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**MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION PEDAGOGY**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

In *Mary Wollstonecraft: Social Reproduction Pedagogy*, I offer a new perspective on the marxist-feminist attributes of early feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft. Focusing on the pedagogical aims of Wollstonecraft's writings across her lifetime, I respond to existing scholarship that has variously labelled Wollstonecraft as a radical, a liberal, or a conservative, respectively. I demonstrate that Wollstonecraft's concerns with futurity, education, gender, and economics reveal a preoccupation with what today might be called a nascent theory of social reproduction, a primary interest of contemporary marxist feminists. Wollstonecraft was particularly preoccupied with pedagogy as a tool for radical changes to social and economic inequities in eighteenth-century Britain. Through education, Wollstonecraft imagined a future in which men and women, the landed and the indigent, would have better claim to equity. By looking into Wollstonecraft's choices of genre and the revisions made to an array of writing projects, I show how Wollstonecraft's methods and aims suggest a marxist-feminist approach that has been largely unnoticed in the literature. I am also careful to examine how Wollstonecraft's emphases on concerns related to class and gender occluded any concern with race and disability, both areas that in Wollstonecraft's day became increasingly significant (and studied) in public culture.

In Chapter One, I introduce my premise that Wollstonecraft had a coherent theory of social reproduction that evolved throughout her lifetime, and which was guided by her interests in social and economic inequity. In Chapter Two, I consider Wollstonecraft's explicitly pedagogical writings and how her writing developed to incorporate more radical and experiential forms of pedagogy for children and their tutors, building upon the didactic traditions she inherited from the eighteenth century. Chapter Three moves into Wollstonecraft's two novels, which function as consciousness-raising documents about the material conditions of women, while still conforming to the aesthetic standards of the sentimental novel. Chapter Four considers Wollstonecraft's most famous works, including her vindications and the travelogue published at the end of her life, as a form of public pedagogy. This chapter argues that by playing off expectations of gender and genre, Wollstonecraft's philosophical arguments in favor of gender and social equity were generally well received by an elite male readership. I conclude by noting the legacy of Wollstonecraft's marxist-feminist theory of social reproduction as found both in the writing of her surviving family and in contemporary feminism.

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## Chapter One: Wollstonecraft and Social Reproduction

A landmark figure in the history of Western feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft has been consistently underestimated for her literary and philosophical contributions outside of feminist thought. Her work, to be clear, cannot be viewed beyond the conditions of her gender. Understandings of her writing can be enriched by a greater attention to the other forces and concerns of Wollstonecraft's time as well as an understanding of how gender impacted her outlook on education, the future, and capitalism. As the following pages of this project demonstrate, futurity, education, gender, and economics are all interlocking concerns throughout Wollstonecraft's career, indicative of and contributing to a nascent theory of social reproduction articulated in her writing. Through education, Wollstonecraft imagined a future in which men and women, the landed and the indigent, would have better claim to equity. Whether in her books for children and for educators, her novels for bourgeois women, or her philosophical tracts for male elites, there appears a latent concern for a new equity in her present day and in the emerging future. Her theory of social reproduction was not consistent throughout her lifetime but instead evolved over the course of her life, evincing an increasing maturity, an expanding education, and a growing consciousness of how social forces impacted the material conditions of the British eighteenth-century populace. Although much of her work remained unfinished and many of her ideas only went through one cycle of revision and reevaluation, Wollstonecraft's philosophy remains an enduring study in the theory and practice of instigating generational change, even if the character of some ideas she expressed can now be repudiated in our present day.

The overarching concept guiding this project—imbricating futurity, education, gender, and economics—is social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to the way society maintains itself through successive generations. In Karl Marx’s original articulation, social reproduction arose as a corollary to the fact that “a society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume.”<sup>1</sup> In order to ensure continued production and consumption under capitalism, capitalists needed workers to eat, sleep, and procreate, and profited in the bargain; workers sold their labor power to the capitalists in exchange for wages, and then paid those wages to capitalists for food and shelter.<sup>2</sup> In the twentieth century, greater attention and theorization of social reproduction theory can be seen in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Louis Althusser, as both articulated the structures of reproduction within the capitalist mode of production, focusing specifically on the role of education.<sup>3</sup> Althusser assigns educational apparatuses as the most influential sites of social reproduction because their political function is so muted: schools take children at their youngest and most “vulnerable” stages of development, instilling in them the “know-how” and ideology desired by the ruling class

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1. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Ernest Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes. 3 Volumes. Vol. 1 (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 711. Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett have distinguished Marx’s articulation as “societal reproduction” from the modern definitions of social reproduction as articulated by materialist-feminists. Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett, “Gender, Social Reproduction, and Women’s Self-Organization: Considering the US Welfare State,” *Gender & Society* 5, no. 3 (1991).

2. Marx, *Capital*, 711-724.

3. Pierre Bourdieu, “The School as a Conservative Force: Scholastic and Cultural Inequalities,” *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Eggleston, 32-46 (London: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974); Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2014).

to continue material production and social reproduction, naturalizing these roles and their functions.<sup>4</sup> The compulsory and authoritative aspects of schooling and education make them prime sites for reifying or undermining hegemony, something Wollstonecraft knew well from her days as a teacher and governess.

Contemporary interest in social reproduction theory has emerged largely through a growing body of work on what Lise Vogel has called “a coherent Marxist-feminist understanding of everyday life under capitalism.”<sup>5</sup> According to Johanna Brenner, “Marxists have their attention almost entirely on the production of things. Marxist feminists have broadened this notion of necessary labor to include the care and nurturing of people.”<sup>6</sup> From Vogel’s foundational work, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (1983),<sup>7</sup> to a recent collection edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (2017),<sup>8</sup> materialist-feminists have articulated a robust theory of social reproduction. As a methodology, social reproduction theory analyzes the relationship between capital and other social relations. Naturally, this methodology shares characteristics of Patricia Hill

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4. Louis Althusser, “Ideology,” 232-272, esp. 251.

5. Lise Vogel, Foreword, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, x-xii (London: Pluto Press, 2017), x.

6. Johanna Brenner, *Women and the Politics of Class* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 2.

7. Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

8. Tithi Bhattacharya, ed. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. London: Pluto Press, 2017.

Collins' articulation of matrices of domination, which acknowledges a "single, historically created system" responsible for "race, gender, and class oppression."<sup>9</sup>

Social reproduction theory accounts for and explains how oppression operates beyond economic processes under capitalism. Social reproduction also refers to the specific instantiations of worker reproduction under capitalism: according to Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman, "the totality of those activities required to create, maintain, and restore the commodity of labor power."<sup>10</sup> These activities include biological reproduction, education, and the care of children, older adults, and ill or disabled people, among many other types of reproductive labor. According to Nancy Fraser the work of social reproduction has been feminized, "cast as women's work ... and often performed without pay," even though capitalism and all human society depends upon social reproduction.<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, Wollstonecraft was aware of the devaluation of social reproductive labor, having worked in education as a teacher and governess, having cared for ill parents and sisters, and having been a mother and wife.

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9. The major distinction between an analysis of the matrix of domination and of social reproduction is that the latter explicitly foregrounds gender and class, in much the same way Wollstonecraft does throughout her writing life. Hence, my decision use social reproduction theory as my guiding methodology in this project. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 225.

10. Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman, "Without Reserves," *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. by Tithi Bhattacharya, 37-67 (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 39.

11. Nancy Fraser, "Crisis of Care? On the Social Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism," *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, 21-36 (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 21.



*Mary Wollstonecraft: Social Reproduction Pedagogy* demonstrates how Wollstonecraft's writing career articulates social reproduction theory as a methodology, in addition to identifying specific instantiations of gender and class oppression. As a methodology, Wollstonecraft's commitment to education and alternative futurities is crucial to her articulation of social reproduction. Commenting on the role of childhood and education under capitalism, Susan Ferguson argues that "because the social reproduction of labor does not take place under the direct control of capital and because children provide a window onto an *alternative way of being*," socially reproductive work has the potential undermine capitalist hegemony.<sup>12</sup> Through her work, Wollstonecraft articulated and advocated for alternative ways of being through an emphasis on the socially reproductive work of education could bring about a for futures other than the one the present seemed destined for: futures in which mothers and tutors are better informed, and children are liberated from didactic pedagogies (Chapter Two); futures in which young women can learn to survive outside of the patriarchal household (Chapter Three); and futures in which the world is not subject to the economic and ecological devastation of capitalism (Chapter Four). As evidenced by the range of audiences Wollstonecraft wrote for, including children, young women, and adult men, she understood that education is important even for—if not especially for—adults.

## **Envisioning the Future**

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12. Susan Ferguson, "Children, Childhood and Capitalism: A Social Reproduction Perspective," *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, 112-130 (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 129 (emphasis added).

Wollstonecraft's preoccupation with futurity has received some passing attention in the two-plus centuries since her death, much of it from the American side of the Atlantic. As far back as the Federalist Era, Wollstonecraft was toasted by Congressman Elias Boudinot in 1793, declaring that "The Rights of Woman are now heard as familiar terms in every part of the United States."<sup>13</sup> An article from the *Weekly Georgia Telegraph* in 1869 describes a fictional visit to the offices of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's *The Revolution*. The author, writing in the persona of a midwestern woman, fearing to find the iniquity that so many detractors of women's rights conclude to be the result of women's empowerment, instead finds the offices to be very proper, including a portrait of "Mary Wollstonecraft, looking into futurity with earnest eyes."<sup>14</sup> It goes without saying that the future Wollstonecraft is looking into is one in which women are guaranteed equal rights. Margaret Tims ends the preface of her 1976 biography of Wollstonecraft, one of many published in the decade, by declaring that "in her vision of human progress, Mary Wollstonecraft is still a woman of the future."<sup>15</sup> This is later echoed by Ruth Abbey who asserts that in order to think about the political future of the family, we must revisit Wollstonecraft's writing on the subject.<sup>16</sup> More recently, Mark

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13. Elias Boudinot, "An Oration Delivered at Elizabeth-Town, New Jersey: Agreeably to the Resolution of the State Society of Cincinnati on the Fourth of July," (Elizabethtown, 1793), 24, quoted in Eileen Hunt Botting, "Making an American Feminist Icon: Mary Wollstonecraft's Reception in US Newspapers, 1800-1869," *History of Political Thought* 34, no. 2 (2013): 273-274.

14. "Amongst the Strong Minded," *Weekly Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, GA), 7 May 1869: 7.

15. Margaret Tims, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Social Pioneer* (London: Millington, 1976), ix.

16. Ruth Abbey, "Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Hypatia* 14.3 (1999).

Canuel reads *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) as a negotiation between Enlightenment stadial theory and an epistemology of futurity as unpredictable,<sup>17</sup> and Enit Karafili Steiner observes that the same text offers a provisional way of dealing with the present and future.<sup>18</sup> For Tims and Abbey, Wollstonecraft serves as a landmark in history which we can refer back to in order to re-think our course of future action. For Canuel and Steiner, Wollstonecraft serves as the source of a new epistemology of time, a counter-historiography of the Whig view of history.

Wollstonecraft's published works expressed a keen interest in the future and how present actions would condition the individual and collective experience of a later period. Her earlier writings addressed futurity as a life-after-death phenomenon, in keeping with her more spiritually oriented youth. In one of the final sections of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), Wollstonecraft observes that the respite of Sunday "call[s] off the mind from the too eager pursuit of the shadows of this life, which, I am afraid, often obscure the prospect of futurity, and fix our thoughts on earth."<sup>19</sup> Wollstonecraft synonymizes "futurity" with "afterlife" in *Thoughts*, with the assumption that the key concern for humankind ought to be their posthumous destination. This is the

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17. Mark Canuel, "Wollstonecraft and World Improvement," *The Wordsworth Circle* 41.3 (2010).

18. Enit Karafili Steiner, "Mood, Provisionality, and Planetarity in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*," *Criticism* 61, no. 1 (2019).

19. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 40.

single reference made about futurity in this work, but Wollstonecraft's second publishing effort, *Mary, A Fiction* (1789) makes several explicit references to futurity. The linkage between present conduct and a spiritual future is echoed when the eponymous Mary is chided by her friend: "consider that all thy future life may probably take its color from thy present mode of conduct."<sup>20</sup> Especially for the eighteenth-century woman, the present ineffably conditions the future of the mortal body and immortal soul. While *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) does affirm that "our immortal soul ... is constantly struggling to spread itself into futurity," as a conduct novella, this work refocuses on the link between present and future actions both in life and after death. No less than six times does the narrator or Mrs. Mason, the moral center of *Original Stories*, insist that a present action must be undertaken in the future. The two sisters, whose brief education the book narrates, learn the value of looking to the future; while "Caroline determined to copy *in future* her sister's temperance and self-denial," Mary "*in future* after she said her prayers, remembered that she was to endeavor to curb her temper" (emphasis added).<sup>21</sup> The first of Wollstonecraft's overtly political works, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) contains a single reference to the future, once again referring to "belief in a future state," en route to proving her point that the common good cannot be a substitute for the

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20. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction* in *Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, ed. Michelle Faubert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012), 121.

21. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life, The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 401, 413.

happiness of the individual.<sup>22</sup> In *Rights of Men* the afterlife serves as metaphor to clarify the goal of political deliberation; the spiritual future becomes the secular future.<sup>23</sup>

Wollstonecraft's conception of futurity was largely metaphysical in the 1780s, but in the final decade of her life, her invocations of futurity mainly served more materialist purposes, eschewing the definition of futurity as synonymous with the afterlife. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft focuses on how educational practices condition the rest of one's life. Articulating her theory of social reproduction, Wollstonecraft states that "according to the tenor of reasoning by which women are kept from the tree of knowledge, the important years of youth, the usefulness of age, and the rational hopes of futurity, are all to be sacrificed, to render woman an object of desire for a short time."<sup>24</sup> So long as a structure of education that neglects women's intellect and character is allowed to persist, the duration of women's lives will be spent in desolation and will be renewed in perpetuity. Wollstonecraft's later voyage to Scandinavia, documented in *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), expanded her consciousness to consider the future of human

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22. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 53.

23. The significance of religion and spirituality in Wollstonecraft's thought and writing has already received excellent treatment by Barbara Taylor in several venues. See "The Religious Foundation of Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 99-118; *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

24. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 164.

civilization: “I anticipated the future improvement of the world ... so far as to advance a million or two of years to the moment when the earth would perhaps be so perfectly cultivated, and so completely peopled, as to render it necessary to inhabit every spot.”<sup>25</sup> These musings take an existential turn just a sentence later, as her “imagination went still farther, and pictured the state of man when the earth could no longer support him ... the world appeared a vast prison.”<sup>26</sup> In just four years following the spiritual and secular negotiation of futurity featured in *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft espoused a very different mode of futurity, both materialist and existential. Her unfinished and final published work, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1797), reifies this focus on the secular and the material. The narrator makes mention of “the dark horizon of futurity,” and “the unmarked ocean of futurity,” referring to futurity as a time-based concept rather than as synonym for the afterlife.<sup>27</sup> As to material concerns, the protagonist’s father, unable to “prevent the whole property of the family from becoming the prey of [her] brother’s rapacity ... was totally regardless of futurity,” resulting in a marriage of convenience and a life of hardship for her.<sup>28</sup>

Wollstonecraft’s preoccupation with futurity evolved throughout her lifetime, beginning with an emphasis on spirituality before giving way to a concern for earthly and material futures. As several the above examples demonstrate, Wollstonecraft’s concerns

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25. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, ed. Ingrid Horrocks (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2013), 115.

26. Wollstonecraft, *Letters from Scandinavia*, 115.

27. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria, Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, ed. Michelle Faubert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012), 168, 279.

28. Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman*, 239.

about futurity often blur into her concerns about education, suggesting an interconnection that animates her understanding of social reproduction.

### **A Life of Education**

That Wollstonecraft was an educator and governess by trade guaranteed the acknowledgement that education played an important role in understanding her importance as an eighteenth-century thinker. Alan Richardson has observed that education was a “keen and vital concern” for Wollstonecraft, “especially the education of girls and women.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Mitzi Myers identifies Wollstonecraft as one of the innovators of the “new educating heroine” in her children’s literature, asserting women’s power through their roles as educators of the nation’s youth. Most recently, Kirstin Collins Hanley has argued that Wollstonecraft’s educational writings have been neglected in comparison to her *Vindications*, suggesting that it is Wollstonecraft’s pedagogical practice rather than her political rhetoric that constitutes her most important contributions to modern feminism.<sup>30</sup> In the existing body of scholarship, the strong connection between Wollstonecraft’s feminism and her pedagogy drives interpretations of her work. The imbrication of futurity and pedagogy in Wollstonecraft’s writing, however, has been less remarked upon by scholars than the eruptions of vatic sentience catalogued above.

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29. Alan Richardson, “Mary Wollstonecraft on Education,” *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24.

30. Kirstin Collins Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft, Pedagogy, and the Practice of Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Accompanied by Wollstonecraft's commitment to a better future was an investment in education, specifically pedagogy. Barred from a formal education due to her gender and her family's downward spiraling economic position, Wollstonecraft saw education as how she and others might gain an equitable position in society. Indeed, one of the overarching arguments of this project is that all of Wollstonecraft's work can be interpreted as pedagogical in nature. To be sure, Wollstonecraft's publications on educational theory and her children's literature are explicitly pedagogical and have been recognized as such. However, her novels and political prose also served the function of educating divergent audiences about the nature and experience of gender and class in eighteenth-century Britain. The practice of pedagogy, though the Latin root evokes childhood, is not fixed to one transitory period in life, but is rather part of the process of an entire lifetime. Such an understanding of education as a lifelong process is also an important part of Wollstonecraft's project. After all, it is in *Rights of Woman* where Wollstonecraft observes that "life is merely an education."<sup>31</sup> Her novels, written for young middle-class women, were an exercise in educating the reader about the trappings of womanhood and how class position modified those constraints. Likewise, her political writings were addressed to a male elite, advocating economic reform and women's rights.

The structural transformation of society through a political education rather than a functional education, Wollstonecraft argued, was what promised a brighter future. It was not simply the attainment of a formal education and its imparted social mobility that would solve the problems of eighteenth-century British society. A more politically determined education would involve teaching children to understand their latent

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31. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 184.



capacities to do good, teaching adolescent women to realize the restraints of their gendered position, and teaching a class of male philosophers to see the prejudices of their views on women and wealth.

Wollstonecraft's theories of education evince a prescient material-feminist understanding of social reproduction as the crux of authoring a more equitable future. Although women's rights and class conflict have not always been considered with equal attention in previous scholarship, the interaction of gender and class form the primary content of Wollstonecraft's message about education. As Ira Shor argues, "education is more than facts and skills. It is a socializing experience that helps make the people who help make society. Historically, it has underserved the mass..."<sup>32</sup> In eighteenth-century Britain that mass included women, the working class, and working-class women, the majority of whom had little access to formal education. What education they did have access to—largely occupational literacy—reinforced their place as politically insignificant and immobile. Indeed, it was the deprivation of formal education that first alerted Wollstonecraft to the social reproductive capabilities of education. As Michael Apple has argued, crystallizing Karl Marx and Althusser's thoughts on education, schooling predominantly serves to reproduce the socioeconomics of class hierarchy,<sup>33</sup> just as Fraser observes that women have benefitted very little from their roles as caretakers of social reproduction. In eighteenth-century Britain, for example, women were largely responsible for the care and education of young children, but male elites

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32. Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 15.

33. Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (Boston: Routledge, 1979), esp. 8-9.

were given to be the experts on education until much later in the century. Moreover, the educational theory espoused by men was considered productive, while the care and instruction performed by women was simply reproductive.

Wollstonecraft's writing career evidences a conviction that education is the primary form of social reproduction through which a better future can be achieved. The stakes of education concern futurity, particularly when it comes to the education of children. As Shor suggests, "education is a contested terrain where people are socialized and the future of society is at stake."<sup>34</sup> As Chapter Two demonstrates, the method and necessity of socializing children was a contested issue in eighteenth-century Britain. Children were educated not to immediately interact with society, but to later enter the workforce, whether as capitalists, workers, or social reproducers consistent with the ideology of capitalism. "Schooling is fundamentally about disciplining children," as Susan Ferguson observes, but socially reproduction institutions "can and do regularly make time and space [for children] to attend to the psychological and physiological impulses."<sup>35</sup> Education can be a site of generational, systemic change, where new ideologies can be sown and explored. At times when certain ideas, such as gender and material equity are unpopular among the adult hegemony, educators may turn to children to see their vision for a better society carried out in the future.

Wollstonecraft viewed education as a lifelong process of intellectual growth and emergence; it is a matter of course that her earlier and later works come into such conflict with one another. As Harriet Devine Jump has also observed, many scholars have

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34. Shor, *Empowering Education*, 13.

35. Susan Ferguson, "Children, Childhood and Capitalism," 128.

focused on Wollstonecraft's mid-career writing as a static description of her political ideals and interiority.<sup>36</sup> Rather, Wollstonecraft's philosophy changed during her life through an engagement with writing. Wollstonecraft wrote in several genres during her life, repeatedly testing her ideas and the genres at her disposal. Her ideas are also mutable as she moves from one genre to another. Yet Wollstonecraft was neither indecisive nor lacking in conviction. She chose the genre she expressed her philosophy through, but her philosophy was also influenced by the resources and constraints of the given genre. These generic decisions were not accidental; rather, Wollstonecraft's decisions about genre reveal a distinct effort to assemble and engage a variety of readerships in her quest to expand the provenance of her thoughts on education. Indeed, Wollstonecraft's life served as an example of the lifelong education, more ideological than functional. Largely an autodidact, Wollstonecraft pursued an education of study and experience that brought her into opposition with patriarchal capitalism, the system she attacked most frequently in her later works.

### **The Gilt Cage**

Wollstonecraft is best known for her contributions to the tradition of protofeminist thought, although these contributions are often misunderstood and overstated.

Wollstonecraft has simultaneously been heralded as a founder and visionary of modern feminism. Hanley refers to Wollstonecraft as "the founder of the early feminist movement," Janet Todd claims that Wollstonecraft "anticipates most positions of the

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36. Harriet Devine Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft, Writer* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), x.

modern feminist movement,” and Virginia Sapiro sees Wollstonecraft as a “visionary political thinker.”<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, she has been vilified for her supposed betrayal of other women both for denigrating and valorizing femininity, and for participating in discourse with men.<sup>38</sup> The pursuit of both viewpoints requires some selective reading of Wollstonecraft’s texts and those of her contemporaries.

Although Wollstonecraft may have declared herself to be “the first of a new genus” in a self-aggrandizing letter to her sister in November 1787, we need not buy into this bravado as being a new type of woman. After all, in her letter Wollstonecraft was referring to a career as a writer, recommended to her by her lifelong publisher, Joseph Johnson. Professional writer may have been a bold career choice in the eighteenth-century for a former governess, but by no means was she the first woman to write for money, nor the first to advance the cause of her fellow women. The coterie of writing women known as the Bluestockings were already famous for their literary achievements and Charlotte Turner Smith’s *Elegaic Sonnets*, published by subscription, debuted several years previous. Going further back, Christine de Pizan (who may have been the first professional woman writer in Europe) and Mary Astell’s appeals for women’s rights were not so old as to have been completely forgotten. Wollstonecraft was certainly not the first

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37. Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, i; Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), 186; Virginia A. Sapiro, “Wollstonecraft, Feminism, and Democracy: ‘Being Bastilled,’” *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Maria J. Falco, 33-47 (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1996), 33.

