "homosexuals" in the modern sense of the term, I hesitatingly use the inelegant term "non-reproductive" to describe men such as Maria's uncle. While I may be accused of being vague and non-specific in my use of the term, I know of no other accurate term to describe what I take to be a heretofore unnamed transitional figure in the history of sexuality.

[3] For a discussion of the sexual history of the "fop" as an early and mid-century figure whose effeminacy is not necessarily associated with sexual irregularity, see Haggerty's *Men In Love*.

[4] For a paradigmatic reading, see Holland and Sherman, "Gothic Possibilities."

[5] Although there is no concrete evidence that Joseph Johnson had romantic or sexual feelings towards other men, he remained a lifelong bachelor and was never known to have had romantic or sexual relationships with women. See Tyson's *Joseph Johnson* and Braithwaite's *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent*. Additionally, Frances Sherwood's representation of Johnson as unabashedly homosexual in *Rights of Woman*, her novelization of Wollstonecraft's life is, perhaps, telling. Also see Elfenbein's chapter on Cowper in *Romantic Genius* and Haggerty's *Men in Love* and *Queer Gothic*.

[6] For a reading of *Wrongs of Woman* that focuses on the relationship between Maria and Jemima as representing a new type of solidarity between women heretofore unseen in English literature, see Mellor's "Righting the Wrongs of Woman."

[7] For a reading of *Wrongs of Woman* that sees Maria's uncle as a perverse figure that corrupts Maria by teaching her the "degrading" form of sensibility that directly causes her downfall, see Daniel O'Quinn, "Trembling: Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and the Resistance to Literature." O'Quinn's reading, which focuses on the novel's intertextual rejection of contemporary sentimental novels, is indebted to Tillotama Rajan's reading of *Wrongs of Woman* as a radically ironic rereading of the work of William Godwin. Both O'Quinn and Rajan's readings depend upon an interpretation of *Wrongs of Woman* as pervasively ironic – h
a notion which I do not believe to be supportable within the context of the rest of Wollstonecraft's notably unironic *oeuvre*.

[8] Maria's uncle use of the act of writing to create an ideal love-object is similar to the development of Maria's passion for Darnford, which is sparked by their writing of marginal comments in books that circulate between them while they are imprisoned in the mental asylum. Maria's failure to realize the dangers of forming romantic attachments through the distorting medium of writing suggests that, contrary to O'Quinn's claim, Maria's troubles result from not taking her uncle's instructive example sufficiently to heart.

[9] For an extended definition and analysis of "compulsory heterosexuality" in the context of women's sexuality, see Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence."

[10] See St. Clair's *The Godwins and the Shelleys*.

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