38. See Susan Gubar, “Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradox of ‘It Takes One to Know One,’” *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 453-473; Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angelika: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London: Virago, 1989); Jennifer Lorch, *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990).

to venture into print the cause of women; even as a feminist radical she is not the boldest of her own time. French radicals, led by Olympia de Gouges and Etta Palm d'Aelders, decried the necessity of breastfeeding on the grounds that it impinged on women's freedoms while Wollstonecraft championed the conservative argument regarding the breast as the duty of natural womanhood. This is to say nothing of her repugnant remarks about "Hottentots" and "Mahometanism," which pervade *Thoughts* and *Rights of Woman*, respectively.<sup>39</sup>

What distinguishes Wollstonecraft from her predecessors and contemporaries in the tradition of protofeminist thought, however, is her rhetorical success establishing a legacy and bringing explicitly protofeminist topics to the public consciousness.<sup>40</sup> One of the ways Wollstonecraft became such a prominent figure in her time and in ours is her bravery in publicly debating men on the leading issues of the day, namely her response to Edmund Burke in *Rights of Men*. Yet this is a move that has earned the ire of some feminist scholars, who have claimed that by engaging in this discourse with men, she ignored an audience of women she might otherwise have been better served writing to. Such an argument betrays a limited understanding of her body of work; her three most famous works in our time, both *Vindications* and *Letters from Scandinavia*, may have been addressed to men, but both of her treatises on education, her two works of children's literature, and both of her novels, were directed to women audiences. Indeed, Wollstonecraft's lesser-known works, which, unsurprisingly, are those directed to women

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39. See Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 17; *Rights of Woman*, 71.

40. Her success in this last regard may be gauged best the spleen directed at her by Richard Polwhele's *The Unsex'd Females*, a viciously misogynist poem written against the supposedly French gender equity.

audiences, provide a better picture of the evolution of her thought and theory of social reproduction. Wollstonecraft was neither the inventor of feminism nor was she a traitor to her own kind. Having dispensed with these myths, it is easier to see Wollstonecraft for who she was: a woman of her time, who railed against the “gilt cage”<sup>41</sup> by which women were confined, and who understood the necessity of speaking to those in power.

Although Wollstonecraft’s theory of social reproduction articulated of a unified matrix of domination, her articulation of the matrix was certainly limited. As Hill Collins defines it, the matrix of domination rejects additive models of oppression, instead referring to the way that intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity are organized.<sup>42</sup> Multiple vectors of oppression do not simply add up neatly, nor can they be understood discretely. Rather, Hill Collins’ matrix of domination accounts for how all these intersecting oppressions originate from a shared source. What is missing from Wollstonecraft’s theory of social reproduction is an account of how race and ethnicity intersect with class and gender, an account which more contemporary feminist theorists such Hill Collins, Angela Y. Davis,<sup>43</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw,<sup>44</sup> and Himani Bannerji<sup>45</sup> have demonstrated is indispensable. Significantly, Wollstonecraft not only

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41. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 112.

42. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21.

43. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

44. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299.

45. Himanji Bannerji, “Building from Marx: Reflections on Class and Race,” *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 144-160.

fails to account for racial and ethnic oppression as part of her feminist social reproduction perspective but uses the abjection of non-White and non-British peoples as justification for White British women's liberation from patriarchal capitalism. As Moira Ferguson has demonstrated, Wollstonecraft's frequent allusions to women's position as a form of slavery ignores the oppression of enslaved Black and indigenous women, which even in the late eighteenth century was a cause celeb among progressive thinkers.<sup>46</sup> And as Joyce Zonana has argued, Wollstonecraft participated in a long trajectory of women writers, who "by figuring objectionable aspects of life in the West as 'Eastern,' ... rhetorically define their project as the removal of Eastern elements from Western life."<sup>47</sup> To speak of Wollstonecraft as simply a champion of women's rights is to ignore one of the more significant innovations of feminist thought in the eighteenth century—the interrelation of gender and class oppression—and to ignore the troubling legacy of White feminism distilled throughout her corpus.

### **Gold-Greedy Adventurers**

The evolution of Wollstonecraft's attitude toward economics, status, and class struggle is the most difficult to trace just by looking at her most famous works, which may explain why so little has been said about it. Even in 1977, Elissa Guralnick observed that *Rights of Woman* "has never been thoroughly examined as a political tract, a radical critique of

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46. Moira Ferguson, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Problematic of Slavery," *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Maria J. Falco, 125-150 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

47. Joyce Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*," *Signs* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 594.

society from broad egalitarian premises.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the majority of Wollstonecraft’s writing career occurred against the backdrop of the French Revolution and its hopes for radical equality along numerous lines. For the British ruling class, the most important line was that of wealth and power, if Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*<sup>49</sup> are any indication. In both *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft suggests that the new balance of power should come to rest on the bourgeoisie, supposedly “the most natural state” of material existence since it balanced the excesses of the aristocracy and the meanness of servants and laborers.<sup>50</sup> Yet the *Vindications* are a waystation on Wollstonecraft’s intellectual development from haughty attitudes about hierarchy in her earlier work to the more radical sentiments about industrial capitalism and class struggle that characterize the last year of life. As biographer Eleanor Flexner observes, during the production of *Vindications*, “Wollstonecraft was not at this time interested in the economic exploitation of women (later she would begin to recognize it).”<sup>51</sup>

Wollstonecraft’s awakening to the evils of capitalism and its imbrication with male domination may be traced to the dying days of her relationship with the radical-turned-speculator, Gilbert Imlay, whom one biographer graced with the saucy epithet,

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48. Elissa S. Guralnick, “Radical Politics in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics, 1788-2001*, ed. Harriet Devine Jump, 2 vols. Volume 1 (New York: Routledge, 2003), 340.

49. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993).

50. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 73.

51. Eleanor Flexner, *Mary Wollstonecraft; A Biography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 149.



“gold-greedy adventurer.”<sup>52</sup> While in France, Imlay turned his attentions from revolutionary idealism to smuggling goods from revolutionary France, past British blockades, to neutral Sweden. Wollstonecraft was still deeply in love with Imlay and had borne their child, Fanny, though Imlay had shunned Wollstonecraft for economic speculation. Imlay’s commercial enterprises were scuttled, however, when the cargo of one of the ships he contracted, laden with silver, went missing. Presumably with a mixture of motives, Wollstonecraft departed Britain not long after her return from France to track down the missing silver.

In Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft was met with the reality that Imlay loved wealth more than her and that his business interests in economic speculation and industrial capitalism were not merely destroying her relationship with him: they were destroying the landscape and society of the nations she traversed. Having sacrificed “the most sacred principles of humanity and rectitude,”<sup>53</sup> elite and bourgeois economic interests were to blame for the ills Wollstonecraft had lately witnessed and experienced. The tyranny and oppression Wollstonecraft felt and saw, born of the sentiment-deadening effects of capitalism, described but not named as such throughout Wollstonecraft’s narrative, is generalized in her writing as a conflict between corrupted, unfeeling businessmen and their humane, sympathetic dependents.

Yet speculation and capitalism did not operate in a vacuum. As Shahrzad Mojab observes, we ignore relationship between gender and class at the risk of “reduc[ing]

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52. George E. Woodberry, *Mary Wollstonecraft* (Oriole Press, 1964), 14.

53. Wollstonecraft, *Letters from Scandinavia*, 126.

gender to questions of culture” and “reduc[ing] gender to class relations.”<sup>54</sup>

Wollstonecraft’s later writings agree with contemporary materialist-feminist accounts of capitalism as the single system from which gender and class oppression derives. Whereas Wollstonecraft had previously lobbied for superiority of the middle class and had previously assumed the bourgeois woman as the default state of womanhood, she was now confronted with the reality that the oppression of women was economic as well as gendered. Poor, laboring, and servant women, whom she had previously not addressed either as an audience or a subject, became subjects of her final compositions. The experiences of women in the lower classes were exponentially worse than those of bourgeois and elite women, whose suffering was not magnified by the inequity of wealth that was growing over the course of the eighteenth century. In *Letters from Scandinavia* and *Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft eviscerates the economic practices of capitalism and suggests a new mode of cross-class solidarity among women to ameliorate the effects of male economic domination.

### **Aesthetics and Ideology**

Futurity and education serve as the basis for a theory of social reproduction only insofar as they are connected to the material conditions of the people involved in the process.

Thus far, I have outlined futurity and education as the two key terms in this project; I will now turn to how gender and class struggle are constituents of Wollstonecraft’s theory of social reproduction. To use a structural marxist metaphor, futurity and education form the

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54. Shahrzad Mojab, ed., *Marxism and Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 5-6.

base of Wollstonecraft's theory of social reproduction. Gender and class struggle form the superstructure of her theory, anticipating the feminist and marxist definitions of social reproduction. Wollstonecraft manages to convey her theory of social reproduction through a nimble negotiation of ideology and aesthetics in each of her works. An accomplished rhetorician in her own right, Wollstonecraft used generic and stylistic conventions of various literary texts to express ideas that were at the time revolutionary and unpopular among elites.

The following chapters are a rhetorical analysis of the three major genre clusters that emerge from Wollstonecraft's public-facing writing: educational theory/children's literature, novels, and political prose. These three genre clusters, as indicated above, address specific audiences Wollstonecraft invokes to further her goals of a better future via an education informed by an awareness of gender and class struggle. Each chapter focuses on a genre cluster, exploring how Wollstonecraft's engagement with that genre evolves over the course of her career, and how her ideas on gender and class evolve. To communicate her then radical ideas to her intended audiences, Wollstonecraft instrumentalized and subverted familiar aesthetic practices within these existing genres to make her evolving ideology palatable to readers.

Considering that ideology and aesthetics are the two operative terms in articulating my methodology for this project, it is necessary to pause and define them. Working at the intersection of feminist and marxist thought, it is necessary to draw from both traditions to define my terms, although the latter tradition's obsession with defining these terms means I will be drawing mainly from the marxist tradition. In their most glib definitions, aesthetics refers to the form that the literary object takes, whereas ideology

refers to the ideas contained within the literary form, what Georg Lukács referred to as the “dialectic of appearance and essence.”<sup>55</sup> Such definitions, however, create a false and artificial binary of ideology and aesthetics that both Lukacs’ contemporaries and posterity have endeavored to dispel or complicate.

My use of the term ideology is drawn from the work of Althusser and Raymond Williams. Ideology refers to the series of ideas and experiences that inform one’s perception and interpretation of the world around oneself. In contrast to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century definitions of ideology as “false consciousness”<sup>56</sup> or as a pejorative synonym to rhetoric,<sup>57</sup> ideology is, according to Althusser, “the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a [hu]man or a social group.”<sup>58</sup> This definition is expanded by Williams when he claims that ideology revolves around the process of people becoming “conscious of their interests and their conflicts.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, ideology is what gives coherence to and systemizes beliefs. Wollstonecraft is an ideologue in the sense that she advanced a specific set of beliefs about gender and class

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55. Georg Lukács, “Realism in the Balance,” *Aesthetics and Politics* (Verso: Brooklyn, 2007), 39.

56. Althusser summarizes Marx and Friedrich Engels’ definition of ideology in *The German Ideology* as “a pure illusion ... external to ... positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence.” Althusser, “Ideology,” 254.

57. Destutt de Tracy coined the term ideology as the “science of ideas,” although it was quickly usurped by French reactionaries who dismissed such a concept as “impractical theory” and “abstract illusion,” supposedly divorced from historical and material reality. Quoted in Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 56-58.

58. Althusser, “Ideology,” 253.

59. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 68.

through her writing. Wollstonecraft's writing and subsequent publication of her ideas in literary forms signals her attempt to bring her various audiences to a sense of their interests and conflicts related to gender and class.

In literature, such as the type of writing analyzed in this project, aesthetics is the experience of ideas. According to Jacques Rancière, "aesthetics can be understood ... as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience ...; that [which] simultaneously determines the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience."<sup>60</sup> Not simply the inert formal elements as understood by Lukács, aesthetics is the use of literary language and technique to condition the reader's experience of a text. Similar to Althusser's notion of interpellation—how culture and ideology become internalized by the subject<sup>61</sup>—Fredric Jameson suggests that authors deploy strategies of containment, the method by which the author of a text presents the illusion of ideological choice for the reader.<sup>62</sup> Outside of a narrative or other literary text, a reader is ostensibly free to make their own decision about perceived events; within the literary text, the author sets the terms for the reader's interpretation of perceived events. As an example, from Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*, the governess Mrs. Mason's decision to kill a small bird could be interpreted as an act of cruelty without the narrative scaffolding telling the reader that by putting the wounded bird out of its misery, Mrs. Mason is

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60. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 8.

61. Althusser, "Ideology," 264.

62. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 52-53.

committing a difficult but merciful act.<sup>63</sup> Given this project's interest in gender and feminist thought, it is worth noting here that there is no monolithic system of feminine aesthetics that Wollstonecraft participates in. As Rita Felski has argued, "any theoretical position which argues a necessary or privileged relationship between [sic] female gender and a particular kind of literary structure, style, or form" is bogus.<sup>64</sup> The assumption that a distinctly feminine aesthetic exists not only proposes the flattening of many different women's experiences into a single category, but it also suggests an obnoxious and obsolete conflation of gender and femininity with socially constructed norms of biological sex.

Although there is room for debate generally as to whether aesthetics and ideology are mutually exclusive or rather are manifestations of one another, my reading of Wollstonecraft's work operates on a continuum of the relationship between these two terms. Wollstonecraft often seemed to play by the aesthetic rules of conservative, elite, and male-dominated genres, while attempting to advance a message in support of radical women's rights and class struggle. Ideology and aesthetics were not completely inseparable in Wollstonecraft's writing, however, especially in her earlier works, because her use of conventional aesthetic practices often obscured her radical ideology. As radical as her ideology may have been, the conventions of didacticism and sentimentalism often

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63. Strategies of containment notwithstanding, several modern critics have used this scene as fodder for misogynistic arguments against both the character of Mrs. Mason and the beliefs on education that Wollstonecraft held in the early 1790s.

64. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 19.

blunted the edge of that radical message, if contemporary and recent interpretations are any indication.

### **Explicating Wollstonecraft's Theory**

The themes of futurity, education, gender, and class struggle that pervade Wollstonecraft's entire body of work constitute a unified theory of social reproduction. This theory both structured the ideology that Wollstonecraft subscribed to throughout her life and was the message that she sought to convey to her readers. Through a rhetorical and literary analysis of the ideology and aesthetics of her writing career, I demonstrate how the individual components of Wollstonecraft's theory of social reproduction evolved throughout her lifetime and how these evolutions affected her use of genre and writing towards affecting structural change. The following chapters explicate the state of Wollstonecraft's theory when she first became involved in a specific genre and the evolution of her use of and beliefs within that genre. Although cut down by puerperal fever in the prime of her writing career it is impossible to know what directions Wollstonecraft's beliefs would have taken with age. The trajectory of her thought seems to suggest that over time she became more radical and more opposed to the oppression of others.

In Chapter Two, the explicitly pedagogical writings of Wollstonecraft are under consideration. Bookending her career as published wholes and posthumous fragments, Wollstonecraft's writing on education and her children's literature demonstrates an investment in education as a significant component of her theory of social reproduction. Indeed, Wollstonecraft's work on education echoes Susan Ferguson's claim that children

“are the objects of the (feminized ...) reproductive labor of others” and are also “agents of their own self-transformation into capitalist subjects.”<sup>65</sup> While Wollstonecraft is ostensibly working from a protofeminist ideology in both her early and later works, the mode of protofeminist argumentation differs across time. In *Thoughts* and *Original Stories* Wollstonecraft advocates for the agency of girls and women within current structures of gender yet moves towards a more autonomous vision of women’s knowledge and behavior in *Hints on the Management of Infants* (1797)<sup>66</sup> and *Lessons* (1797).<sup>67</sup> Wollstonecraft’s views on class struggle are also noticeably different across the span of her career. *Thoughts* and *Original Stories* are designed specifically for the middle-class adult and child reader, respectively. *Hints* and *Lessons*, on the other hand, are less concerned with the status and wealth of readers and their actions; rather, they contain advice and lessons that are broadly applicable. Wollstonecraft’s early and later pedagogical works operate within the same genres of pedagogy and children’s literature but rely on different aesthetics to hail a wider audience and craft a more empowering message: *Thoughts* and *Original Stories* rely on an empirical and impersonal style, while *Hints* and *Lessons* are familiar in tone and offer experiential narratives. Although her earlier writings use didacticism to discipline and socially reproduce gendered and classed

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65. Ferguson, “Children, Childhood and Capitalism,” 113.

66. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Hints on the Management of Infants*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 453-459.

67. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Lessons*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 461-474.



subjects, her later writings offer greater freedom for children greater agency for self-discipline and alternative ways of being.

Chapter Three moves into Wollstonecraft's two novels, *Mary* and the unfinished fragment, *Wrongs of Woman*. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of these two texts, once again demonstrating the evolution of Wollstonecraft's thought within her theory of social reproduction. In lieu of formal and political education, I argue, Wollstonecraft's novels function as consciousness-raising documents about the material conditions of women from a gendered perspective (and from a class perspective in *Wrongs*). By penning these novels for women about the conditions of their lives, Wollstonecraft worked to educate women about the oppressions of gender and class, and the possibility of life being otherwise. *Mary*'s narrative offers a rather fatalistic view of gender relations, suggesting that while women were forced to marry for the economic gains of others, there is no escaping these conditions except in death. Wollstonecraft also idealizes the charitable bourgeois martyr, who is misunderstood and does not receive the gratitude she should rightfully claim. *Wrongs*, on the other hand, suggests the way women can take their destinies into their own hands in a world that legally views them and their children as property of unfeeling husbands. It is in this novel that Wollstonecraft introduces the viewpoint of Jemima, a servant who is the victim of gendered and economic violence and who becomes the protagonist's friend and ally. One of the several potential conclusions to the novel suggests that cross-class female solidarity offers a vision of a better future for all women, one resistant to patriarchal capitalism. Aesthetically, both of Wollstonecraft's novels rely on sentimental conventions to lure the reader into her radical visions of a protofeminist reality. While

*Mary* is rather conventional in its use of sentimentality, *Wrongs* incorporates a gothic twist and employs subtle narrative techniques to bring the class privilege of bourgeois women into the open.

Despite not being recognized as overtly educational, I argue that Wollstonecraft's political texts, the subject of Chapter Four, in fact constitute a form public pedagogy. Through *Rights of Men*, *Rights of Woman*, and *Letters from Scandinavia*, Wollstonecraft attempts to educate and persuade an elite male audience to act in the best interest of women and the laboring classes. Recognizing that her works directed towards children and women had a limited ability to impact the present state of society, Wollstonecraft took to political and philosophical writing to affect material change in the present as well as in the future. In *Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft used an epistolary style to argue against Burke's account of the French Revolution as fundamentally dangerous to the welfare of Britain, suggesting that what Burke and the elites feared was a more equitable distribution of wealth and property that would benefit most British citizens. *Rights of Woman* famously argues that the supposed inferiority of women is socially conditioned, using philosophically conventional forms of argumentation. A synthesis of these two discrete ideological positions and aesthetic forms, *Letters from Scandinavia* uses the epistolary narrative to craft a material-feminist warning about the future of Britain under a male-dominated capitalist regime, what Nancy Fraser identifies as a "crisis of care."<sup>68</sup> The work that earned her the most praise from male contemporaries, *Letters from Scandinavia* serves as the last finished document of Wollstonecraft's theory of social

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68. Fraser, "Crisis of Care," 22.

reproduction, successfully blending her most evolved ideological positions into a well-accepted aesthetic form.

## Chapter Two: Wollstonecraft's Pedagogy and Children's Writing

Although she is most famous today for her proto-feminist rhetoric, Mary Wollstonecraft's gender politics were co-constitutive of the broader issue and power of education. Her first and final publications were explicitly concerned with the education of children, particularly girls and young women. Her other writings, as demonstrated in the following chapters, were also implicitly about education. Wollstonecraft's beliefs about women's rational capacity and her insistence that they should have access to equitable education were clearly political, but they were also very personal. Her crusade for women's right to formal rational education began with her own inability to access a formal, liberal education in her early years. In a chaotic, downwardly mobile bourgeois family that lavished its attention on the eldest son, Wollstonecraft was left to seek out her own education, an experience that defined her life and career as a governess and public educator. In other words, economic factors as well as her personal experience and political conviction contributed to Wollstonecraft's authorship of educational texts. Her early life also exposed her to machinations of education as a site of social reproduction, one where subjects could be molded to fit or resist the status quo.<sup>1</sup>

Wollstonecraft's first brush with formal education came at the age of eleven. She had learned to read in her parents' home, the location of which changed several times in

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1. According to Susan Ferguson, children are both the subjects and agents of social reproduction in their childhood. They submit to education as a form of training to take their place as laborers or reproducers in capitalist society, but the opportunity for play allows children the ability to engage in imagining other possibilities. Susan Ferguson, "Children, Childhood and Capitalism: A Social Reproduction Perspective," *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017): 112-130.

her early life. Her father's violent temper and inflated sense of self destabilized what had been a relatively respectable family. But beyond basic literacy Wollstonecraft was largely left to her own devices when not pressganged by her mother into caring for her younger sisters and brothers. With the family's move to Beverley in 1770, she and her siblings (with the exception of the eldest, Ned, whose education had always been provided for as the Wollstonecraft heir) would be able to receive a formal education. But the young Mary chafed at the idea of her younger brother James attending Beverley Grammar School, while she, Everina, and Eliza were sent off to the local schools instead. The injustice lay not so much in where she and her sisters were forced to attend, but what they were to attend to; while the boys were to be taught a curriculum of "Latin, Greek, French, German, history, philosophy, rhetoric, logic, [and] mathematics," she would instead be educated in "needlework and simple addition."<sup>2</sup> Here, Wollstonecraft learned about the disciplinary side of education as social reproduction. She was being trained to stay in the home, while Ned and James were being trained to adventure outside the household as an attorney and a commissioned officer in the navy, respectively. As biographers suggest, there was no better way to convince the young Mary to develop an obsession with formal education than to deny her one.

The girls' school in Beverley was not completely an impasse for Wollstonecraft as she met a kindred spirit in Jane Arden, a girl who was deeply interested in liberal education and whose father, John, was a scientific lecturer. Wollstonecraft was taken in by the Arden family to an extent, being present at many of John Arden's lessons for his

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2. Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft & Mary Shelley* (New York: Random House, 2016), 18.

family and becoming intimate with the Arden family library. Wollstonecraft was painfully aware of the learning gap between her and Jane Arden, noting in one of her earliest letters that “I have not the advantage of a Master as you have, and it is with great difficulty to get my brother to mend my pens.”<sup>3</sup> This interest in learning and in another family, according to her biographer Charlotte Gordon, alienated Wollstonecraft from her own family and their downward socioeconomic trajectory: “she was ambitious and discontented, but she understood something they did not: that education was the key to her future. Schooling would be her way out of the degradation and violence that characterized her family.”<sup>4</sup> After scamming a landlord and losing exorbitant amounts of money on horseracing and alcohol, Edward Wollstonecraft would pack up his family and flee once more, severing Mary’s relationship with the Ardens. Heartbroken, yet undeterred, Wollstonecraft would find a new surrogate family in the village of Hoxton, and a new friend in Fanny Blood, with whose help Wollstonecraft and her sisters later founded a girls’ boarding school in Newington Green.

The scenes of Wollstonecraft’s early life demonstrate that her commitment to education as expressed in her writing was no mere commercial decision. Some eighteenth-century women made their livelihood as professional writers, often in the booming trade of novels or in the renewed field of educational writing. Consumed in her

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3. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 8.

4. Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws*, 20.

early life by “an inextinguishable thirst of knowledge” and an “ambition to excel,”<sup>5</sup> Wollstonecraft’s inadequate schooling catalyzed her writing career. Whetted by injustice and other people’s books, Wollstonecraft’s desire for knowledge would steer her towards a career in education and an interest in educational theory, a field that was and would continue to rapidly transform in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As discussed in Chapter One, Wollstonecraft’s interest in education forms the basis for her interest in social reproduction. As Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett remind us, social reproduction includes “the maintenance and socialization of children.”<sup>6</sup> By inserting herself into eighteenth century discussions of education, Wollstonecraft makes a significant bid for changing the future direction of society by molding pedagogues and pedagogies for future citizens. She sought to do so through both educational theory and children’s literature. Writing for these two audiences is a rhetorically strategic move. According to Susan Ferguson, speaking of education in relation to social reproduction under capitalism,

the ‘reproduction process’ of creating a human being is inflected not just by capital’s demand for future labor power; it is, crucially, shaped by the personal needs and desires of the caretaker and teacher as well as the psycho-physiological

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5. William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, eds. Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 51.

6. Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett, “Gender, Social Reproduction, and Women’s Self-Organization: Considering the US Welfare State,” *Gender & Society* 5, no. 3 (1991): 314.

needs and desires of the child. As such, it can be both more playful and less fully alienating.<sup>7</sup>

Although social reproduction in the eighteenth century typically meant preparing boys to inherit estates and enter professions and preparing girls to remain in the household for all but the most demeaning labor, Ferguson points to the liberatory aspects of education as social reproduction. Both student and instructor can explore “alternative way[s] of being” outside of the rigid confines of early capitalist economic production.<sup>8</sup> As we will see, Wollstonecraft revised and refined her own pedagogical theories and practices throughout her writing career.

This chapter begins by contextualizing Wollstonecraft’s life, thoughts, and publication in the eighteenth century to understand the educational genres in which she composed: instructional tracts and children’s literature. Doing so sheds light on how Wollstonecraft situates her educational practice and philosophy in relation to two major interlocutors: the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the coterie of women’s intellectual advocates, the Bluestockings. In her instructional tracts, Wollstonecraft navigates between beliefs about the masculinity of rationality espoused by Rousseau and the elitism of the eighteenth-century women’s intellectual movement. These tensions are pragmatically resolved without challenging either gender inequality or class-based assumptions, an uncharacteristic move if only considered in light of her later career. The second half of this chapter addresses the genre of children’s literature, texts authored for an audience of children with the goal of educating children. These sections illustrate the

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7. Ferguson, “Children, Childhood and Capitalism,” 122.

8. Ferguson, “Children, Childhood, and Capitalism,” 129.



evolution from didacticism early in Wollstonecraft's career to the experiential approach that she adopted at the end of her career. Such an evolution is emblematic of the late eighteenth-century shift in educational philosophy and demonstrates Wollstonecraft's awareness of education as a site of both disciplining the child to enter capitalist society and of allowing the child to imagine other ways of being.

### **Late Eighteenth-Century Education**

Wollstonecraft's views on the topic of education were informed by those of her predecessors. The eighteenth century proved to be a pivotal moment in the history of education for Britain that Wollstonecraft was not only shaped by but also helped define. British pedagogy in the eighteenth century was molded by religious, scientific, and utilitarian forces that helped open knowledge to a greater population than in previous centuries. This democratization of education resulted in a push for freedoms for those most impacted by the broader reach of knowledge, as anti-slavery, socialist, and proto-feminist movements began to emerge and even proliferate in Britain by the end of the eighteenth century. Although conservatives feared how access to learning for women and the masses would impact societal hierarchies, they were ultimately unable to prevent it. More access to knowledge led to increased social mobility for those from the lower classes, excepting entry into legal and legislative professions. Towards the end of the century, some women were even able to earn careers as professional writers. These levelling forces were curbed as the century turned over into the 1800s with the twin

ascendancy of the industrial revolution and the consolidation of power behind capitalist modes of production.<sup>9</sup>

For the middle and upper classes of Britain, the debate between educating children at home or in the schoolhouse took precedence as the writings of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau advocated rational and individualist educations in the home. Wollstonecraft would be most explicitly influenced by Rousseau's *Emile* on this point, as were many other notable women in education at the time, including Hester Chapone and Maria Edgeworth. Boarding schools existed throughout the eighteenth century and were typically patronized by the middling classes of Britain's families, those who could afford their children's education yet could not afford to lodge a private tutor in home. Those from families who could not afford to supply a formal education, as well as many of the well-educated women of the era, had to instruct themselves in whatever way they could. For young men, chance-acquired or secondhand books and lectures procured them an education. While Nicholas Hans observes that the "number of self-taught men was comparatively large," he laments that "the appalling wastage of talent in the eighteenth century cannot be denied[,] ... an inevitable result of the aristocratic society and social privilege."<sup>10</sup>

The waste of talent in the eighteenth century is even more appalling when we consider that girls and young women were, according to Hans, "in an even worse position

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9. For a more detailed history of the educational revolution in eighteenth-century Britain, see Eve Tavor Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading: Print Culture and Popular Instruction in the Anglophone Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and Nicholas Hans, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

10. Hans, *New Trends in Education*, 181-193, esp. 189, 193.

than the boys of the lower classes.”<sup>11</sup> This is aptly illustrated by Gordon, who compares Wollstonecraft and her future husband William Godwin’s experiences in Hoxton: “They lived only a few hundred yards apart, but their lives could not have been more different: she, tending to her siblings and preoccupied with the running of the household; he, bent over his books.”<sup>12</sup> Although girls of a certain means had access to private and home education, they did not have access to the universities and academies once they entered adolescence that even some poor young men could attend. Boys’ and girls’ educations were also qualitatively different, as Wollstonecraft knew from her time in Beverley. Girls who attended boarding schools or who were given private instruction from tutors were given a limited curriculum and set of learned skills. Conversely, boys were given some instruction in science and mathematics, neither of which were considered proper for young women for the majority of the eighteenth century. It was not until Erasmus Darwin’s *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (1797) that women’s education in science and mathematics would gain significant traction.

A girl’s status largely defined what type of education she received. For instance, laboring and servant women often received little formal education, with the understanding that education was unnecessary for them to fulfill the manual and menial labor they were expected to perform by dint of their birth. Bourgeois young women were expected to cook, barter, and keep house, and were thus trained in basic literacy and arithmetic. Many governesses came from the middle classes, and in such instances were trained in languages, arts, geography, and history, suitable for educating the children of

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11. Hans, *New Trends in Education*, 194.

12. Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws*, 22.

the elite. Wealthier middle-class families might also procure instruction in the more genteel education reserved for the upper classes. Since many of these families employed servants to perform many domestic duties, the curriculum for these young women consisted of ornamental knowledge and training, referred to as accomplishments. Daughters of the elite were provided a liberal education consisting of basic history, Christian morals, grammar, and geography, coupled with accomplishments, which could include “dancing, sewing, drawing, music, and French.”<sup>13</sup> Accomplishments were often the subject of Wollstonecraft’s spleen in her educative writing, as, in her eyes, they lacked much use beyond attracting and entertaining men.

Many women filled the roles of pedagogue in the eighteenth century, even if few received thorough education on how to teach. As Norma Clarke observes, “most, if not all, [women writers] had experience of teaching and training up children, either in the capacity of older sisters, or as mothers, aunts, governesses and teachers.”<sup>14</sup> Because the duty of early education so frequently devolved to women in the household, women were the most fitting audience for manuals of childcare and instruction. For this same reason, women writers were best equipped to write these manuals and to communicate the best practices of pedagogy to their peers. Crucially, “by writing books and thus extending their influence from the realm of the private to the public, women laid claim to some of

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13. Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading*, 11.

14. Norma Clarke, “‘The Cursed Barbauld Crew’: Women Writers and Writing for Children in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *Opening the Nursery Door: Reading, Writing, and Childhood, 1600-1900*, ed. Mary Hilton, Morag Styles, and Victor Watson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 94.

that authority” constituted by the figure of the teacher.<sup>15</sup> According to Eve Tavor Bannet, in the eighteenth century “education began to give educated women some career paths outside of marriage.”<sup>16</sup> These paths typically included work as governesses, teachers, schoolmistresses, and professional writers. In some ways, the extent to which gendered ideology prohibited women’s employment in the eighteenth century has been overstated;<sup>17</sup> particularly so regarding publishing, a profession owned largely by men, yet frequently open to printing the words of women. A schoolmistress, governess, and writer, Wollstonecraft was well served to claim the authority of the teacher and in her early career publications.

Despite not having formal access to higher education in the eighteenth century, many women were still able to attain an education beyond the prescribed roles of their gender. Typically, these women had a learned father, elder brother, or other male relative who took an equal interest in their further education, while an even smaller minority attended formal secondary schools or were taught by their well-educated mothers. Others, like Wollstonecraft, sought out their own education—“a genius will educate itself,” as Wollstonecraft famously remarked to an old acquaintance.<sup>18</sup> Those who sought out an education, could reliably find one through a number of outlets. According to Hans, “almost all published lectures were addressed to both sexes” and public lectures, such as

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15. Clarke, “Cursed Barbauld Crew,” 95.

16. Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading*, 27.

17. Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street, 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), esp. 17-18.

18. Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, 136.

the ones given by John Arden, were known to be attended by women as well as men.<sup>19</sup> A wide variety of printed texts were intended for women readers as well. Bannet notes that there were many “guides to study” that were easily adapted for, or explicitly intended for women,<sup>20</sup> and Hans observes that dictionaries and encyclopedias were written with audiences of men and women in mind.<sup>21</sup> Other women’s periodicals, such as the *Lady’s Diary* offered insights written by women for women. Even novels could provide edification in unsuspecting areas: for example, Charlotte Smith’s political novel *Desmond* (1792), while couched within a sentimental romance plot, provided a remarkable history of the French Revolution that diverged from official government interpretations of events.

Women in the eighteenth century could overcome the financial and ideological barriers to receiving the more rational, useful education that emerged during the century. However, these women were often exceptions to an arbitrary rule, and as Kristin Wilcox observes, these individual exceptions were “inadequate for accomplishing th[e] task of large-scale reform” in eighteenth-century women’s education.<sup>22</sup> One of the ways that women such as Wollstonecraft could contribute to reforming education was through writing and publishing. This method appears to have emerged at the time of Wollstonecraft’s entrance into publication, as Vivien Jones observes “that the numbers of

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19. Hans, *New Trends in Education*, 205.

20. Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading*, 11.

21. Hans, *New Trends in Education*, 205.

22. Kristin R. Wilcox, “Vindicating Paradoxes: Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘Woman,’” *Studies in Romanticism* 48.3 (2009), 454.

publications in all genres [by women] ... rose steeply in the last third of the century."<sup>23</sup> Not only were women becoming more literate throughout the century, but they were clearly interested in expanding women's literacy through their own venture into pedagogical discourse.

Wollstonecraft participated in the expanding project of women's education through her publication of theoretical and practical texts for educating girls and young women. The educational theory Wollstonecraft authored takes the form of instruction manuals on education, namely her first published work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787)<sup>24</sup> and the posthumous fragment, *Hints on the Management of Infants* (1798).<sup>25</sup> The educational practice that Wollstonecraft published took the form of children's books, designed to apply the educational theories she endorsed at the given moment of their composition. These included *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788)<sup>26</sup> and the unfinished *Lessons* (1798),<sup>27</sup> the latter of which was ostensibly written for her youngest daughter, Fanny.

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23. Vivien Jones, introduction to *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

24. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

25. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Hints on the Management of Infants*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

26. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

27. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Lessons*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

Wollstonecraft's published educational theory engages an intellectual tension between the rational masculinity of the Enlightenment movement and the bourgeois proto-feminism of the Bluestockings circle. Wollstonecraft draws upon these two traditions to assert the ideal of a rational feminine education. The formal composition of *Thoughts* and *Management* constitutes the significant difference between the two texts, demonstrating an evolution in Wollstonecraft's idea of effecting social change. Whereas *Thoughts* engaged in the discourse and formality of the coterie of educational theorists, *Management* adopts an informal style, presence, and an epistolary intimacy to address mothers and pedagogues who could best make use of her suggestions.

Wollstonecraft's writing on educational practice constitutes the focus of the second half of Chapter Two. Both *Original Stories* and *Lessons* attempt to instruct children. But whereas *Original Stories* is built upon the ideology of didactic instruction rooted in older eighteenth-century traditions, such as those practiced by the Bluestockings, *Lessons* operates through an emergent ideology of experiential learning and a belief in children's inherent genius. As such, *Original Stories* teaches girls and young women to accept their roles in society through introspection and self-monitoring, while *Lessons* teaches Wollstonecraft's daughter Fanny to learn through her own experience of the world, and, ultimately, to question the legitimacy of imposed social roles. The form and ideology of Wollstonecraft's pedagogy evolved significantly throughout her adult life as her theory of social reproduction evolved. Although her earlier works stressed the disciplinary function of education, her later works encouraged the exploration of alternative ways of being in the world. This evolution set an important



foundation for the subjects of Chapters Three and Four: novels for women and political writing for men, respectively.

### **An Educational Theory of Feminine Reason**

Wollstonecraft's initial foray into the education debate is no less polemical than her more familiar writings on human rights. Despite her admission in the preface to *Thoughts* that "many treatises have already been written" on the subject of "female education," she refused to apologize for intruding her ideas into the discourse, as convention dictated (5). While Wollstonecraft was not the first to write about women's education, most of her predecessors, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, James Fordyce, and John Gregory, were men. Inspired by the Enlightenment, this male triumvirate advocated for reason until it came to women, whom they disparaged as being incapable of attaining the same sophistication of reason as men or as having no practical use for cultivated reason. Many women also wrote about women's education, but they did not run in the same circles as Wollstonecraft. The major women contributors to the education debates came from the coterie known as the Bluestockings. The Bluestockings are perhaps most responsible for what Catherine Gallagher refers to as the "discursive break" in the eighteenth-century representation of women: "on the 'before' side is the aristocratic model of woman, political, embodied, superficial, and amoral; on the 'after' side is the middle-class model, domestic, disembodied, equipped with a deep interiority and an ethical subjectivity."<sup>28</sup> The Bluestockings had a vested interest in the education of women, but their exclusivity

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28. Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), xx.

and bourgeois conservative values clashed with Wollstonecraft's burgeoning political imagination and genteel poverty. This animosity came to a head in a correspondence between Horace Walpole and Bluestocking stalwart Hannah More, where Wollstonecraft was derided as a "hyena in petticoats." Although an outsider from education discourse in the eighteenth century on account of her gender and status, Wollstonecraft draws deeply from the Enlightenment and Bluestocking traditions to advance her own arguments in *Thoughts*.

Wollstonecraft argues that women have the innate human capacity to reason yet must be freed from cultural exigencies such as early marriage to fully exercise their innate faculties. Rousseau is cast as a foil to the proto-feminism of her middle works, yet Wollstonecraft articulates her early ideas about education and philosophy based on her reading of Rousseau. Wollstonecraft was first introduced to Rousseau's works no later than March 1787, about the time she was composing *Thoughts*. In a letter to her sister, Wollstonecraft remarks on her reading of *Emile* and Rousseau's belief in the autodidactic tendency of genius: "he chooses a *common* capacity to educate—and gives, as a reason, that a genius will educate itself."<sup>29</sup> Viewing herself as a self-taught genius, Wollstonecraft was no doubt in accord with Rousseau on this and other subjects. Although Rousseau endows boys alone with autodidactic genius, Wollstonecraft promotes this as a theory of girls' education in *Thoughts*. Observing that young women are frequently shuttled from boarding school to the altar, Wollstonecraft remarks that the mind can only improve itself "if it has leisure for reflection, and experience to reflect on" (31). Even with the relatively superficial education provided in young women's boarding

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29. Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, 114-115.

schools, Wollstonecraft asserts that women do have an innate capacity to self-educate through reflection and leisure. She of course qualifies this, stating that only in a happy marriage, of a mature woman's rational choosing, can this be possible. In other words, women are only able to exercise rationality once they have been freed of the cultural constraints imposed in their youth.

Of the self-educating capacity of the mind, Wollstonecraft later observes in *Thoughts* that "a mind accustomed to observe can never be quite idle, and will catch improvement on all occasions" (48-49). Here Wollstonecraft once again affirms Rousseau's theory of autodidactic reason but expands the provenance of the original. The mind, according to Wollstonecraft, runs its own learning routines, enacting a self-directed education. Crucially, Wollstonecraft makes this claim in a chapter on women's conveyance through public places, affirming that education is not simply universal but is also socially constructed. By spending too much time in vain and immoderate company, a young woman's mind is bound to absorb these same sentiments. For this reason, Wollstonecraft cautions against straying from "those pursuits and pleasures ... [that] prepare us for a state of purity and happiness" (49). A focus on rational rather than vain pursuits guarantees the health of the mind. A genius can educate itself, but only insofar as it has the proper resources to reflect upon.

Both Wollstonecraft and Rousseau were great proponents of reason, viewing reason as an essential component of a gradual education. Despite a belief in self-education, Rousseau asserted that primordial human consciousness was an inadequate guide, observing that "before the age of reason we do good and bad without knowing it,

and there is no morality in our action.”<sup>30</sup> Wollstonecraft agreed with Rousseau on the importance of reason in education, but differed in application. Rousseau averred that there is “nothing more stupid than these children who have been reasoned with so much.”<sup>31</sup> In *Thoughts*, Wollstonecraft would tentatively agree that “intellectual improvements, like the growth and formation of the body, must be gradual” (10), but she firmly held that rational education could not begin too soon. In any case, Wollstonecraft reasoned that it was the duty of parents to cultivate a child’s reason and avoid any influence that might lead them astray.

Observing that the practice of wet-nursing—common among the elite—separated parent and child during some formative moments of care, Wollstonecraft asserted that a “mother (if there are not weighty reasons to prevent her) ought to suckle her children” (7). Wollstonecraft held to this domestic notion, not because it was the mother’s place (as Rousseau believed), but because she thought it to be essential to the physical and mental health of the child. Believing that “the first years of a child’s life are frequently made miserable through negligence or ignorance,” Wollstonecraft asserted the importance of a mother’s role in a child’s life (7). Mother’s milk not only provided children proper sustenance, but it also shielded infants from the ignorance of nurses who were ill-prepared to feed and care for a child that was not their own. According to Wollstonecraft it was, in fact, quite a rational behavior for a mother to feed her own child, “in order to produce a rational affection for her offspring” (7). Given the preeminence of reason in

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30. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile; or, On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 67.

31. Rousseau, *Emile*, 89.

human activity, Wollstonecraft argued that performing the duties of a mother would give mothers a rational impetus for continuing the care of the children past infancy.

Wollstonecraft and Rousseau are in accord on the point of mothers breast-feeding, if not for the same reasons. Wollstonecraft viewed the combination of rationality with emotional attachment as a pragmatic means to the proper education of the child, whereas Rousseau viewed this activity as a woman's innate role.

The autodidactic tendency of the mind also made it clear to Wollstonecraft that education must begin early before miseducation could set in. Wollstonecraft notes that "children very early contract the manner of those about them" (7). Education is not simply about the conscious acquisition of knowledge for Wollstonecraft, but the interpolation of social and cultural behaviors. For this reason, Wollstonecraft observes that "it is easy to distinguish the child of a well-bred person, if it is not left entirely to the nurse's care" (7). However, because children from well-bred families are often left to the care of nurses and servants, Wollstonecraft observes that children "are taught cunning, the wisdom of that class of people" and are left with bad examples of conduct before their parents and instructors even begin to inculcate proper manners and conduct. Although Rousseau scoffed at the idea of teaching infants and young children the basics of rationality, Wollstonecraft conceived of education in broader terms. She would later insist that "children cannot be taught too early to submit to reason."<sup>32</sup>

Wollstonecraft's most vehement disagreements with Rousseau about education were to be found on the distribution of the right to reason. For her part, Wollstonecraft

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32. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2015), 238.

was a more democratic advocate of reason, praising “every attempt ... to investigate the human mind,”<sup>33</sup> as opposed to the “few men” whom Rousseau considered capable.<sup>34</sup> Wollstonecraft was positively repulsed by Rousseau’s misogynistic depiction of women as children. Wollstonecraft would declaim such a notion as “nonsense!” in *Rights of Woman*.<sup>35</sup> According to Rousseau, children were undifferentiated by gender until reaching adolescence whereby they diverged into men and women, with distinct, prescribed roles.<sup>36</sup> Due to this differentiation in adulthood, Rousseau believed in different education for girls and boys, despite their apparent similitude. While men were to be instructed in a fully rational education, women were “only to skim the sciences of reasoning,” so that they might better perform the duties of wife and mother and not fall victim to the wiles of men.<sup>37</sup> Naturally Wollstonecraft disagreed with Rousseau about the role of gender in education, informing one of the major interventions of *Thoughts*: that women were not only as capable of reason as men, but that they ought to receive a similarly rational education as men.<sup>38</sup>

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33. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, August 1789.

34. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts (First Discourse)*, in *The First and Second Discourses*, trans. Roger D. Masters and Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964), 63.

35. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 91.

36. “Girls are children, boys are children; the same name suffices for beings so much alike ... [yet a] perfect woman and a perfect man ought not to resemble each other in mind any more than in looks.” Rousseau, *Emile*, 211, 358.

37. Rousseau, *Emile*, 189.

38. For a more thorough reading of Wollstonecraft’s engagement with Rousseau, see Virginia A. Sapiro and Penny A. Weiss, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft: Restoring the Conversation,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary*

In *Thoughts*, Wollstonecraft is far more subtle than in *Rights of Woman* as to how she defies conventional notions of reason belonging to men only. One such way that Wollstonecraft performs this sleight of hand is by referring to children rather than to girls specifically. It is not until the third chapter of *Thoughts*, entitled “Exterior Accomplishments,” that Wollstonecraft refers to “girls.” By speaking of rational education in general terms within a book about the education of daughters, Wollstonecraft avoids inflammatory discussions of woman’s capacity for reason, while slyly implying all the while that they are quite capable. Wollstonecraft does concede that women are frequently subject to many “foibles,” including over-attention to dress, sentimental reading, and card-playing. Wollstonecraft does not argue that women are frequently captives to emotion rather than rationality, which would steer them away from such vain and empty pursuits. Rather, she argues that it is a result of their education that women behave in such a way, and that an education founded on reason would restrain such passions. Wollstonecraft states this quite plainly at several moments throughout *Thoughts*. For example, while observing that reflection forms the habits of human character, she remarks that “our passions will not contribute much to our bliss, till they are under the dominion of reason, and till that reason is enlightened and improved” (37). Elsewhere, Wollstonecraft assures that keeping company with one’s family on Sundays, though seemingly irksome on a day of rest, “will be found pleasant after some time; and passion being employed this way, will, by degrees, come under the subjection of reason”

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*Wollstonecraft*, ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 179-207.

(40). Couching her arguments about women's capacity and suitability for a rational education, Wollstonecraft normalizes the idea of reason as woman's domain in *Thoughts*.

Wollstonecraft's educational theory was in conversation with Rousseau regarding the place of reason in women's education, but the class-based assumptions that undergird the message of *Thoughts* becomes clear as the result of her dialogue with Bluestocking women. Although Wollstonecraft only explicitly refers to one member of the Bluestockings coterie in *Thoughts*, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, there are palpable points of convergence and divergence with Bluestocking feminism throughout the text. According to Harriet Guest, it is perhaps because of the acceptance of Bluestocking women in public discourse that allowed for "the emergence of a feminist political voice," exemplified in Wollstonecraft's more mature writing.<sup>39</sup> Regardless, aristocratic maternalism characterized the membership and attitudes of the Bluestockings. As Elizabeth Eger notes, the Bluestocking circle was "originally aristocratic in formation, [although] the bluestockings admitted members into their circle on merit alone."<sup>40</sup> However, decisions were more likely based on ideological alignment, as demonstrated by Catharine Macaulay's estrangement from the circle for her increasingly liberal politics and marriage to a significantly younger man. Moreover, while the Bluestockings accepted membership from the lower classes through a patronage network, they were wary of social destabilization. The success of Anne Yearsley, the milkmaid-poet and protégé of Hannah More and Elizabeth Montagu, for example, "caused More and Montagu anxiety rather

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39. Harriet Guest, "Bluestocking Feminism," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65.1 (2002), 62.

40. Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 67.



than pleasure,” and according to Eger, “they were unwilling to see her raised above her station.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, More’s *Cheapside Repository Tracts*, written for semiliterate laborers, were designed primarily for the sake of suppressing laboring class interests for the sake of the nation’s economic and political stability during the French Revolution.

An early-career Wollstonecraft held rather rigid beliefs about the innate role and character of the lower classes, particularly when it came to education. Wollstonecraft views the education of the servant class as a utilitarian project, designed to keep them in their place and to avoid the transmission of their supposedly uncouth behaviors to elite children. These attitudes are certainly in line with the positions held by Bluestocking women. A chapter entitled “On the Treatment of Servants” in *Thoughts* echoes More’s and Montagu’s position on underclass mobility. Wollstonecraft claims that “servants are in general, ignorant and cunning” (38), and for this reason should be kept out of a child’s proximity, lest they imbibe their supposedly vicious characteristics. Yet Wollstonecraft also regards the lack of education among the servantry as an enjoinder to treat them as children: “the same methods we use with children may be adopted with regard to them [servants]. Act uniformly, and never find a fault without a just cause; and when there is, be positive, but not angry” (38). The reasons for this treatment are entirely pragmatic; Wollstonecraft argues that treating servants with benevolence prevents their familiarity and assures their interest in the family’s well-being. In advocating for this treatment of servants, three things are affirmed: that servants are not to be the subjects of an education, that they are not to be trusted as instructors or models for higher status

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41. Eger, *Bluestockings*, 83.

children, and that these attitudes towards servants are reproduced for succeeding generations.

The audience of *Thoughts* is clearly the genteel eighteenth-century reader. The typical Bluestocking audience, with the notable exception of More's *Cheapside Repository Tracts*, was also genteel and certainly no lower than middle class. As Eger observes, a good amount of Bluestocking productivity was centered in a salon culture that venerated more ephemeral and private compositions, such as conversation and epistolary correspondence, as well as other artistic and architectural ventures.<sup>42</sup> The more permanent and public compositions typically took the form of educational tracts (Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* [1773]), histories (Catharine Macaulay's *The History of England* [1763-1783]), and even novels (Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* [1762]) and poetry (Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Poems* [1773]). Such texts were intended for a literate middle-class audience with the leisure and fortune to purchase them. This seems to have underpinned Wollstonecraft's decision to address a wealthy genteel audience through *Thoughts*, although the type of education Wollstonecraft espoused may have been more influential than the economy of publication. In the first half of *Thoughts*, it is implicitly stated that the audience is of high means. The frequent reference to servants and opinions regarding whether boarding school or a governess is more suitable to educate girls indicate the socioeconomic status of the presumed reader.

However, halfway through the text, Wollstonecraft makes it clear that she has "hitherto only spoken of those females, who will have a provision made for them by their parents" (25). In this chapter, Wollstonecraft warns families against pursuing a genteel or

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42. Eger, *Bluestockings*, see 59-120.

fashionable education for their daughters if they do not have the means to see her married well. As Wollstonecraft observes, “few are the modes of earning a subsistence [for women], and those very humiliating” or traditionally reserved for men, “and certainly they are not very respectable” (26). Economic considerations aside, Wollstonecraft warns that once a daughter has been educated above her station, it is difficult for her “to herd with the vulgar, or to condescend to mix with her former equals when she is considered in a different light” (25). Although Wollstonecraft is more progressive than Rousseau in allowing women to pursue a rational education, in *Thoughts* she holds to the same retrograde principles that led Montagu and More to impede the social mobility of their protégés.

Wollstonecraft is best remembered as a champion of gender equality, but *Thoughts* reverberates with the domestic attitudes toward women that were mostly prevalent in the eighteenth century. Bannet differentiates eighteenth-century women’s advocates along the lines of Matriarchs and Egalitarians, the Bluestockings belonging to the former category. Matriarchs “retain[ed] a firm belief in domestic, social, and political hierarchy,” one which conceded the difference of gender roles on the basis that bourgeois and aristocratic women held moral superiority over men.<sup>43</sup> The Bluestockings, with the notable exception of Macaulay,<sup>44</sup> were most closely aligned with the Matriarchal camp, exemplified by More’s assertion that “the profession of ladies ... is that of daughters,

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43. Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 3.

44. Carol Strauss Sotirpoulos, *Early Feminists and the Education Debates: England, France, Germany: 1760-1810* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 137.

wives, mothers and mistresses of families.”<sup>45</sup> Egalitarians, on the other hand, “imagined a family based on consensual relations ... and on a division of labor between men and women who related to each other as equals.”<sup>46</sup> Bannet aligns Wollstonecraft with the Egalitarians based on her later works, but it is a different Wollstonecraft who speaks through *Thoughts*. Regardless of their different ideologies, both Matriarchs and Egalitarians believed in the pursuit of women’s education. For the Bluestocking Matriarchs, this belief emerged through their publications and salon discourse. According to Eger, the Bluestockings “created a strong sense of community between women. By reforming the social habits of their peers, replacing cards and polite gossip with serious intellectual conversation, they were explicitly concerned with educating women.”<sup>47</sup> By accepting a gendered binary, Wollstonecraft and the Bluestockings endorsed women’s traditional role within the house, choosing to affirm the culturally constructed differences between men and women.

This endorsement of domesticity within the Bluestocking women’s initiatives is most clear within the work of Hester Chapone, whose *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, according to Guest, “became a standard text for issue to young ladies, a handbook on the acquisition of respectable middle-class femininity.”<sup>48</sup> Chapone’s *Letters* is significant in this regard, not only because it explicitly reinforces the idea of the domestic

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45. Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education with a View of the Principles and Conduct Present Among Women of Rank and Fortune* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 61.

46. Bannet, *Domestic Revolution*, 3-4.

47. Eger, *Bluestockings*, 120.

48. Guest, “Bluestocking Feminism,” 60.

woman in a public-facing work, but because it is designed to instruct women on how to enter into their domestic role. According to Chapone's *Letters*, "the principal virtues or vices of a woman must be of a private and domestic kind."<sup>49</sup> While Chapone does not confine a woman's person to the domestic realm in this passage, she is clear that a woman's "principal" place and value resides in the home. "Within the circle of her own family and dependents lies her sphere of action," Chapone continues, "the scene of almost all those tasks and trials which must determine her character and her fate here and hereafter."<sup>50</sup> Chapone explicitly ties conceptions of womanhood to separate spheres ideology through her invocation of the phrase "sphere of action." Again, Chapone does not foreclose on the notion of women existing in public or semi-public spaces, but she is particularly insistent that the home and the family is where a woman's value is located and evaluated.

Although Wollstonecraft would later contradict the Bluestocking belief in the domestic and semi-public as the proper space for women, she affirms this belief in *Thoughts*. Implicitly, Wollstonecraft suggests that much of the work of raising children is the duty of the mother in the home. For example, Wollstonecraft's injunction that a mother "ought to suckle her own children," necessarily confines women to the domestic space for upwards of a year, in order that the mother creates the proper bond with her child (7). Moreover, Wollstonecraft suggests that it is the mother's duty to educate her daughters herself, provided she has "leisure and good sense" (22). Wollstonecraft's

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49. Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Lady* (London, 1806), 86.

50. Chapone, *Letters*, 86.

suggestion derives from her belief that boarding schools are too focused on manners, governesses overextend themselves to provide for their old age, and servants are too likely to corrupt children.

Explicitly, Wollstonecraft argues that the role of women is within the domestic sphere. Regardless of any aspirations to enter available careers or to improve the mind, Wollstonecraft argues that it is paramount for girls to learn their role within the home. To assure readers of this, Wollstonecraft states that “to prepare a woman to fulfil the important duties of a wife and mother, are certainly the objects that should be in view during the early period of life” (22). In a later chapter of *Thoughts* entitled “Desultory Thoughts,” Wollstonecraft observes that “as every kind of domestic concern and family business is properly a woman’s province, to enable her to discharge her duty she should study the different branches of it” (34). Unenthusiastic though she is to make this claim, Wollstonecraft nevertheless leaves the idea of the domestic woman unchallenged throughout her earliest publication. Although Wollstonecraft is mostly known for her arguments in favor of extending equal rights and opportunity to both men and women, her early pedagogy affirms the existing ideology of the private, domestic woman.

As a collective, the Bluestockings expressed ambivalence regarding the role of accomplishments, the ornamental knowledge and attributes of elite women’s education. Chapone and More represent opposing sides on this point of education, though neither are exactly in accord with Wollstonecraft. Chapone tells her reader that

politeness of behavior, and the attainment of such branches of knowledge, and such arts and accomplishments as are proper to your sex, capacity, and station, will prove so valuable to yourself through life, and will make you so desirable a

companion, that the neglect of them may reasonably be deemed a neglect of duty.<sup>51</sup>

Chapone valorizes the attainment of accomplishments as a duty for women. She is pragmatic in this verdict, noting their necessity for performing bourgeois femininity, but she also depicts accomplishments as a personally fulfilling goal and activity. Elsewhere, Chapone asserts that with the attainment of accomplishments a young woman “will engage the affection and respect of all who converse with [her].”<sup>52</sup> More, on the other hand, disparages the present notion of accomplishments in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), wondering that “there is not [a term] more abused, misunderstood, or misapplied than the term *accomplishments*.”<sup>53</sup> Observing that, at some earlier point in time, an accomplished woman had completed and perfected her talents in a variety of areas, the accomplished woman of the present has neither completion nor perfection to describe her education. Furthermore, the “frenzy of accomplishments” has diffused down to the middle class, rendering many young women less useful in the eyes of the nation, and undermining More’s previously stated strictures against social and economic pretension.<sup>54</sup>

Wollstonecraft, meanwhile, castigates the basic utility and purpose of accomplishments. Unlike Chapone, Wollstonecraft sees no practical or self-fulfilling benefit to accomplishments, nor does she pine for the lost days of a complete and perfect

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51. Chapone, *Letters*, 119.

52. Chapone, *Letters*, 169.

53. More, *Strictures*, 44. Emphasis in the original.

54. More, *Strictures*, 44.

attainment of accomplishments, like More. Instead, Wollstonecraft modifies the typical curriculum of accomplishments by referring to “exterior accomplishments,” those “which merely render the person attractive; and do those half-learnt ones which do not improve the mind” (12). By aligning the pieces of “music, drawing, and geography” that most girls only learn something of with the exterior, and therefore vanity, Wollstonecraft makes an argument in favor of what could be defined as interior accomplishments. Rather than focusing on external improvements that gain the applause of others as did Chapone and More, Wollstonecraft instead focuses on the internal improvement of the mind, which “tends to make a person in some measure independent” and “is a prop to virtue” (12). These internal accomplishments, Wollstonecraft suggests, have more practical value than external ones. For example, Wollstonecraft argues that external accomplishments are often taught in order “to please the other sex . . . to get married, and this endeavor calls forth all her powers” (31). After this marriage, however, women have little training for how to “fill up the vacuum of life” (32). Reason, Wollstonecraft argues, the main resource and goal of internal accomplishments, must be trained and exercised to render the rest of both virtuous and enjoyable.

Wollstonecraft’s attitudes towards domesticity, the purpose of education, and the role of status used to define character in *Thoughts* can be difficult to reconcile with the more radical voice and arguments that define her later works. Whether Wollstonecraft believed everything she wrote in *Thoughts* or felt the need to tread lightly around deeply held cultural beliefs is impossible to answer and is in some ways beside the point. “Subversion of any ideology might,” Kathryn Steele reminds us, “require superficial deference to its beliefs—cloaking a revolutionary intention with the fabric of convention



as a way to ensure publication and sale, or elude censors.”<sup>55</sup> As a young woman endeavoring to make her first foray into the world of publishing and in need of an income, Wollstonecraft may have also felt a more radical resistance to gendered ideology would spoil her further aspirations as an intellectual. Indeed, as Guest observes, Bluestocking women were accepted and applauded by the general reading public, specifically because they “present themselves as models of acceptable or traditional notions of feminine virtue.”<sup>56</sup>

Before turning to Wollstonecraft’s writing for children, consider the last piece of educational theory that Wollstonecraft wrote. Although only three manuscript pages in length, the extant fragment of *Hints on the Management of Infants* offers a window into the evolution of Wollstonecraft’s thoughts on education and pedagogy in the decade after the publication of *Thoughts*. *Management* is generically quite different, using an epistolary format to communicate with its reader. Rather than using the distant and didactic voice of *Thoughts* to instruct readers, Wollstonecraft adopted the tone and style of a familiar, addressing the reader through a personable and less authoritative mode of the letter writer. According to Gary Kelly, the “‘familiar letter’ was the kind of informal, unlearned, personal domestic, desultory, brief writing for which women were thought to be suited by nature and education.”<sup>57</sup> Such familiar letters were used to communicate between familial and intellectual networks, connecting the private with the public. By

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55. Kathryn L. Steele, “Hester Mulso Chapone and the Problem of the Individual Reader,” *The Eighteenth Century* 53.4 (2012), 488.

56. Guest, “Bluestocking Feminism,” 61.

57. Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 114.

using this epistolary convention, *Management* was perhaps intended for a less literate, less wealthy audience than the one *Thoughts* must have found. Its form and style are more approachable to the women it addresses, whose role, as seen in *Thoughts*, is to provide for the education of young children.

Far less prescriptive in its advice, *Management* is still concerned with the exercise of reason as the main goal for the text's stakeholders. To this point, Wollstonecraft states that "general rules, founded on the soundest reason, demand individual modification; but, if I can persuade any of the rising generation to exercise their reason on this head, I am content" (459). Rather than instilling a set of precepts into the heads of mothers and children such as in *Thoughts*, *Management* trusts the capacity of these women to follow their own reasoned judgment. Wollstonecraft is explicit in her acknowledgement of middle-class readers as one of the primary stakeholders of *Management*, but unlike in *Thoughts* she views the role of class differently regarding education. "My advice will probably be found most useful to mothers in the middle class," writes Wollstonecraft, "and it is from them that the lower imperceptibly gains improvement" (459). Although still viewed as children themselves considering their education and upbringing, servants are no longer represented as a lurking threat to the education of children. Instead, Wollstonecraft asserts that it is the obligation of the middle class to instruct their servants to rise above the manners customarily assigned to them: "custom, produced by reason in one, may safely be the effect of imitation in the other" (459). Although still condescending in her view of class, this shift from *Thoughts* to *Management* exemplifies a belief in a progressive, lifelong trajectory of education and its role in social reproduction. As Wollstonecraft herself learned and revised her views on education over

time, she herself passes this knowledge onto mothers, who pass it on to their children and to their servants.

### **Literature for Children**

Wollstonecraft's two major works of children's literature, *Original Stories* and the posthumous *Lessons*, take their cues from the educational theory she authored at the time of their composition. While Wollstonecraft began as a believer in the rational and didactic forms prevalent in the eighteenth century, she eventually adopted emergent notions of imagination, the importance of childhood, and the value of experiential learning. *Original Stories* reflects the rational didacticism of *Thoughts*, characteristic of late eighteenth-century pedagogy. *Lessons* offers greater insight into the fragment of *Management*, both composed and marked by the growing interest in experiential learning, a movement in which Wollstonecraft was demonstrably influential.

Many scholars have characterized the abovementioned rational, didactic and imaginative, experiential educations as belonging to two distinct movements, referred to as the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The Enlightenment and Romanticism, however are not discrete, mutually exclusive movements. Even James Holt McGavran, who differentiates between distinct Enlightenment and the Romantic pedagogies, demonstrates that "there was no absolute dichotomy between visionary and moralist."<sup>58</sup> Rather than use the terms "Enlightenment" and "Romantic" to describe the traditions that Wollstonecraft belonged to and was influenced by, I refer to the specific concepts that

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58. James Holt McGavran, Jr., Introduction to *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 6.

these terms are meant to evoke. Rather than the Enlightenment, I refer to Wollstonecraft's earliest influences as rational, didactic, imitative, and characteristic of residual eighteenth-century ideology. Rather than Romantic, I refer to Wollstonecraft's later influences as imaginative, experiential, and rooted in the innate genius of the child, characteristic of emergent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideology.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, women writers came to dominate the market for children's literature, in no small part because of their culturally defined role as bearers and caretakers of children. According to Norma Clarke, "most if not all" women writing children's literature at the time, "had experience [with] teaching and training up children, either in the capacity of older sisters, or as mothers, aunts, governesses and teachers."<sup>59</sup> (It is worth pointing out that Wollstonecraft embodied each of these roles throughout her lifetime.) Publishing in the field not only provided other women in similar roles with useful material to fulfill their teacherly duties, it allowed women to publicly claim pedagogical authority, even at a time when men continued to encroach on professions that were historically delegated to women.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, John Newberry is perhaps the most prominent children's writer of the era in contemporary public memory, but male authors were outnumbered at the time by the likes of Wollstonecraft, Sarah Trimmer, and Bluestocking authors such as Barbauld, More, and Catherine Talbot. Given that they wrote children's literature during the eighteenth century, these same women writers drew from the ideology of rationality and the form of didacticism.

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59. Clarke, "Cursed Barbauld Crew," 94.

60. Clarke, "Cursed Barbauld Crew," 94-95.

By challenging gendered norms of masculine reason and pleasing femininity, many women authors of children's literature sought to inculcate principles of rational femininity. In Wollstonecraft's own attack on this aspect of eighteenth-century gender ideology, she observes that "most of the male writers ... have warmly inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point to render them pleasing."<sup>61</sup> As this would suggest, children's literature was highly politicized, opposing cultural conservatism and promoting reform within British society. For much of the eighteenth-century, childhood was viewed as the formative stage where youth were to be molded into future citizens. These citizens were largely figured as men. Although men dominated the ideological discourse of eighteenth-century education, women writers were largely responsible for shaping the youth of nation for their roles. The proliferation of children's literature by women in the latter years of the eighteenth century leads Mitzi Myers to observe that the socialization of children was the end goal of education.<sup>62</sup> Socialization was the goal of children's literature, but women authors like Wollstonecraft did not simply uphold social norms. Instead, children's literature could and often did provide readers with a framework for challenging the social and political contexts into which they entered on adulthood.<sup>63</sup> Particularly for the education of young girls, this

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61. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 45.

62. Mitzi Myers, "Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames, and Moral Mothers: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Female Tradition in Georgian Children's Books," *Children's Literature* 14 (1986), 33.

63. Ferguson argues that for both child and instructor, schooling offers the possibility of resisting the reproduction of the capitalist worker. Although the division between work and play represents the capitalist intent to suppress the imagination by relegating it to the domain of play, Ferguson suggests that play is liberatory space for children that allows for the exploration of other possibilities of being outside of labor,

literature offered models of rational womanhood, such as Wollstonecraft's Mrs. Mason, Ellenor Fenn's Mrs. Teachwell, and Sarah Trimmer's Mrs. Andrews, that girls could embody upon entering adulthood.<sup>64</sup>

Authors of children's literature prioritized moral education over literacy instruction. According to James Holt McGavran, interpretations of Locke's *tabula rasa* argued that children were "in great need of both religious and secular instruction because, being smaller, weaker, and less developed than adults, they were inherently more subject to temptation."<sup>65</sup> As Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* and *Lessons* demonstrate, behavior and morality was the provenance of children's literature, while only small portions of the texts would be dedicated to rote instruction.

With an emphasis on rationality and socialization came the attendant form and genre of didacticism. Stressing the function of the text as the instruction of the reader beyond other considerations, namely imagination, didacticism was the key aesthetic development in eighteenth-century education, although its perceived value has aged poorly. Wollstonecraft affirmed the utility of didacticism in *Thoughts*, observing that "reading is the most rational employment," and that "judicious books enlarge the mind and improve the heart."<sup>66</sup> While Wollstonecraft's nemeses James Fordyce and John Gregory were advocates of didacticism when educating children, didacticism became a woman's aesthetic during the period. As Bannet argues, didacticism in the eighteenth

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production or reproductive. See Ferguson, "Children, Childhood and Capitalism," 113-120.

64. Clarke, "Cursed Barbauld Crew," 96-101.

65. McGavran, *Romanticism and Children's Literature*, 5.

66. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, 20.

century “put into woman’s hands a powerful instrument of social change,” one which “taught by offering constructed and embodied ideals of conduct for readers’ imitation and by persuading them that these ideals were possible and proper, admirable, and entirely worthy of imitation in the state of the current world.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Hilary Havens goes on to suggest that women writers of didactic works “interrogated traditionally patriarchal aspects of society ... using the genre to question the limits of ... fictional, societal, cultural, and national structures in exciting and unprecedented ways during this important historical moment.”<sup>68</sup> Didacticism was an important aesthetic and ideological tool in the writing woman’s repertoire, but its reclamation by women devalued it as a form.

Changing political attitudes in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, in response to the French Revolution, posed an existential threat to women’s authority over education. Late eighteenth-century theorists condemned the lessons and style of earlier pedagogy. Although women writers of didactic education continued to be prolific, they attracted the spleen of cultural critics such as Charles Lamb, who swore against “the cursed Barbauld Crew, those Blights and Blasts of all that is human in man and child.”<sup>69</sup> Women’s didacticism in children’s literature offended the likes of Lamb because of a rigid set of dichotomies, described by Norma Clarke, that characterized the divide between imaginative literature and didactic literature: “instruction is opposed to amusement, morality to fun, and the ‘real’ world to fantasy, as if these categories were

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67. Bannet, *Domestic Revolution*, 10.

68. Hilary Havens, Introduction to *Didactic Novels and British Women’s Writing*, ed. Hilary Havens (New York: Routledge, 2017), 13.

69. Clarke, “Cursed Barbauld Crew,” 91.

guarded by impermeable boundaries.”<sup>70</sup> Clearly, the lines drawn by imaginative against didactic writers had as much to do with the gender of the combatants as it did with the philosophical differences between the two parties. While the emerging cadre of men condemned formal and didactic education, women theorists continued to point out that women had never been allowed the luxury of such an education.

The imaginative turn in British education was not simply about undermining women’s authority to education, as many women writers, Wollstonecraft included, were foundational, yet often neglected figures of what has been called the British Romantic movement. Rather, “Romanticism” embodied several key ideological points that differentiated itself from the residual eighteenth-century ideology. Clarke refers to one of the main principles of the Romantic movement of education as the “cult of childhood.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the late-eighteenth century was the birth of childhood as a discrete concept. According to McGavran, falling infant mortality rates due to improved medical technologies resulted in parents being able to “plan smaller families, hold more realistic hopes for the survival of both children and their families’ fortunes, and permit themselves to care more deeply for their offspring.”<sup>72</sup> With this paradigm shift, children were no longer viewed as smaller adults. The perception of childhood as a distinct phase, coupled with the increased mortality and value of children, led to “an increase in in the perceived value of formal education, especially for boys, as a preparation for an economically and

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70. Clarke, “Cursed Barbauld Crew,” 91-92.

71. Clarke, “Cursed Barbauld Crew,” 101.

72. McGavran, *Romanticism and Children’s Literature*, 3.



morally sound life.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, children, but mainly boys, came to be perceived with a special attention by the Romantics.

The invention of childhood placed an importance on the thoughts, experiences, and inner life of the child. McGavran emphasizes that childhood was viewed by imaginative writers as a “special time” in a person’s life, one which came with “an intuitive way of knowing.”<sup>74</sup> Rather than molding children into future adults and citizens, emerging educational theory asserted that children were naturally inclined towards intuitive and imaginative learning, and that contrived pedagogical systems would hinder the natural development and education of children.<sup>75</sup> These beliefs find their clearest articulation in the early writings of William Blake, who also illustrated the second edition of Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories* at Joseph Johnson’s behest. According to Blake, “the true meth- / -od of knowledge / is experiment / the true faculty / of knowing must / be the faculty which / experiences.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the acquisition of knowledge must come from experience, rather than didactic instruction. While older eighteenth-century models of education had viewed reason as the pinnacle and goal of education, the Romantics believed that a myopic privileging of reason led to the decay of the child’s natural faculties. Once again, Blake crystallizes this idea with the following metaphor: “If the

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73. McGavran, *Romanticism and Children’s Literature*, 3.

74. McGavran, *Romanticism and Children’s Literature*, 3-4.

75. As Ferguson points out, these early “Romantic” notions of childhood were upheld twentieth-century research by the likes Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget, which found that children have a “tendency to embrace the world in ways that are especially sensuous and imaginative.” Ferguson, “Children, Childhood and Capitalism,” 118.

76. William Blake, *All Religions Are One*, in *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: Norton, 2008), 5.

doors of perceptions were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. /  
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."<sup>77</sup>  
By neglecting sense through the privileging of human reason, the Enlightenment had divorced humanity from their innate knowledge potential.

Wollstonecraft belies distinctions between didactic and imaginative writing because her involvement with these forms wax and wane throughout her career. As the following section demonstrates, Wollstonecraft articulated a strong preference for reason in *Original Stories* and a strong preference for experience in *Lessons*. However, these preferences are not mutually exclusive, as there is evidence of both schools of thought permeating each work. Wollstonecraft believed that reason and socialization were important components of girls' education because these elements had been proscribed to men and had been used to justify women's inferiority for so long. Yet she also believed in the concept of inherent genius and the utility of discovering one's own education and way in the world. Although these two texts seek to educate young girls through different means and for varying purposes, they each demonstrate the importance of education for women and young girls at a time when their education was largely ornamental and/or utilitarian.

### **From Instructive to Experiential Pedagogy**

*Original Stories* expands on the work of *Thoughts*, translating the theory of the former into children's literature. As Wollstonecraft indicates from the preface, *Original Stories*

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77. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: Norton, 2008), 75.

is intended for the eyes of not only children, but their tutors as well, who will instruct children readers in the finer points of the stories' moral lessons. This is mirrored by the contents of the book, which follows the preteens Mary and Caroline and their governess Mrs. Mason. Loaded with personal and intellectual faults, the girls are guided by Mrs. Mason towards a more rational understanding of themselves and the world, clearly based on the model of education offered in *Thoughts*. The girls are described as “the children of wealthy parents ... left entirely to the management of servants, or people equally ignorant” (361), one of the great causes of miseducation as defined in *Thoughts*. Through the figure of Mrs. Mason, an author surrogate for Wollstonecraft who has experienced great difficulty and sadness while becoming an exemplary educator of youth, the girls are reformed through a steady diet of conversation, precept, and exemplification.

As a didactic text, *Original Stories* has an explicit goal of educating young girls to negotiate their place within society and to exercise their reasoning capabilities. While Mrs. Mason serves as an external monitor of the girls' conduct, her lessons serve to inculcate a duty for the girls to self-monitor their own conduct based on rational principles. Using “conversational” episodes, Wollstonecraft adopts a vicarious Socratic method of instruction in *Original Stories*. While Mary and Caroline learn through dialogue with Mrs. Mason and the exemplary figures introduced to them, readers learn to model these roles and to learn through observing these dialogues. *Original Stories*, like *Thoughts*, is very much within the Enlightenment tradition of instruction by imitation and the mastery of the passions via reason. In a masculine-dominated society, Wollstonecraft's lessons in *Original Stories* seek to extend the reins of reason and the Enlightenment to a “female education.”

In writing *Original Stories*, Wollstonecraft acknowledges that parents are often unprepared to cultivate the moral and intellectual lives of children, and that the lessons contained in the text may need to be reinforced by an instructor. The intentions of the text are made immediately clear from the full title of the book: *Original Stories from Real Life, with Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*. The title signposts the text's involvement with socializing the child (regulating the affections) and honing the use of the child's reason (forming the mind), yet the conversations drawn from "real life" indicate that these are no fairy tales. "A product of the conduct book tradition," explains Kirstin Collins Hanley,<sup>78</sup> *Original Stories* relies on the direct invocation of teaching moments within the text to educate the book's characters, and by proxy, its readers. The Socratic convention of conversation, with an aim towards "perspicuity and simplicity of style," as Wollstonecraft alludes to in the preface (359), avoids the more tedious and condescending precepts of Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Women* (1765) or Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774). The conversations in *Original Stories* fulfill a dual purpose, however: "to assist the teacher as well as the pupil" (360). "Every child requires a different mode of treatment," Wollstonecraft recognizes, "but a writer can only choose one, and that must be modified by those who are actually engaged with young people in their studies" (360). As Hanley observes, this dual attention to student and instructor "reflects the growing

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78. Kirstin Collins Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft, Pedagogy, and the Practice of Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25.

concern among popular educationists ... that the child's learning, and especially reading, had to be guided and well supervised by a parent or other authority figure."<sup>79</sup>

Using a didactic style throughout the text, Wollstonecraft weaves narrative with precept in the Socratic conversations between Mrs. Mason and the girls, between instructor and student. The conversations themselves revolve largely around episodes in which Mary and Caroline run afoul of moral or social norms, followed by Mrs. Mason introducing an allegory or a new character to narrativize the lesson the girls must learn. For example, in Chapter IX, Caroline is depicted as gluttonous and the next morning she and her sister are taken by Mrs. Mason to watch the farm animals being fed. They come across the pigs, "greedy creatures" ravening over the breakfast in their trough, to which Caroline reacts strongly: "Caroline blushed, she saw this sight was meant for her, and she felt ashamed of her gluttony" (399). Not one to let a precept go by without further reinforcement, Mrs. Mason remarks to the girls that "if we exceed moderation, the mind will be oppressed, and soon become the slave of the body, or both growl, listless and inactive" (400).

Although the didactic nature of *Original Stories* has suggested that it is not attuned to the attention or interest of children,<sup>80</sup> Wollstonecraft balances precept and example to write age-appropriate lessons for readers. In observing Mary's penchant for procrastination, Mrs. Mason is said to often comment on this attribute, "but, unwilling to burden her with precepts, she waited for a glaring example. One was soon thrown in her

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79. Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 26.

80. Paul Hazard, *Books, Children, and Men*, translated by Marguerite Mitchell (Boston: Horn Book, 1983), 37, quoted in Myers, 41.

way, and she determined that it should not pass unobserved” (409). No strict conduct book, *Original Stories* rarely offers a lesson for children without narrativizing its occurrence and correction. Perhaps the only instance of precept without example occurs near the end of the book, as Mrs. Mason describes the various types of pride that exist to the girls, without an attendant story. This exception notwithstanding, the more frequent method of precept and example helps to interest readers and make accessible the precepts being taught. Moreover, it helps the unprepared parent to understand how to make lessons for children more relevant and digestible, whether through animal allegory or vivid example.

The most explicitly proto-feminist aspect of *Original Stories* is Wollstonecraft’s injunction that reason and rationality are innate and cultivatable capabilities of girls, and by extension, women. Although, as Alan Richardson has observed, many readers’ and critics’ response toward Mrs. Mason has categorized her as “‘icy and merciless’ and ... a bloodless ‘monster,’”<sup>81</sup> these responses are emblematic of the misogyny Wollstonecraft battled throughout her career. What some have perceived as icy and monstrous can otherwise be described as rational and agentive. The first chapter of *Original Stories* is particularly instructive in this regard, as Mrs. Mason warns Mary and Caroline against their typical behavior of destroying worms and insects, instead making the rational argument that “God cares for them, and gives them everything that is necessary to render their existence comfortable” (368). In a dark comedic turn, Mrs. Mason further states “you are often troublesome ... yet I do not kill you” (368). Mrs. Mason teaches the girls

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81. Alan Richardson, “Mary Wollstonecraft on Education,” *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 30.

not to kill things out of frivolity, by drawing a rational analogue between worms and insects and their own lives. While numerous critics have abhorred Mrs. Mason's mock suggestion that she might kill the girls, it is a powerfully rational and effective point of comparison for the object lessons she is imparting.

As in *Thoughts*, *Original Stories* draws a distinction between interior and exterior accomplishments, arguing for the importance of the former over the latter. "The soul of beauty," according to Mrs. Mason, "consists in the body gracefully exhibiting the emotions and variations of the informing mind" (390). Endeavoring to turn Mary and Caroline from the obsession with women's exterior beauty, Mrs. Mason instructs readers that "internal beauty [is] valuable on its own account, and not like that of the person, which resembles a toy, that pleases the observer, but does not render the possessor happy" (392). Through this analogy, Mrs. Mason suggests that women's beauty is cultivated and emphasized for the pleasure of men, rather than for the benefit of the woman herself, who must instead focus on internal beauty for her own benefit and happiness. As is typical of any Wollstonecraft text about women and education, she once again takes aim at the system of women's accomplishments in *Original Stories*. One of Mrs. Mason's friends, Mrs. Trueman, observes to Mary that "you value accomplishments much too highly – they may give grace to virtue, but are nothing without solid worth" (435). As Mary desires to sing as well as Mrs. Trueman, Mrs. Mason affirms her friend's observation, stating that while "accomplishments should be cultivated to render us pleasing to our domestic friends ... we ought rather to improve our own abilities than servilely to copy theirs" (435-436). By de-emphasizing the importance of exterior accomplishments for their own sake, the text instructs readers to look after their

intellectual abilities for their own intrinsic rewards, so as not to neglect their own happiness in favor of the pleasure of those around them.

*Original Stories* undoubtedly is inflected by Wollstonecraft's pedagogical forebears, who adhered to overly rationalistic formulations of reason and passion. Throughout the text, Mrs. Mason advises her charges to control their passions and to hone their reason. This is demonstrated when Mary restrains her laughter at the limping sailor, whose "awkwardness made him truly respectable, because he has lost the use of his limbs ... saving the lives of his fellow creatures" (398). Elsewhere in the text the girls, and readers by proxy, are advised that "if you wish to be useful, govern your desires and wait not till distress obtrudes itself" if they wish to demonstrate authentic generosity (445). Finally, in her parting words to Mary and Caroline, Mrs. Mason reminds the children that "the wild pursuits of fancy must be conquered" to be truly benevolent and helpful to the rest of humanity (449). If the language of restraint, government, and conquest seem harsh in these examples, it must be remembered that Wollstonecraft is responding to the exigence of poorly socialized middle-class and elite children, who have the capacity to bring about the most good or the most ill in society. Furthermore, as Richardson reminds us, Wollstonecraft was writing against the backdrop of a "virtual conspiracy of male educators and writers seeking to render women more weak and less rational than they otherwise would become," and to which a "nascent Romantic cult of childhood innocence and imagination" was at times accomplice.<sup>82</sup>

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82. Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," 25-27.



To suggest that Wollstonecraft was diametrically opposed to imaginative principles of education, however, is to overlook many cues within *Original Stories*.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Wollstonecraft's pedagogical innovations are cleverly hidden behind what Gloria Apilini has called "an old didacticism."<sup>84</sup> Even in the preface to the book, Wollstonecraft suggests that "knowledge should be gradually imparted, and flow more from example than teaching; example directly addresses the sense, the first inlets to the heart" (359). In this short passage, Wollstonecraft acknowledges the importance of sensory experience to children's education in addition to the fact that children learn best from example as opposed to precept. While the stories often refer to didactic morals, the fact that these morals are communicated through *stories*, evinces an awareness of experience as an important pedagogical method. This is reinforced in a later chapter of *Original Stories*, in which the narrator states "Mary's judgment grew every day clearer; or, more properly speaking, she acquired *experience*; and her lively feelings fixed the conclusions of reason in her mind" (440; emphasis added). As this suggests, experiential and rational education

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83. Amy Carol Reeves, Orm Mitchell, and Geoffrey Summerfield have each disparaged Wollstonecraft's pedagogy in *Original Stories*, out of deference to William Blake's pedagogy and illustrations to the second edition of *Original Stories*. Reeves, Mitchell, and Summerfield broadly argue that Blake's "Romantic" illustrations redeem the text with a counternarrative to Wollstonecraft's supposedly outdated and stifling didacticism. Amy Carol Reeves, "Saving Mrs. Mason's Soul: How Blake Rewrites Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life*," in *Romanticism and Parenting: Image, Instruction and Ideology*, ed. Carolyn A. Weber. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 37-52; Orm Mitchell, "Blake's Subversive Illustrations to Wollstonecraft's *Stories*," *Mosaic* 17 (1984), 18-27; Geoffrey Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason* (London: Methuen, 1984), 229.

84. Gloria Alpin, "Arts and Politics in *Power-full Images for Children: William Blake's Engravings in Mary Wollstonecraft's Original Stories from Real Life* (1791 Edition)," (paper presented at the Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature Conference, Dublin, Ireland, March 5/6 2010), 9.

are not exclusive to one another, but are in fact mutually constitutive. Furthermore, Mrs. Mason's lessons are not overriding the inherent nature of Mary and Caroline, as many late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century educators feared rational education would. Rather, as the introduction to *Original Stories* notes, the girls "had caught every prejudice that the vulgar casually instill" (361). Mary and Caroline's upbringing has already corrupted their childhood innocence, to use the "Romantic" parlance; Mrs. Mason's lessons instead ameliorate their miseducation in favor an education that is better suited to their happiness and the happiness of those around them. As Myers suggests, "young heroines like Wollstonecraft's sisters ... culturally disposed toward puerility, need special help in forming 'a taste for truth and realities.'"<sup>85</sup>

Clearly in line with rational principles of education, *Original Stories* demonstrates Wollstonecraft's commitment to the role of socialization in children's literature. According to Richardson, *Original Stories* "seeks to reengineer the child reader's subjectivity along lines of self-surveillance and openness to adult control."<sup>86</sup> One of the more important lessons in *Original Stories* appears to be distinguishing the social standings of children, servants, and adults, in which each of these categories are mutually exclusive. In an enlightening episode, Mary is berating a maid—"I wonder at your impertinence, to talk thus to me – do you know who you are speaking to?"—indicating her perceived superiority of someone ten years her senior (412). However, Mrs. Mason intervenes, rebuking Mary by pointing out that the maid does not help Mary because she is her inferior, but because Mary cannot do things for herself without the maid's help.

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85. Myers, "Impeccable Governesses," 44.

86. Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," 31.

“You may perhaps have recollected,” Mrs. Mason chides, “that children are inferior to servants who act from the dictates of reason ... while children must be governed and directed till *their’s* gains strength” (412; emphasis in original). This lesson contrasts with the rhetoric of *Thoughts*, which asserts that servants are but children to be led by the advanced breeding of their superiors. Elsewhere in *Original Stories*, Mrs. Mason affirms that servants and children are inferior to other adults, stating “I govern my servants, and you, by attending strictly to truth” (384). The synthesis of these two texts provides a fascinating equation: children are inferior to servants, who are in turn inferior to adults. At no point are servants considered adults or children, suggesting that the concept of childhood (and by extension, adulthood), outlined in the previous section, extends only to those of the middle and elite classes. Despite the troubling implications of these defined roles, the lesson imparted by Mrs. Mason is that one ought to respect the role of their inferiors, for “if I behave improperly to servants, I am really their inferior, as I abuse a trust, and imitate not the Being, whose servant I am” (412).

Wollstonecraft is concerned with demarcating the roles of child and adult in *Original Stories*, as well as the behavior appropriate to these specific roles. Part of socializing children becomes how they will act as adults and how they should know how to act. While status is clearly an important aspect of understanding how to behave, it is an inadequate guide for all situations, and as Caroline’s behavior demonstrates, is open to abuse. Rather Wollstonecraft takes a page from her eighteenth-century predecessors by seeking to instill reflective, self-monitoring behavior in children through *Original Stories*. As Erik Bond argues, post-Restoration writers, “due to a rapidly expanding print culture, moved from imagining that they could govern others to imagining that they could govern

an interior self.”<sup>87</sup> Rather than relying on external apparatuses such as a police force to monitor the behaviors of citizens or authors who would tell readers how to act and feel, writers from James Boswell to Frances Burney believed that they and others could internalize these apparatuses to form self-governing citizens.

Chapter VI of *Original Stories* is a prime demonstration of how children are socialized to begin the process of internalizing governance within the text. While Mrs. Mason has directly reproved Mary and Caroline for their missteps in previous chapters, this chapter begins with the girls flaunting their appearance and mocking the looks of others before being sent to bed by their preceptor. When they are dismissed by Mrs. Mason, they are told “I give you to-night a kiss of peace, an affectionate one you have not earned” (388). Without being told directly of their misbehavior, the girls puzzle over Mrs. Mason’s comment, noting that “her quiet steady displeasure made them feel so little in their own eyes [and], they wished her to smile that they might be something; for all their consequence seemed to arise from her approbation” (388). The purpose of this episode is to demonstrate the importance of interpreting social cues, so as for children to understand when they have done wrong without immediate and explicit reproof. By the same token, the text also instructs parents and tutors to adopt a similar manner of reproving their charges as Mrs. Mason.

Once children can properly evaluate and reflect upon their behavior, they no longer require the watchful eye of parent or instructor. Such is the case in the final chapter of *Original Stories*, where, having adequately reformed the girls, Mrs. Mason

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87. Erik Bond, *Reading London: Urban Speculation and Imaginative Government in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 129-130.

takes her leave, but not before she presents them with a book she has written for them.

Presumably it is the text that the reader holds, for Mrs. Mason states,

I have written the subjects that we have discussed. Recur frequently to it, for the stories illustrating the instruction it contains, you will not feel in such a great degree the want of my personal advice. Some of the reasoning you may not thoroughly comprehend, but, as your understandings ripen, you will feel its full force (449).

Receiving the book from Mrs. Mason inaugurates a rite of passage for the girls, as they are now capable of conducting themselves without direct observance and instruction.

Instead, by recurring to the book, they will further internalize the lessons it holds, until they are able to behave properly without the assistance of the book. The child reader of the *Original Stories*, as the introduction explains, will follow a similar trajectory: being helped by an instructor to read the book, reading the book on their own, and finally no longer needing the book at all. As Richardson succinctly states, “the girls no longer require the constant presence of a monitor only because they have learned to monitor themselves.”<sup>88</sup>

*Original Stories*, finally, participates in the eighteenth-century tradition of children’s literature through its use of exemplary figures. According to Clarke, “feminist polemicists like Mary Wollstonecraft sought to offer young women a model of female adulthood grounded in reason and thought that would give them a measure of control

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88. Richardson, “Mary Wollstonecraft on Education,” 31.

over their lives.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, Mrs. Mason, as many others have observed,<sup>90</sup> is the primary figure from whom readers are intended to take as an exemplary woman. Described as “a woman of tenderness and discernment . . . induced to take on herself the important charge [of educating girls] through motives of compassion” (361), Mrs. Mason is the rational woman par excellence, as has been demonstrated throughout this section. Perhaps more intriguing, however, is how Mary and Caroline are presented as examples for one another to imitate, despite their numerous flaws. In the episode of Caroline’s gluttony, for instance, Caroline finds in Mary a figure worth emulating. Having been denied the opportunity of going on a garden walk as punishment, Caroline hears of Mary’s behavior during the walk from Mrs. Mason: “As Mary had before convinced me that she could regulate her appetites, I gave her leave to pluck as much fruit as she wished; and she did not abuse my indulgence. On the contrary, she spent most part of the time in gathering some for me, and her attention made it taste sweeter” (400-401). Having heard of Mary’s behavior, the reader is informed that “Caroline determined to copy in future her sister’s temperance and self-denial” (401). Thus, Wollstonecraft indicates the virtue of both vertical forms of emulation (adults as examples for children) through the Mrs. Mason figure, as well as horizontal forms of emulation (children as examples to other children), through Mary and Caroline’s relationship.

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89. Clarke, “Cursed Barbauld Crew,” 101.

90. See Myers, “Impeccable Governesses”; Richardson, “Mary Wollstonecraft on Educations”; Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft*. It is perhaps worth mentioning that this positive evaluation of Mrs. Mason is a relatively recent development in our post-Romantic world. For a catalogue of past abuses of Mrs. Mason’s character within scholarship see Myers, “Impeccable Governesses,” 41.

If *Original Stories* may be accused of perpetuating eighteenth-century dogma about rationality, socialization, and conformity in education, Wollstonecraft's unfinished and posthumously published fragment *Lessons* defies any such label. Richardson boldly claims that "if completed, [*Lessons*] might have changed the early history of the British children's book ... [and] would have made a pronounced contrast to the steely didacticism of *Original Stories*."<sup>91</sup> If *Original Stories* is of the didactic tradition, *Lessons* can be situated at least partially in the emergent imaginative movement. As the editor of Wollstonecraft's posthumous works, William Godwin provocatively claims that "it is obvious that the author [of *Lessons*, Wollstonecraft,] has struck out a path of her own, and by no means intrenched upon the plans of her predecessors" (467). Unfortunately, Wollstonecraft's premature death from puerperal fever following the birth of her second daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (later Shelley), left the text unfinished and in a curious state.

It is difficult to separate *Lessons* from Godwin's editorial fingerprints, which gives some precarious insight into the composition history and intended purpose of the work. In an epigraph affixed below the title of the work, Godwin places the sentence found on the back of the original manuscript: "The first book of a series which I intended to have written for my unfortunate girl" (468). The unfortunate girl in question appears to be Fanny Wollstonecraft Imlay, Wollstonecraft's youngest and "illegitimate" daughter from a previous relationship. In a footnote to the epigraph, Godwin concludes the passage "to have been written in a period of desperation, in the month of October, 1795," about the time of her second suicide attempt (468). Although Godwin's supposition cannot be

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91. Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," 24, 39.

taken completely as fact, the evidence he draws from offers clues to the exigence for the work. Without a coherent father figure for Fanny in much of her early life, and haunted by a persistent melancholy, Wollstonecraft may very well have written *Lessons* as a surrogate mother-text, lest Wollstonecraft die by suicide. A less biographical reading of the epigraph suggests a more broadly applicable audience, for like Fanny and Wollstonecraft before her, many young girls grew up without strong or healthy parental figures who could tend to their early education. Read in this manner, *Lessons* appears as a surrogate for any girl left without caring parents, in addition to the presumably intended audience of Fanny.

Godwin places the date of the epigraph's composition in October, 1795, but it seems exceedingly likely that at least parts of *Lessons* were composed afterwards, during Wollstonecraft's relationship with Godwin. The case in point rests in the references to a father and a younger brother William, in the text: "Look at William, he smiles; but you could laugh aloud ... Papa laughed louder" (470). Returning to an autobiographical reading, the reference to "Papa" suggests that this and other passages were written during her relationship with Godwin, who had acceded to the role of a father figure in Fanny's life. Simultaneously, "William" seems to be a reference to Wollstonecraft's unborn child, who was presumed by Wollstonecraft and Godwin to be a boy they had taken to calling "Master William."<sup>92</sup> One fascinating implication is that Wollstonecraft composed at least part of *Lessons* for Fanny with the erroneous foreknowledge that she would have a

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92. Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws*, 453.



brother but have lost her mother in the process.<sup>93</sup> Such a reading gives a futuristic cast to the text, in which Wollstonecraft attempted to narrate the next several years of Fanny's life without being there to witness it.

Beyond the curiosities of its composition, however, *Lessons* is a powerful reminder of Wollstonecraft's desire to rewrite and update her previously published beliefs with the benefit of more wisdom and experience. While Hanley states that *Lessons* is a spiritual prequel to *Original Stories*,<sup>94</sup> I instead suggest that *Lessons* is rather a revision of *Original Stories*. Indeed, much happened in Wollstonecraft's life between the publication *Original Stories* and the composition of *Lessons*, the two major events being the birth of her own child and the French Revolution, which radicalized her politics. Just as the fragment of *Management* adopts a more colloquial air and a slightly more enlightened class politics than *Thoughts*, *Lessons* takes up an experiential form and a child-centered ideology in favor of the mostly didactic and teacher-centric *Original Stories*. Rather than casting a maternal pedagogue as the central character of a diegetic narrative, *Lessons* makes use of an agentive second-person narrative structure to engage and affirm the child reader's experiences. The progressive arc in *Lessons*, from learning and copying words, to describing actions, to reflecting on the nature of things, further demonstrates the trajectory found in the fragment of *Management*. That is, childhood and adulthood are not static, but rather descriptive states in a lifelong rising trajectory of education. *Lessons* is not dogmatically Romantic, just as *Original Stories* has been

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93. This would be a sound rationale for writing the text, given that mortality rates for mothers giving birth during the period were quite grim.

94. Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 90.

demonstrated to be influenced by both eighteenth-century traditions; it comprises what Wollstonecraft deemed to be the best of both form and ideology to instruct her own daughter and others.

The important role of experience in childhood education is the clearest Romantic principle to be found in *Lessons*. As opposed to the third-person narration and precept-heavy prose of *Original Stories*, *Lessons* uses a second-person narrative that invites the child reader into the experiences and examples committed to the page. The third lesson, for example, the first to include complete sentences, begins with short present-tense affirmative commands for the reader, “Stroke the cat. Play with the dog. Eat the bread,” before a shift to self-reflexive commands, “Hide your face. Wipe your nose. Wash your hands” (469). Although these passages are laden with commands, they invite the reader’s participation through an agentive second-person perspective that accommodates readers’ limited literacy and experience. In later lessons, these commands shift to reflections on readers’ past experiences: “*You were* then on the carpet, for *you could not* walk well. Still when *you were* in a hurry, *you used* to run” (470; emphasis added). These invitations to reflection, coupled with commands to act, structure readers’ growing experiences in a legible and supportive manner, guided by a caring, maternal voice. According to Harriet Devine Jump, *Lessons* is distinct from *Original Stories* owing to the “empathy, compassion, and care” of its narrator, as opposed to the cool rationality of Mrs. Mason.<sup>95</sup> As the text itself demonstrates, this maternal voice is necessary to prevent the child reader from unwittingly endangering themselves. Wollstonecraft’s maternal narrator

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95. Harriet Devine Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft, Writer* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 24.

warns readers, “not to put pins in your mouth, because they will stick in your throat” (471), and to “never touch the large knives” (472). While *Lessons* encourages child readers to experience the world for themselves through the assistance of the lessons, it is also wary of the dangers that unbridled and unsupervised exploration may pose.

*Lessons* relies on a narrative hierarchy to present these experiences to the child, in order to structure their growth. Understanding the accumulative nature of literacy, Wollstonecraft begins with a lesson consisting entirely of listed nouns—“Cat. Dog. Cow. Horse. ...”—before moving to a second lesson, which lists verbs and adjectives—“Come. Walk. Run. ... Sweet. Good. Clean. ...” (468). The third lesson introduces simple sentences of subjects and verbs—“The bird sings. The fire burns. The cat jumps” (469)—gradually introducing more complex sentences, such as this one in the final lesson: “After she has been told that she must not disturb mama, when poor mama is unwell, she thinks herself, that she must not wake papa when he is tired” (474). The narrative hierarchy of experience also emerges when the maternal narrator uses herself, the reader, and the young William to demonstrate the trajectory of intellectual growth and education. According to Hanley, *Lessons* takes “criticism of rote learning to a new level, [as] Wollstonecraft’s mama figure draws upon her own experiences as a child” as a point of comparison for young readers.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the narrator observes to readers that “four years ago you were as feeble as this little boy [William]” in order to demonstrate the readers’ growth (469), while also observing that “my mama took care of me, when I was a little girl, like you” when explaining not to eat pins (471). By setting these points of comparison, as Richardson notes, “the roles of parent and child are shown to be not fixed

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96. Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 89.

identities, but positions that shift with succeeding generations.”<sup>97</sup> In doing so, Wollstonecraft demystifies the authority and superiority of adulthood, allowing more agency for the child reader. Perhaps more importantly for her overall project, however, Wollstonecraft’s reference to generational churn and care work highlights the maturity of her theory of social reproduction at the end of her life.

Although “Romantic” pedagogues took for granted the innocence of childhood, Wollstonecraft does not necessarily take this for granted in *Lessons*, deviating slightly from this principle. As the above analysis demonstrates, Wollstonecraft carried reservations that children would be able to care for themselves without supervision and some form of instruction. This concern arises over the question of whether children are innately capable of sympathy and empathy, or at the very least, whether it needs to be refined through instruction. Wollstonecraft suggests that children do need instruction in this regard, as several lessons are concerned with caring for animals and other humans. The penultimate lesson, for example, narrates the actions of the reader caring for “a poor puppy [that] has tumbled off the stool” (473). The reader is advised to “run and stroke him” and to give the dog a saucer of milk to comfort the animal in its pain. Harkening back to the rational affection described in *Thoughts, Lessons* suggests that since “you are wiser than the dog, you must help him. The dog will love you for it, and run after you” (473). By narrating the rationale behind caring for the dog and the dog’s love for the reader, Wollstonecraft expresses reservations about the child’s innocence and innate capacity to do good, suggesting that there still must be rationality behind affection. This is echoed at the end of the lesson, where the narrator states, “I must make broth for the

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97. Richardson, “Mary Wollstonecraft on Education,” 38.

poor man who is sick. A sick man is like a child, he cannot help himself” (473). By comparing infirmity to childhood, Wollstonecraft makes legible to readers why one must help the sick, bridging care for animals, which is more attractive to young children, to care for other humans.

## **Conclusion**

A brief glance at Wollstonecraft’s pedagogical writings at the beginning and end of her career elucidates her remarkable evolution over the course of a mere decade. As an early-career author, Wollstonecraft’s thinking is clearly positioned within her experience as a bourgeois woman of the eighteenth century, whereas her late-career work engages with the new strands of “Romantic” thinking and begins to critique the class structure that she took for granted in the late 1780s. Throughout all of this change, her commitment to expanding the rights of women in the context of a British patriarchal system remains, although the specific methods and goals she uses and strives for mutate over time. Indeed, by looking at her pedagogical writings as bookends to her career, it is possible to see through a comparative analysis how she viewed education and authorship as an iterative process, one characterized by the growth of the author-pupil. Not only does one individual gain knowledge and experience over the course of their life, but, in the Whiggish view of history, the rest of human society progresses towards a more perfect understanding of their world and society. A true believer in this stadial theory of perfection, Wollstonecraft acknowledges that current knowledge is contingent and must be revised and recirculated throughout the course of one’s life to be truly educated.

As any progressive view of history also suggests, knowledge is situated within its own temporality. What is true today may not be true tomorrow, and the truths that are inconvenient or ignored one day may be welcomed and explored the next.

Wollstonecraft's pursuit of more radical and overt exhortations of women's rights (more visible in Chapters Three and Four), demonstrate not only her growing awareness of the rights discourse around women, but her perception that history was beginning to turn towards more enlightened views of gender in the aftermath of the French Revolution (even if her perception turned out to be premature). While *Thoughts* does not overtly challenge women's domestic roles, her refusal to indicate any substantial differences between young William and the "you" of *Lessons* suggests that neither boys nor girls ought to receive any special consideration in light of their gender. What is more, Wollstonecraft's relationship to *Lessons* and its extant exercises demonstrate that Wollstonecraft conceived of the project of education as extending beyond her lifetime. Evolution in educational theory would be carried out by successive generations, as daughter turned to mother, and one theory of pedagogy turned over to another. In other words, Wollstonecraft's educational career built a structure of reproductive labor that would educate young women and edify their tutors.

Finally, Wollstonecraft's pedagogical writings and her participation in publication and the discourse surrounding women's education shows the importance of textual relationships in eighteenth-century pedagogy. Women authors claimed authority over the field of education through publication, as Wollstonecraft did. But more than that, the instructional manuals and children's literature that these women published were vital instruments for educating mothers and daughters. As Wollstonecraft's publications

demonstrated, women were often unprepared to provide their children with a liberal or moral education, which necessitated manuals and stories such as *Thoughts* and *Original Stories* that would aid both parent and child in their pedagogical journey. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft was acutely aware that many girls were left to their own devices regarding formal education, as she herself had been. Through literature intended for the neglected or orphaned daughter, such as *Original Stories* and *Lessons*, Wollstonecraft projects a maternal figure to care for readers and to provide a figure for adult emulation. This textual mentorship and mothering may be the most innovative aspect of Wollstonecraft's pedagogical career, filling a gap in education that few before her had considered necessary. Such textual innovations would last beyond her lifetime and continue the reproductive work of young women's education. As Chapter Three proposes, the novel was the primary means through which adolescent girls and women could be educated about the conditions of their lives in the context of their gender.

### Chapter Three: Women's Solidarity and Wollstonecraft's Novels

Despite her status as one of the preeminent woman writers of her time, Wollstonecraft's first novel, *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) received a chilly reception. At some point in late 1787 Wollstonecraft secured publication for *Mary*, which would be printed the following year by Joseph Johnson. Known as a radical publisher and proprietor of the free inquiring *Analytical Review*, Johnson was no stranger to Wollstonecraft. He published her first book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). The year 1787 also saw the insolvency of Wollstonecraft's young girls' academy at Newington Green and her ill-fated residency as governess in the home of Lord and Lady Kingsborough in Dublin. After returning from Ireland in August, with little way to make an immediate living, she sought out Johnson, with whom she had remained in contact. Johnson offered to find her lodgings and work.<sup>1</sup> It was at this time that he agreed to publish Wollstonecraft's novel. But rather than encourage her to continue producing fiction, Johnson suggested that Wollstonecraft pursue a career in translation.<sup>2</sup> Surely, this was a stinging blow to the bourgeois pride that was characteristic of the Wollstonecraft family. While authorship was synonymous with creative (masculine) authority, translation was considered mimetic, i.e. feminine.

Johnson may simply have done Wollstonecraft a favor by publishing *Mary*. A short work, it was written in considerable haste. Wollstonecraft began writing in earnest

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1. See Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 133-137.

2. Jennifer Lorch, *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 30.



by June 1787 and likely finished it later that summer, most likely prior to her August meeting with Johnson.<sup>3</sup> Johnson was known largely for publishing political, religious, and didactic writing. It was out of the ordinary for him to publish a novel at all, given what Leslie Chard has characterized as “a lingering Calvinistic hostility to ‘imaginative’ literature.”<sup>4</sup> Johnson certainly did little to market the book, as there appear no extant advertisements for *Mary* in 1788. Conversely, both *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *The Female Reader* (1789) were advertised in London periodicals.<sup>5</sup> *The Female Reader*’s announcement even carried an advertisement for remaining copies of *Thoughts*, but not *Mary*. Only after the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) does *Mary* make an appearance in periodicals. The announcement for *A Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794) includes advertisements for all the books she had authored and translated; this time *Mary* was included.<sup>6</sup> Even in excerpted form, *Mary* surfaces just once, in *The Young Gentleman & Lady’s Instructor* (1809), as a positive portrayal of sensibility in women: “it is this quickness, this delicacy of feeling ... which expands the soul ... [and makes it] disposed to be virtuous.”

Even after her death *Mary* seems to have gone unnoticed by the reading public. Historiographical accounts have recently shown that Wollstonecraft remained a

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3. Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley* (New York: Random House, 2016), 97.

4. Leslie Chard, “Joseph Johnson: Father of the Book Trade,” in *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 79 (1975): 61.

5. “News,” *General Evening Post* (London), Aug. 21-23, 1787; “Advertisements and Notices,” *Morning Post* (London), Apr. 14, 1788.

6. “Advertisement and Notices,” *Morning Chronicle* (London), Oct. 18, 1794.

prominent figure in both the British and American imagination, especially when it came to women's rights. But aside from a letter to the *Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist*, neither readers nor critics mentioned her novels as significant touchstones. Understandably, *Rights of Woman* dominated discourse about Wollstonecraft, which was excerpted by American periodicals such as the *Massachusetts Magazine* and the *Lady's Magazine, and Repository of Entertaining*, and even cited by American politician Elias Boudinot.<sup>7</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, George Eliot noted that copies of *Rights of Woman* and Wollstonecraft's other writings were "rather scarce," having not been republished in nearly sixty years.<sup>8</sup>

*Mary* follows the titular protagonist from her earliest education to her untimely grave. Largely neglected by both of her parents, Mary is failed by the social reproductive function of the household: she learns to read only thanks to the intervention of the housekeeper and through the aid of a neighboring young woman to whom Mary becomes attached. When her mother falls deathly ill, Mary is forced to marry a young man her age who has not even finished his education in order to appease her mother's worries for

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7. See Eileen Hunt Botting, "Making an American Feminist Icon: Mary Wollstonecraft's Reception in US Newspapers, 1800-1869," in *History of Political Thought* 34, no. 2 (2013): 273-295; Eileen Hunt Botting and Christine Carey, "Wollstonecraft's Philosophical Impact on Nineteenth-Century American Women's Rights Advocates," in *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (2004): 707-722; Howard M. Wach, "A Boston Vindication: Margaret Fuller and Caroline Dall Read Mary Wollstonecraft," in *Massachusetts Historical Review* 7 (2005): 3-35; Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 238-239.

8. George Eliot, "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft," in *Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Jane Moore (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 3-8.

Mary's future well-being. Without any choice and no ways to resist, Mary is married and left alone as her new husband embarks on his grand tour of Europe. Mary's friends, Anne, the young woman who helped her procure an education, and Henry, a bachelor with whom she shares a platonic relationship both die from consumption. In her despair she travels about England, intending bestow charity upon less fortunate women, but finds little happiness in her endeavor. At the end of the novel, she reunites with her husband after his return from the continent, only to die pining for a world in which she could not be married. *Mary* articulates a critique of the heterosexual household as the site of social reproduction, but ultimately is unable to envision a resistance that accounts for women's material conditions, instead lapsing into a pessimistic yearning for the afterlife.

Wollstonecraft's return to fiction in the last year of her life was more than a reaction to a previous commercial failure. Rather, it was a response to Wollstonecraft's own ethical and intellectual development in the intervening decade; ten years later, *Mary* seemed blinkered and extremely conservative. Even among Wollstonecraft's circle, *Mary* was treated as something of an embarrassment. Her husband, William Godwin's loving yet misguided memoir of Wollstonecraft called her first novel a "little work," stating that "the story is nothing. He that looks into the book only for incident will probably lay it down in disgust." For Godwin, the novel does not speak well of Wollstonecraft's talent, but does speak well of her person: "If Mary had never produced anything else, [it] would serve, with persons of true taste and sensibility, to establish the eminence of her genius."<sup>9</sup>

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9. William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 66.

Wollstonecraft herself was less sanguine in her evaluation of *Mary*. Her sister, Everina, presumably was unaware of its publication until the year of Wollstonecraft's death when Wollstonecraft mentioned it in a letter to Everina. "As for my [*Mary*]," Wollstonecraft writes, "I consider it as a crude production, and do not very willingly put it in the way of people whose good opinion, as a writer, I wish for." In a final self-effacing flourish, she tells her sister, "you may have it to make up the sum of laughter."<sup>10</sup>

Wollstonecraft attempted to polish the crudity of her first published work of fiction by authoring a new novel, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798). Unfortunately, she succumbed to puerperal fever before it was finished, and it fell upon Godwin to publish the fragment in the four-volume collection *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). Godwin's companion piece, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, completely destroyed Wollstonecraft's legacy and contaminated reception of her posthumous work. His incautious documentation of her relationships with men and the brazen report that she acknowledged no religion on her deathbed offended the socially conservative sensibilities of Britons and Americans. The poet Robert Southey, one of the more generous readers of the biography and an admirer of Wollstonecraft was incensed at Godwin for "stripping his dead wife naked," but most readers were inflamed by Wollstonecraft's life, rather than Godwin's frank record of it.

Naturally, *Memoirs* soured the reception of *The Wrongs of Woman* and reviews clearly indicate that critics were reacting autobiographically, using Wollstonecraft's life as a cipher for reading the novel. Unsurprisingly, Robert Bissett of the ultra-conservative

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10. Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 404.

*Anti-Jacobin Review* attacked *The Wrongs of Woman*, stating that “its object is to shew the miseries to which women are exposed, owing to *their inferior state which they occupy in society*. ... *The restrictions upon adultery* constitute, in Maria’s opinion, A MOST FLAGRANT WRONG TO WOMEN. Such is the moral tendency of the work.”<sup>11</sup>

Wollstonecraft’s sexual life, which was unknown to the greater public prior to 1798 is clearly on Bissett’s mind as a reader. Following suit, the *British Critic* found that the novel “represents a specimen of that system of morality which the writer displayed in her own person, but which is alike offensive to the purity of female virtue, and the precepts of our holy religion.”<sup>12</sup> The *Monthly Review* found it no more moral than the previous reviewers, stating that even had the novel been finished, “its moral effect or utility would not, we apprehend, have been at all increased. ... [W]e cannot admire its moral tendency.”<sup>13</sup> The British were not the only ones to condemn Wollstonecraft’s “immoral” novel. A letter to the *Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist* in 1801 considers *Rights of Woman* to contain “many good improvements in female education.” As a result, however, the work is described as “doubly dangerous,” because it may act as a gateway to the real radicalism of *The Wrongs of Woman*.<sup>14</sup>

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11. [Robert Bissett], “Review of *Wrongs of Woman* and *Rights of Woman*,” in *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics, 1788-2001*, ed. Harriet Devine Jump, 2 vols. Volume 1 (New York: Routledge, 2003), 164. Emphasis in the original.

12. Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics, 1788-2001*, 170.

13. Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics, 1788-2001*, 171-172.

14. “For the Centinel,” *Columbian Centinel and Massachusetts Federalist* (Boston, MA), 24 January 1801: 1.

Remove the lens of eighteenth-century moral and religious propriety that clouded contemporary reception of *The Wrongs of Woman* and one sees a remarkable novel with a more nuanced understanding of the material conditions of gender than *Mary*. *Wrongs of Woman* initially has a similar plot structure to *Mary*, as the protagonist Maria is born to parents who neglect her education and is married young. However, the novel begins in *media res* as she awakens as a prisoner in an asylum for women. Through the postmodern narrative pattern, it is revealed that Maria's husband, though seemingly a gallant young man is a gambler and a libertine who wishes to sell Maria to clear his debts and attempts to rape her after she gives birth to their daughter. Maria flees from her imprisonment with the help of her jailer, Jemima, who has lived a life of destitution, degradation, and violence. With Jemima's help, Maria escapes from her husband and establishes a household of their own, before the narrative becomes fragmented with numerous possible endings. Ultimately, *Wrongs of Woman* envisions an alternative life for women based upon their solidarity as women and despite their class positions by upending the ideology of separate spheres.

By analyzing these two novels alongside one another, this chapter demonstrates Wollstonecraft's intellectual evolution from an individualist protofeminist to a materialist feminist as evidenced by her appropriation of the sentimental novel. Both novels critique the contemporary paradigm of social reproduction. *Mary* and *Wrongs of Woman* highlight the failure of women's education and the role that deficient education has in perpetuating women's oppression by men. The novels also critique the middle-class arrangement where women were relegated to the home and carried out the burdens of "biological reproduction" and "reproducing the worker," both of which were "the sources of

women's oppression," according to Tithi Bhattacharya.<sup>15</sup> While *Mary* ignores the additional labor that working-class women take on, both by engaging in waged productive labor in order to survive while also shouldering the burden of reproductive labor in the household, *Wrongs of Woman* acknowledges this additional burden and the precarious lives poor and working-class women lead. *Wrongs of Woman* envisions more agency for women to resist patriarchal capitalism by establishing alternative, cross-class households compared to *Mary*, which only articulates a passive death as a resistant act.

### **Novel Aesthetics**

Wollstonecraft abhorred novels. *Mary* begins with a criticism of the heroine's mother, who "ran over those most delightful substitutes for bodily dissipation, novels" (80). To Wollstonecraft, novels constituted one of the most persistent attacks on women's physical, social, and intellectual independence. Wollstonecraft did not accept the axioms that women were inherently more delicate, naturally less intelligent, or intrinsically less rational than men. Rather, as she would demonstrate in *Rights of Woman*, the traits that were the rationale for women's subjugation were acquired, rather than congenital. As a savvy writer, Wollstonecraft was surely aware that if she were to convince women that most novels were bad, she would have to reach them through none other than the novel. Although she had experience directly intervening in the education of girls and young women as a schoolmistress and governess, authorship had the potential to give her a larger audience (in addition to providing a more financially stable and dignified career).

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15. Tithi Bhattacharya, "How Not to Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," in *Social Reproduction: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, 68-93 (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 73.

While Ann Mellor has argued that Wollstonecraft turned to the novel because she believed it “offered a representation of truth superior,”<sup>16</sup> it appears far more likely that Wollstonecraft made this move for reasons of audience. Although she had already written a treatise on the education of girls (see Chapter Two), she would still need to convince young women that they were not inherently incapable of rationality.

While many forces sought to ensure women’s acquisition of delicacy and sentimentality, none were as effective, in Wollstonecraft’s eyes, as the novel. Because women were denied many elements of a formal intellectual education, they became crucial to the reading marketplace as they sought self-improvement through novels. When it came to genres, reading was a gendered act in the eighteenth century. The novel itself was considered a feminine literary form and publishers largely catered to women readers. In all, the eighteenth-century book trade was deeply indebted to women readers, both culturally and commercially.<sup>17</sup> While some novels could fill the void in formal education, most were potboilers that reified negative social beliefs, namely that women were vain or irrational. Novels, such as *Pamela*, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, and *Emile*, each of which is invoked in the advertisement to *Mary*, affirmed to their more impressionable readers that their caricatures of women were in fact a reflection of reality and a justification for things as they were. Characters such as Clarissa, Lady Grandison,

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16. Anne K. Mellor, “Righting the Wrongs of Woman: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria*,” in *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics, 1788-2001*, ed. Harriet Devine Jump, 2 vols. Volume 2 (New York: Routledge, 2003), 205.

17 See Jacqueline Pearson, *Women’s Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Eve Tavor Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading: Print Culture and Popular Instruction in the Anglophone Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).



and Sophie, suggested and reinscribed the belief that women lacked the intelligence and mental fortitude that was to be found in their male counterparts. Even when women novelists committed their perceptions of reality to paper, they were indelibly conditioned by novels they had already consumed. Essentially novels had their place because of a deficit in women's education, justified by the very novels that were purported to bridge that deficit. In other words, novels were critical to social reproduction, as they justified and convinced women to understand themselves as inferior relative to men.

Wollstonecraft did not simply write a novel that would condemn all other novels. Instead, she wrote a novel that would call into question the ideology of other novels, distinguishing her novel from "bad" novels. Many literary commentators of her time employed this differentiating trope. According to Jacqueline Pearson, "feminists arguing for the rationality of women ... condemned novels as 'horrid trash,' 'utterly unfit' for young women because their indulgence in 'passion' and pleasure' leads to corruption of 'both the head and heart.'"<sup>18</sup> Wollstonecraft was no exception. In *Rights of Woman*, she famously commented that novels "tend to make women the creatures of sensation" and "confined to trifling employments, they naturally imbibe opinions which the only kind of reading calculated to interest an innocent frivolous mind, inspires."<sup>19</sup> In her novels, we also see her attempts to differentiate her novels from the morass. In the author's advertisement to *Mary*, Wollstonecraft identifies her protagonist as the woman "who has

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18. Pearson, 83.

19. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, edited by Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 131, 272.

thinking powers,” one who, according to the author, has yet to enter fiction’s ranks.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the preface to *Wrongs of Woman*, an excerpt from a letter to Wollstonecraft’s friend George Dyson, argues that “it is the delineation of finer sensations, which, in my opinion, constitutes the merit of our best novels” (159). As Wollstonecraft suggests, good novels rely not on crescendos but on the careful modulation and exploration of emotion. Rather than the maudlin and artificial scenes characteristic of sentimental novels, *Wrongs of Woman* is concerned with the exploration of genuine emotion. While most novels offered what Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd have called “an education in sentiment, escapism, and adventure,”<sup>21</sup> Wollstonecraft suggests that novels should offer women an education in discovery, fortitude, and agency in order that they should face reality rather than retreat from it.

Like other critics, Wollstonecraft viewed the various novel subgenres as a point of differentiation between good and bad. In *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft inveighs against novels that do not “exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination,” particularly those which “are only addressed to the imagination.”<sup>22</sup> Such thinking, informed by “anti-novel discourse” that characterized women’s imagination as “sexually vulnerable,” is reflected in the novels’ paratexts.<sup>23</sup> Wollstonecraft subtitles *Mary* “a fiction” in order to distinguish it from the romance or other imaginative forms. “In a

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20. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, edited by Michelle Faubert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012), 76.

21. Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 30.

22. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 272.

23. Pearson, 82.

fiction,” she states, “such a being [as Mary] may be allowed to exist, whose grandeur is derived from the operation of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion” (76). Fiction is neither a claim to factual events nor a claim to absolute fancy. Instead, fiction offers the probability of the ideas portrayed. In the preface to *Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft downplays the inventive aspect of her previous novel, by instead referring to *Wrongs of Woman* as a history. “In the invention of the story,” she claims, the focus on the material conditions of women “restrained my fancy” (157). Contemporaneous novels such as Frances Burney’s *Evelina, Or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778)<sup>24</sup> or Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette; Or, The History of Eliza Wharton* (1797)<sup>25</sup> used the term “history” to suggest that the novel makes some claim to historical truth (*The Coquette* was, in fact, based on a real event). Likewise, Wollstonecraft uses the generic label of history to validate her venture into fiction as a lesson on women’s structural oppression. By intimating that her novels were a reimagining of present reality and a record of reality, respectively, she could credibly distinguish herself from the romantic and sentimental roots of bad novels.

Having already made generic concessions to reach her audience of young women, Wollstonecraft would have to make some aesthetic concessions to sentimentality, the preeminent style of the late-eighteenth century. The ideology of the sentimental novel

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24. Frances Burney, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

25. Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*, in *The Power of Sympathy and The Coquette*, edited by Carla J. Mulford (New York: Penguin, 1996).

encouraged women's passivity, prioritized emotion, and fostered self-complacency.<sup>26</sup> At a surface level, borrowing from the sentimental tradition might appear to be what Susan Gubar has called a "paradox" in Wollstonecraft's career. According to Gubar, by writing novels in the sentimental mode Wollstonecraft's novels "negate" the arguments she makes in *Rights of Woman*, where she "condemns precisely the conventions of sentimental fiction."<sup>27</sup> Wollstonecraft's appropriation of sentimentality is not an indicator of her own misogyny or evidence that she did not actually like women.<sup>28</sup> As Jamie Barlowe has argued, such arguments relating to Wollstonecraft's novels fail to access the liberatory potential they contain by labeling the novels as "merely sentimental."<sup>29</sup> Extending Barlowe's argument, I demonstrate that by redeploying the surface elements of sentimentalism, Wollstonecraft could suggest her own educative ideals of discovery, fortitude, and agency via the sentimental novel.

Indeed, Wollstonecraft is extremely critical of sentimentalism, even within her own novels. Wollstonecraft's most scathing critique of sentimentalism comes in *Rights of Woman*, where she claimed that "soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of

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26. By self-complacency, I am referring to women's acceptance that they were inherently subject to men and that the middle-class experience of gender was universal across class and race.

27. Gubar, Susan, "Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradox of 'It Takes One to Know One,'" *Feminist Studies* 20.3 (Autumn 1994), 457.

28. See Gubar; Lorch; Marilyn Butler and Janet Todd, General introduction, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. 7 vols (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

29. Jamie Barlowe, "Daring to Dialogue: Mary Wollstonecraft's Rhetoric of Feminist Dialogics," *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, edited by Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 125.

*sentiment*, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness.”<sup>30</sup>

As her criticism implies, sentimental novels teach women to mimic the weakness of the novel’s heroines, leading them astray from “what true dignity and human happiness consists” of: “strength, both of body and mind.”<sup>31</sup> Wollstonecraft’s characterization of Mary’s mother demonstrates the effects of sentimental novels on impressionable young women: she “dwelt on the love-scenes” of novels “and, had she thought while she read, her mind would have been contaminated” (81). Though less pointed than in her earlier writing, *The Wrongs of Woman* is also critical of a style that allows “a woman of both sense and sensibility to be duped by an attractive man with acceptable ideas.”<sup>32</sup> It is worth reiterating at this point that nowhere in these characterizations does Wollstonecraft point the blame at women for their subordinate role, as some critics have suggested. Rather, the reading materials, heavily marketed to women, are designed to hold women in their present state.

As an aesthetic movement, sentimentalism relied heavily on the invocation and regulation of emotion. Earlier instantiations of sentimentality, such as Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771), asserted that thinking found its source in feeling and that exercises in sympathy would lead to a greater moral sensibility.<sup>33</sup> By the turn of the century, however, the bathos of Mackenzie’s sentimentalism was ridiculed, and

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30. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 73. Emphasis added.

31. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 73.

32. Lorch, 61.

33. Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

sentimentality was more aligned with unregulated emotion believed to be constituent of femininity.<sup>34</sup> Sentimentalism was important to the existing order of social reproduction as it reinscribed existing hierarchies through an emphasis on communal strength and social cohesion rooted in emotion. Sentimental literature taught readers the virtues of experiencing and regulating emotion, and provided characters worth emulating. Rather than the decadent and courtly affectation of the aristocracy, middle-class readers were given the “person of feeling” to imitate. The novel therefore became a vehicle for the circulation of sentimentalism, as many other political and philosophical ideals had been dramatized for greater reach.<sup>35</sup> While sentimentality was posited to be an intrinsic human capacity, it needed to be taught and learned through narrative discourse, as the rhetoric of sentimentality made clear. Thus, like femininity, sentimentality was an acquired characteristic, disguised as an inherent trait.

The design of the sentimental novel had both a physical and intellectual component to the educations they offered. Elements of sentimental literature included sharp reversals of fate, heightened diction, exclamative orthography, and episodic plots, but at its most basic, “the arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familiar characters and rhetorical devices” were the hallmarks of sentimentality.<sup>36</sup> As

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34. While Wollstonecraft was also disdainful of unbridled emotionalism, she would later vindicate the earlier model of aligning emotion and understanding in *Letters from Sweden*: “we reason deeply when we forcibly feel.”

35. Todd, *Sensibility*; Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading*; Charlotte Sussman, *Eighteenth-Century English Literature, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period: 1789-1830* (New York: Longman, 1989).

36. Todd, *Sensibility*, 2.

Pearson argues, sentimental fiction was designed for a female readership, as women's reading was constructed as a physical-emotional activity, as opposed to men's reading, which was considered a disembodied, intellectual pursuit.<sup>37</sup> Through this connection of the emotional and the physical, in fiction and in reality, sentimentalism became, according to Todd, a "pedagogy of seeing and of the physical reaction that this seeing should produce."<sup>38</sup> The overwrought style of sentimentality essentially taught a similar affective response to a readership of mostly women. The softness, susceptibility, and delicacy that Wollstonecraft elsewhere derides as being counterproductive to an equitable education for women was nonetheless exemplified as the defining trait of women's education. This embodied, emotional response was pivotal to the project of sentimentality because reading constructs perceptions of reality. Indeed, novels were a crucial component of eighteenth-century social reproduction, as they naturalized the distinctions between men and women and their respective roles in society.

Sentimentalism offered an education in emotion, yet Wollstonecraft used her novels to inculcate a pedagogy of reason and intellect for women. While her message against self-complacency and passivity would be unfamiliar to the intended reader, it comes in a familiar wrapper of sentimentalism. This strategy of containment,<sup>39</sup> provided readers with a false sense of ideological choice in the text, due to Wollstonecraft's structuring of choice. In the advertisement for *Mary*, Wollstonecraft is acutely aware of how these strategies of containment operate in women's fiction:

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37. Pearson, 4.

38. Todd, *Sensibility*, 4.

39. See Chapter Two for Jameson's definition.

Those 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. Lost in pleasing enthusiasm, [readers] live in the scenes [authors] represent; and do not [readers] measure their steps in a beaten track, solicitous to gather expected flowers, and bind them in a wreath, according to the prescribed rules of art (75).<sup>40</sup>

While Wollstonecraft is redeploying the rhetoric of women's susceptibility to fiction, she does so to critique the axiom that women are inherently susceptible to fiction. Rather, what she appears to claim here is that women are indoctrinated into susceptibility ("willing captives") through a susceptible mode of discourse (which "animates the hidden springs"). To put it plainly, women have a predictable "weakness" to sentimentality because they are educated primarily through reading works that adopt a sentimental lens.

### **Sentimental Fictions and Histories**

Wollstonecraft's use of sentimental discourse in *Mary* both upholds and subverts generic expectations in order to challenge the ideological narrative of sentimentality. Many sentimental novels of the era lionized women's passivity as a feminine virtue; but not so in *Mary*. The protagonist's mother, Eliza, is a paragon of passivity, particularly when it comes to marriage. Although Eliza falls in love with an officer, her father insists on a match with a more distinguished gentleman. Rather than pursue her own love interest, "she readily submitted to his will, and promised to love, honour, and obey, (a vicious

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40. Wollstonecraft's use of pronouns in this passage makes it difficult to parse whether she is referring to readers or authors at any given point; I have taken the liberty of inserting explicit references to readers and authors where it would otherwise be confusing.



fool,) as in duty bound” (77-78). Mary is cast into a similar situation shortly after her seventeenth birthday, when her father and mother (now on her deathbed) “informed her that they had both determined to marry her to Charles, their friend’s son[.] ... [T]he ceremony was to be performed directly” (94). Mary does not attempt any more resistance than her mother, as she “stood like a statue of Despair, and pronounced the awful vow without thinking of it” (95). Wollstonecraft’s *Mary* demonstrates that passivity in marital consent is a guarantor of an early death: Mary and Eliza both languish into an untimely demise.

While the sentimental novel had upheld women’s passivity as a source of strength and virtue, *Mary* unveils the sentimental logic of passivity as obedience to system of masculine absolutism. As Claudia Johnson recognizes, Wollstonecraft subverts the familiar trope of passivity in *Mary* by penning a plot that is “understood both as a sort of conspiracy that seduces and traps women, and as a literary structure that can mis-describe and mis-shape their desires in the novels women read.”<sup>41</sup>

Mary’s overwhelming sensibility is clearly related to her largely unsupervised education. If sentimentalism is marked by pathetic plots and emotional evocation, *Mary* defies the value that is typically placed on emotion in the sentimental novel. The heroine of this novel is no cold rationalist. Rather, Mary’s understanding was “strong and clear,” though often “clouded by her feelings” to the point that she is described as “the slave of compassion” (85-86). While Mary is shown to have the capacity for both emotion and

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41. Claudia L. Johnson, “Mary Wollstonecraft’s Novels,” *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 199.

reason (uncommon for a woman character), it is emotion that overwhelms her ability to assert rationality. Mary's grief over her mother's impending death renders her unable to reject the proposed marriage. Rather than being innate, her overbearing emotions are demonstrated to be the product of her informal education. Having been taught to read by the housekeeper, there is little to guide Mary's reading; she "perused with avidity every book that came in her way. ... [L]eft to the operations of her own mind, she considered every thing that came under her inspection and learned to think" (82). While these passages illustrate Wollstonecraft's belief that "a genius will educate itself,"<sup>42</sup> it also suggests that an unadulterated education tends toward a nervous emotional register, particularly given the types of literature girls and women were bound to encounter. Mary is intended to be a strong identificatory figure for the sensible reader, while also illustrating the deleterious effects of sentimentalism. Later in the novel Mary experiences a "rhapsody of sensibility," in which she states that sentimentalism "is the most exquisite feeling of which the human soul is susceptible," and is what makes it "disposed to be virtuous" (135). Yet, as demonstrated above, the acuteness of Mary's feeling renders her ability to exert a reasonable agency incapacitated at key moments in the novel. By appropriating tropes of sentimental fiction, Wollstonecraft thus shows the deleterious effects that it has on young women who have only experienced education as an endorsement of pure emotion.

*The Wrongs of Woman* likewise appropriates the primacy of emotion in order to appeal to sentimental readers. While Todd has noted that *The Wrongs of Woman* participates in the attack on sentimentality and Gary Kelly has argued that it borrows

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42. Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, 136.

traits from the Jacobin novel, I am arguing that Wollstonecraft once again borrowed from the sentimental tradition for this novel.<sup>43</sup> Wollstonecraft identifies Maria, the heroine of the novel, as “a woman of sensibility,” and goes out of her way to make the emotional content of the book clear in the author’s preface to the novel.<sup>44</sup> “In writing this novel,” says Wollstonecraft, “I have rather endeavoured to pourtray passions than manners” (157). Here, the genuine emotion of experience is juxtaposed against the affected emotion of the stereotypical sentimental novel. Wollstonecraft’s final novel is not a flight of fancy nor molded from stock conventions. Instead, she has given “misery and oppression” embodiment in the characters of the novel, emotions that she herself had embodied (157). The autobiographical nature of the novel also inserts itself into the sentimental tradition. As Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd remind us, “many women like [Wollstonecraft] had tried to enter fiction’s ranks, often by writing their own life experiences.”<sup>45</sup> Many sentimental novels derived some basis from the emotion of lived experience, often privileging emotional knowledge over empirical knowledge. Autobiographical elements in the eighteenth-century novel, according to Kelly, operate as a “rhetorical device, authenticating the fiction for readers.”<sup>46</sup> Wollstonecraft uses these sentimental conventions in *Wrongs of Woman* both as a technique of invention and as a claim to authenticity, a generative and conciliatory move toward her intended audience.

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43. Todd, *Sensibility*, 135; Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 206.

44. Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, 411.

45. Ferguson and Todd, 30.

46. Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*, 208.

The relationship between Maria and her daughter also draws upon conventions of the sentimental novel. Considering that eighteenth-century marital conditions fully subjugated women to their husbands, women writers offered veneration of motherhood as the model for female heroism.<sup>47</sup> As the novel opens, Maria finds herself separated from her daughter and imprisoned by her husband in an asylum for attempting to leave him with her daughter. Maria's first thoughts are concern for her daughter's well-being: "who would watch her with a mother's tenderness, a mother's self-denial?" (162). Though an overtly political novel, *Wrongs of Woman* opens with this paean to maternal affection and self-sacrifice, simultaneously appealing to the sentimental reader's emotions and sense of justice at how Maria and her daughter have each been wronged by a villainous husband. At a later point when Maria is given the erroneous intelligence that her daughter has perished, "her eyes filled with delicious tears" (209). This tearful catharsis is part and parcel with the physical-emotional response that sentimental discourse was built upon. The news of the child's death is reversed—again, a sentimental plot element—when it is discovered that the infant is alive after all. This event comes at the very end of the published fragment, the last of several possible endings that Wollstonecraft had planned, and the one which Godwin presumably considered the official ending, given its placement. Maria is about to take her own life when her companion, Jemima, bursts in with her daughter:

Maria gazed wildly at her, her whole frame was convulsed with emotion; when the child ... uttered the word 'Mamma!' she caught her to her bosom, and burst into a passion of tears—then, resting the child gently on the bed, as if afraid of

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47. Todd, *Sensibility*, 112.

killing it,—she put her hand to her eyes to conceal as it were the agonizing struggle of her soul. She remained silent for five minutes, crossing her arms over her bosom, and reclined her head,—then she exclaimed: “The conflict is over!—I will live for my child!” (287)

The culmination of overwhelming emotion, maternal sacrifice, and plot reversal are all embodied in this scene. To educate women and make them aware of and despise their unnatural subordination, Wollstonecraft adopted this sentimental mode of discourse to appeal to her readers’ socially engineered appetites.

### **Novel Ideologies**

Wollstonecraft used similar aesthetic practices in both *Mary* and *Wrongs of Woman*, as evidenced by her use of the novel genre and appropriation of sentimental discourse. The ideological purposes of these two texts differ significantly, however. On the one hand, *Mary* is paean to rationality and bourgeois individualism, but one which can see only death as an escape from a misogynist culture; on the other, *The Wrongs of Woman* offers a liberatory vision of women’s collective action and supports a model of femininity that has a place for both reason and emotion. Bookends to Wollstonecraft’s writing career, the novels strike at the ideology of masculine supremacy in distinctly different ways. *Mary* suggests that women’s individualism and autonomy are the vanguard against gendered ideology. Through their own individual efforts, women can attempt to ameliorate the inequitable conditions of less privileged women, indicative of sympathy or moral sentiment. However, *The Wrongs of Woman* complicates *woman* as a singular category and is attuned to the intersecting forces that invisibly dictate *women’s* lives, a confluence

of gender and class. *The Wrongs of Woman* suggests that shared solidarity or empathy along the lines of gender offer women of various status positions the opportunity to oppose the constraints of their lives. Put simply, if *Mary* espouses a bourgeois ideology of gender, *The Wrongs of Woman* challenges and confronts the ideology of the very people who would read the novel.

Wollstonecraft's first attempt at the novel was heavily influenced by bourgeois individualism. This ideology, as demonstrated by *Mary*, suggests that social issues have individual solutions and that a single story or perspective can generalize the whole of women's experience. The gendered issues that *Mary* faces within the novel are presented thus: if *Mary* were to have more autonomy within her life, she would be able to overcome the issues that face her as a woman. For example, the novel claims that marriage is a problematic institution because it does not allow women a choice of their partner. This argument assumes that a matrimonial "free market" would allow women to choose more congenial and less abusive husbands. What such an argument does not consider is that most women needed to marry in order to materially survive and that there is very little choice allowed in a hetero-compulsive society. In terms of education, the argument of *Mary* is that the segregation of men's and women's education does not allow a woman to cultivate her own genius. This is opposed to a more structural argument that suggests that women's education is designed to be less formal than men's education to justify women's subordinate station in the eighteenth century.

Beyond presenting women's issues as something that may be overcome at the individual level, *Mary* insinuates that a single protagonist can stand in as a proxy for all women. This assumption is embedded in the notion that all women share an identical

relationship to material and lived conditions; that is to say the middle-class material and lived conditions Wollstonecraft experienced. By keeping the focus and the narrative of the novel concentrated on Mary's experience of the world, the bourgeois woman becomes metonymic for all women, erasing differences that might be found within Hill Collins's matrix of domination.<sup>48</sup> Labor and systemic violence do not appear as endemic issues that women must face on a regular basis, because these issues were less prevalent for middle-class women. In this way, the novel reflects much of the middle-class reader's experiences back at them, affirming that women innately share a flat experience of the world.

When Wollstonecraft returned to the novel form a decade after having published *Mary*, her ideological commitments had radically shifted away from individualism and had become more attentive to the vectors of experience and identity that could impact women's experiences. While Wollstonecraft fails to consider how race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and so forth interact with gender, *Wrongs of Woman* is an important first step in articulating a matrix of domination. For this reason, *Wrongs of Woman* does not conflate womanhood and the bourgeoisie as completely as *Mary* had. Instead, Wollstonecraft keenly delineates the experiences of poor, laboring women and bourgeois women within the novel. While the unfinished manuscript leaves something to be desired as far as educating readers about experiences on multiple intersections beyond gender and class, *Wrongs of Woman* challenges the ideology of its readers in a way that *Mary* could not. Instead of vindicating individualism as she had in *Mary*, Wollstonecraft begins to articulate women's solidarity across class lines. One of the most effective strategies used

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48. See Chapter One.

by Wollstonecraft for expressing this is the use of embedded narratives. Far from simply tracking the experience of one woman, the narratives of several women with strikingly different experiences than the protagonist allows for multiply marginalized women to exist within a single text. Each of the women serves as some form of helper in aiding the bourgeois woman protagonist reach her goal at the end of the novel, yet it slowly becomes clear that all women have a vested interest in understanding the conditions of those outside of their own identity, particularly since they share a common oppressor: the patriarchal household as the major site of eighteenth-century social reproduction. The remaining analysis in this chapter demonstrates how *Wrongs of Woman* revises the ideology of *Mary* by advocating for women's solidarity.

### **Marriage**

Marriage and education are two of the gendered focal points on which Wollstonecraft builds her argument against the ideology of misogyny. Wollstonecraft engages both structures of power in her novels but challenges them in quite different ways. In *Mary* the first scene of trauma in the protagonist's life is her forced marriage to Charles, urged on by her parents with neither Mary's consent nor her ability to protest. *Mary* reiterates throughout that Mary's marriage is an oppressive force because it disallows her autonomy to choose her own relations, creating an abstract bondage to her husband. If marriage is entirely abstract in *Mary*, it has a very material manifestation in *Wrongs of Woman*. Unlike Mary, Maria chooses her own husband, but this does not guarantee the domestic bliss that *Mary* might otherwise insinuate. Despite all prior appearances, Maria's husband George Venables turns out to be an inebriated, womanizing gambler



with a violent streak (much like Wollstonecraft's own father). Maria's resistance to her marriage is not one of principle or desire. She resists so that she and her daughter can survive. The material realities of marriage left unexplored in *Mary* are further detailed through the histories of other women that Maria encounters throughout the *Wrongs of Woman*. Thus, while *Mary* decries the injustice of women's lack of choice in marriage, *Wrongs of Woman* offers a more comprehensive critique of marriage as a gendered structure of power, challenging whether any marriage is consensual or coerced. Both novels in turn instruct readers about the (abstract and material) dangers they face through marriage.

From the viewpoint of *Mary*, the concept of marriage poses an issue for women because it is often not consensual for bourgeois women. Eliza's and Mary's marriages each demonstrate that marriage is coerced, but Mary does not offer an affirmative consent, while her mother does. Eliza readily submits to her father's wishes for her to marry against her initial inclination; Mary, is repulsed by the idea of marrying against her inclination, but she is powerless to prevent the ceremony from happening. According to the narrator, Mary felt "an extreme horror at taking—at being forced to take, such a hasty step" (95). For Wollstonecraft, the distinction is significant, because it reveals an individual woman's desire to resist compulsory marriage. If conformity with dominant bourgeois principles is fashionable for women, Mary expresses the opposite intention at every turn: "If I acted contrary to conviction ... the world might approve of my conduct—what could the world give to compensate for my own esteem?" (123). Mary is resistant to marriage in the abstract because of its impingement on her sense of autonomy.

Interestingly, marriage as an abstract bondage does not interfere with Mary's physical or financial autonomy. Once married, Charles disappears to the continent with his tutor to finish his studies, while Mary is left to her own devices in England. All the same, "marriage appeared a dreadful misfortune" to Mary, who was often "reminded of the *heavy yoke*" of marriage to a husband whose "name made her turn sick" (97; emphasis added). The "heavy yoke" of marriage is not manifest in any material sense. Mary has no physical or even epistolary communication with her husband while he is on the continent and is otherwise free to do what she pleases, aside from re-marrying. Apart from Henry, the consumptive bachelor with whom she has a platonic relationship, in no way does her marriage fetter her in the ways one might expect in the eighteenth century.

The abstract bonds of marriage found in *Mary* become material impediments to autonomy in *Wrongs of Woman*. Wollstonecraft attends to the material realities that women faced in an eighteenth-century marriage and demonstrates that these realities are not universal to all women. Although Maria initially believes her marriage to George Venables as one of choice, it quickly becomes clear that marriage is not a choice once his true character is revealed. Maria, upon becoming pregnant reflects on the permanence of her marriage and her emotional-physical response: "my heart died within me; my desire of improvement became languid, and baleful, corroding melancholy took possession of my soul. Marriage had bastilled me for life" (243). Wollstonecraft is not just being colorful with this metaphor by comparing English marriage to the arbitrary state prison of France. Unlike the phantom yoke in *Mary*, Maria and others in *Wrongs of Woman* suffer the material consequences of marriage. Maria's limited mobility is the first to be highlighted. After Maria is nearly raped by Venables and is offered to be sold to one of

Venables' associates to nullify his gambling debts, Maria flees from their home in the hope of escaping the bastille of marriage. Maria's narrative thereafter becomes one of flight from her husband and the law. Near the end of the extant fragment, Maria must plead her case against Venables and English law in court so that she may secure a divorce, but to no avail. The judge scoffs at such "French principles" that would undermine a woman's "duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could for herself" (284). The judge's sentence reveals how Maria's "French principles" pose a threat to the continued way of British life and demonstrates how contingent eighteenth-century society was on the confinement of women to a life of social reproduction in the household.

If *Mary* presents a fictional case study of women's subjugation through marriage, *Wrongs of Woman* offers several histories of women who are confined because of marriage, both literally and figuratively.<sup>49</sup> The most significant episode of Maria's flight from her husband involves her imprisonment in an asylum for the mentally ill. Maria's illness is apparently disobedience to her husband. Though it is insinuated that Maria is being held under false pretenses, this episode demonstrates how marriage constructs women's mental illness. Not only do husbands fabricate illnesses to secure control over their wives, but their matrimonial tyranny is also the cause of mental illness. For example, Maria is acquainted with the story of a "madwoman" held prisoner in the asylum. Jemima, at this time the asylum's attendant, explains to Maria that the prisoner

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49. According to Ferguson and Todd, this shift "appears to recognize the political and dramatic significance of illustrating class differences through major female characters side by side in the same work." Ferguson and Todd, 111.

“had been married, against her inclination to a rich old man, extremely jealous ... and that in consequence of his treatment ... she had during her first lying-in, lost her senses” (176). Clearly, claims of mental illness are both fabricated and caused by the misogynist structure of eighteenth-century English marriage.<sup>50</sup>

After escaping from the asylum with Jemima’s aid, Maria procures a room from a landlady who shares the history of her own confinement. The unnamed landlady, referred to as “one of the true Russian breed of wives” presumably because of the physical abuse she endured from her husband, tells a harrowing tale of her survival (259). As a humble servant she had married a man in service to the same family as herself in the hopes of being able to buy and let out a house, which she succeeded in doing. However, her husband turned out to be a profligate every inch as bad as George Venables, initiating a cycle of abandoning his wife, reappearing whenever he was destitute and selling off everything she had earned to repay his debts, before then disappearing again. When Maria arrives, the landlady has only just been able to get another house after her husband died as a soldier and has yet to fully emerge from the debts he had contracted. Maria and the landlady’s stories are not wholly dissimilar, as both are wedded to husbands who are abusive profligates. The great difference and lesson, however, is the privilege of class and connections that Maria is privy to, but that her landlady is not. As a former servant, the landlady must work to procure her fugitive existence, whereas Maria can draw upon the funds of her middle-class background. At least regarding marriage, *Wrongs of Woman*

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50. For a complete reading of madness as disability in *Wrongs of Woman*, see S. Leigh Matthews, “(Un)Confinements: The Madness of Motherhood in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman*,” in *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, edited by Helen M. Buss, et. al., 85-97. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006.

attempts to teach its bourgeois readers that the marital experience of laboring class women is exacerbated by their position in society, a lesson otherwise absent from *Mary*.

## **Education**

*Mary* and *Wrongs of Woman* both share a concern for women's education, given the lack of formal instruction available. Unlike *Wrongs of Woman*, *Mary* views education as a pathway for women to enter the market economy. The novel is far from upholding the notion of separate spheres in which men produce value outside of the household, while women stay at home and reproduce labor value through caring and child-rearing.<sup>51</sup> In order to produce labor value outside of the home and still maintain the distinction of bourgeois pride, however, a rational education is required. Wollstonecraft juxtaposes the education her mother received and the one she found for herself. Unlike Eliza, who was favored with all the accomplishments of a woman's eighteenth-century education, Mary was largely left to her own devices as a learner. Regardless, Mary's innate genius shines through as she seeks out her own education. One of Wollstonecraft's stated purposes for writing the novel is that gifted minds will educate and earn for themselves, a defining myth of the bourgeois individualism. As Mary and the narrator alternately exhort, working for an autonomous living is one of the more important reasons for women to acquire a rational education. Mary not only avows that she herself will work before becoming dependent on another's charity, but she also pushes the women benefactors of

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51. See Nancy Fraser, "Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, 21-36. London: Pluto Press, 2017, 23-24.

her charity to do just that; significantly, Mary has no need to work, due to her financially expedient marriage. The crux of Wollstonecraft's argument about education in *Mary* rests on the contradictions that genius will educate itself, but a formal education is required to produce labor value and that Mary exhorts poor women to work in order to subsist, while never needing to work herself. These contradictions are not settled until *Wrongs of Woman*, where Wollstonecraft revises her earlier assertions on education.

In her final novel, Wollstonecraft explores the material and structural connections between education and work. As Maria discovers, there is slim opportunity for bourgeois women to earn their own keep, and when they can, these opportunities are far from desirable compared to the stations allotted to their male counterparts. While *Mary* elides the perspectives and challenges of laboring-class women, *Wrongs of Woman* gives voice to them and explicates their unique trials. Not only is a foundling like Jemima unable to educate herself because she lacks resources, but her class position also qualifies her for a larger range of employment, yet with more degrading outcomes than her bourgeois counterparts. As *Wrongs of Woman* demonstrates, women are structurally impeded from accessing education and fulfilling employment in ways that bourgeois ideology is unequipped to explain. While *Mary* seeks to educate women readers about the importance of a rational education for their own ability to participate in bourgeois society, *Wrongs of Woman* seeks to educate middle-class women about the precarity of their own education and their privileged place in society relative to their laboring class counterparts.

Wollstonecraft never minced words when discussing women's education in the eighteenth-century. Made up largely of "accomplishments"—including reading, drawing,

dancing, music, geography, and foreign language acquisition—a genteel woman’s education was taught with the intention of attracting a husband and for occupying idle time once the husband was secured. Accomplishments, thus, were largely superficial and excluded women from the liberal education their male counterparts received.<sup>52</sup> Needless to say, this difference in education was the bane of Wollstonecraft’s ideology at the time of writing *Mary*. The novel, in fact, begins with an inventory of Eliza’s education, which consisted of “acquiring a few superficial accomplishments, without having much taste for them” (77). Despite the acknowledged purpose of accomplishments as a marital tool, Mary’s “father always exclaimed against female acquirements, and was glad that his wife’s indolence and ill health made her not trouble herself about them” (83).

Wollstonecraft seems to suggest that women’s education is then doubly useless in some cases: women learn little by acquiring accomplishments and husbands are relatively uninterested in whatever their wives may have learned. Mary is largely left to her own devices in early childhood until her brother dies and she becomes the family’s heiress. With the future of the family resting on her marriage prospects, “[p]roper masters were sent for; she was taught to dance, and an extraordinary master procured to perfect her in that most necessary of all accomplishments” (92). Yet at no point does Mary find purpose for dancing or any other superficial bit of education she receives following her brother’s death. Rather, as Wollstonecraft demonstrates for a reading audience, women’s education was purposefully facile and pointless, intended to justify women’s inferior position in the world.

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52. See Chapter Two for a more detailed depiction of women’s education in the eighteenth-century.

While Mary's parents do eventually take an interest in her education, she nonetheless received an unsanctioned education of her own. Much like Wollstonecraft, Mary becomes an autodidact. In her youth, Mary meets an older girl, Anne, who offers a model for writing and conversation that offered "a degree of equality [to] her behavior" (87). As time passed, however, Anne notices that Mary's choice in reading changes from works that inspired her "lively imagination" and instead "frequently stud[ied] authors whose works were addressed to the understanding" (93). Ironically, Wollstonecraft demonstrates that Mary's lack of formal education allows her to become the rational woman that many suggested could not exist. *Mary* serves as a proof of concept for the rational woman. As Syndy Conger observes, "the novel presents self-education as inevitable, lifelong, and often preferable to formal education, since it is more apt to foster individuality and genius."<sup>53</sup> Not only does the novel theorize women's capacity for a rational education, in practice it offers proof that Wollstonecraft as the novelist successfully educated herself.

Maria, like Mary, has the advantages of family that set the foundations for her access to education. Her father was a naval captain who resigned his commission "on account of the preferment of men whose chief merit was their family connections" rather than individual ability (210-211). The other men in her family hold similar middle-class employment, as her uncle was trained to be a clergyman but instead became a secretary in colonial India where he amassed a "handsome fortune" and her brother Robert, an attorney, was apprenticed to "the most unprincipled man in that part of the country" (213-

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53. Syndy McMillen Conger, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 40.



214). Quite like Eliza, Maria's mother "had an indolence of character," which led her to neglect the education of children (212). Instead, Maria enjoys the romantic education of a "neighboring heath, on which we bounded at pleasure, [and] volatilized the humors that improper food might have generated" (212). Rather than attaining frivolous accomplishments, Maria's youth is spent gaining an experiential education of the type advocated by late eighteenth-century pedagogues.<sup>54</sup> While her untutored youth served to prefigure her character, her uncle, who "had of course received a liberal education" takes a firm interest in his niece's adolescent education (212). "Endeavoring to enlarge and strengthen my mind," Maria writes, "he inculcated, with great warmth, self-respect, and a lofty consciousness of acting right, independent of the censure or applause of the world" (213-214). But Mary's greatest appraisal of her uncle is the fact that "he brought me books, for which I had a passion, and they conspired with his conversation, to make me form an ideal picture of life" (214). As Maria's narrative reiterates, one of the affordances of bourgeois life for women is an education gleaned from male relatives, and a romantic view of the world that it cultivates. However, this is only made clear to middle-class readers when brought into juxtaposition with the education of less privileged characters.

As the illegitimate daughter of two house servants, Jemima's education was composed of neither explicit instruction nor the experience of freedom. Having been born at the expense of her mother's life and sent out to nurse by her indifferent father, Jemima "learn[ed] to curse existence ... and the treatment that rendered me miserable, seemed to sharpen my wits" (190). Maria receives familial encouragement and instruction from her

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54. See Chapter Two for the ideological differences between didactic and experiential educations.

uncle, but “without the grand support of life—a mother’s affection,” Jemima “had no one to love me; or to make me respected, to enable me to acquire respect” (193). In her youth Jemima is given no explicit instruction or schooling. Any education she attains occurs through others’ actions as she is unable to procure reading materials like Maria. Upon becoming servant to an old gentleman, Jemima receives the closest thing to an education she is allowed in her life: “I could just spell and put a sentence together, and I listened to the various arguments, though often mingle[d] with obscenity, which occurred at the table where I was allowed to preside” (198). Ironically, because of Jemima’s station in the world, she had “the advantage of hearing discussions, from which, in the common course of life, women are excluded” (198). Through the crass yet profound discussion of the literary dinner table, Jemima gained “what might be termed a moral sense” and a “fondness of reading,” which endeared her to the old gentleman (198). This education is inevitably cut short by the gentleman’s death and his son’s confiscation of all property that was earmarked for Jemima’s continued edification. This turn in the story demonstrates that even when poor and laboring women are allowed the luxury of informal education and intellectual improvement, the time and materials for doing so are incredibly precarious and dependent upon the whims of middle-class gatekeepers.

Maria’s and Jemima’s narratives make clear that there are few ways of procuring a living for women, regardless of education or social station. “By allowing women but one way of rising in the world,” writes Maria, “the fostering of libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as proof of inferiority of intellect” (223). Even for women of superior intellect, there is no easy path for finding their way in the world outside of marriage. As for employment,

work as a governess is “the only [job] in which even a well-educated woman, with more than ordinary talents, can struggle for a subsistence” (236-237). However, class pretension forecloses many opportunities for bourgeois women as well, for Maria’s sister “shrunk at the name of milliner or mantuamaker as degrading to a gentlewoman” (237). Yet for women without the privilege of being degraded, the work procured out of survival is far worse than teaching or dressmaking. Jemima’s employment as a servant in genteel homes, a jailer at an asylum, a laborer in a slop-shop, and especially her life as a sex worker demonstrates the extreme degradation that a bourgeois novel reader could not imagine for herself. As Jemima says to Maria—and readers: “I will not attempt to give you an adequate idea of my situation, lest you, who probably have never been drenched with the dregs of human misery, should think I exaggerate” (192).

## **Violence**

Although depictions of violence against women are absent in *Mary*, they make up a significant portion of Wollstonecraft’s critique in *Wrongs of Woman*. Physical violence is not explicitly depicted in *Mary*. Even the autobiographical elements of Wollstonecraft’s life that are violent are filtered out of the narrative. Mary’s father, like Wollstonecraft’s father, was extremely ill-tempered and further incited when drunk, so much so that “Mary was continually in dread lest he should frighten her mother to death” (83). Whereas a young Wollstonecraft would sleep nights in front of her mother’s bedroom door to protect Elizabeth from Edward Wollstonecraft’s lascivious and violent

drunkenness,<sup>55</sup> Mary is concerned that her mother will be “frightened” to death. (One wonders whether this is a euphemism.) At no point is Mary herself threatened with violence as both her husband Charles and her friend Henry pose no physical threat to her. Henry’s illness does not position him as a threat to Mary, but instead provides Mary with “an excuse to herself for shewing him ... artless proofs of affection, which the purity of heart made her never wish to restrain” (113). Charles, though Mary abhors to even think about him, is depicted as equally harmless. In one of the few descriptions of Charles, the narrator finds him to be “a boy [Mary] seldom took any notice of” (95). Furthermore, the reasons for his continued residence on the continent after the completion of his studies “appeared childish” to Mary (139). This juvenile characterization is confirmed by a friend of his who convinces Mary to reunite with Charles once he has returned to England. The friend “knew him to be a good-natured, weak man” (147). While the novel may lure readers into believing that violence is non-existent within the narrative, the invisibility of violence does not necessarily imply that violence is absent.

Physical threats of violence are made visible and acted upon in *The Wrongs of Woman*. Neither Maria or her working-class counterparts are immune to violence from men and even other women. Maria’s landlady is described in Maria’s embedded narrative as “one of the true Russian breed of wives,” echoing Wollstonecraft’s sentiment in *Rights*

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55. “At night, he terrorized Elizabeth, raping her and beating her so painfully she could not stifle her screams. Her terrible wordless outcries swept through the thin walls of their house straight into Mary’s room. ... when she was a teenager, she rebelled, setting up camp outside her mother’s door, waiting for her father to come home so she could stop him from crossing the threshold. But her efforts to save Elizabeth only made matters worse ... but Mary did not stop trying. Night after night, she took up her post;” Gordon, 15.

*of Woman* that “it would be expedient to open a fresh trade with Russia for whips.”<sup>56</sup>

This coy implication that the landlady suffered physical violence at the hands of her reprobate husband pales in comparison to the frank depiction of Jemima’s abuse. Jemima recounts how at the age of sixteen the head of the house she served “contrived to be alone in the house with me, and by blows—yes; blows and menaces compelled me to submit to his ferocious desire” (193). This is no isolated incident either, as his wife later discovers him raping Jemima. Unsurprisingly, Jemima is blamed by the wife for her own abuse; she instantly “tore off my cap, scratched, kicked, and buffeted me, till she had exhausted her strength, declaring, as she rested her arm, ‘that I had wheedled her husband from her’” (194). Perhaps no other passage depicts the intersecting forces of gender and class as this episode in Jemima’s narrative. As a woman servant, subject to the physical and sexual violence of her employer, she is physically abused by his wife because of the abuse she has endured.

If marital violence is unseen in *Mary*, and only insinuated in the landlady’s tale in *Wrongs of Woman*, violence is present and rendered visible in Maria’s narrative. Her husband, George Venables, has already been revealed to have “seduced a servant’s daughter [who] bore his illegitimate child” at the point where he begins to abuse Maria. She describes his attempt to rape her as follows:

Towards midnight Mr. Venables entered my chamber, and ... bade me make haste, “for that was the best place for husband and wives to end their differences.” He had been drinking plentifully to aid his courage.

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56. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 283.

I did not at first deign to reply. But perceiving that he affected to take my silence for consent, I told him that, “If he would not go to another bed, or allow me, I should sit up in my study all night.” He attempted to pull me into the chamber, half joking. But I resisted; and, as he had determined not to give me any reason saying that he used violence, after a few more efforts, he retired, cursing my obstinacy, to bed (254).

While Venables tries to present the event as a humorous, non-violent matter, the attempt to interpret Maria’s silence as consent and physically coerce her speaks for itself. *Wrongs of Woman* does not shy away from having its bourgeois narrator be the target of sexual violence, but her successful escape from Venables’s advances serves as a contrast to Jemima’s. Perhaps this distinction in the novel demonstrates to the reader that the suffering of laboring women is more acute than bourgeois women, in both degree and kind.

Neither Mary nor her women interlocutors are reported as being physically victimized in *Mary*, but several passages offer euphemistic suggestions violence. As previously mentioned, Mary’s concern that her father, when under the influence of alcohol, will “frighten” her mother to death seems to hint at something more sinister. Mary’s relationship with Charles seems to suggest that there may be more to her story, at least when read alongside *Wrongs of Woman*. Ashley Tauchert has argued that Charles is quite harmless, “a shadowy insubstantial threat; an empty sign of patriarchal authority that exercises little effective power” and like Henry “offers no active sexual threat to the

heroine.”<sup>57</sup> Yet compare the following scenes from *Mary* and *Wrongs of Woman*, in which Mary and Maria respond to the physical touch of their respective husbands.

[W]hen [Mary’s] husband would take her hand, or mention any thing like love, she would instantly feel a sickness, a faintness at her heart, and *wish, involuntarily, that the earth would open and swallow her* (148; emphasis added).

The greatest sacrifice of my principles in my whole life, was the allowing my husband again to be familiar with my person, though to this cruel act of self-denial, when *I wished the earth to open and swallow me*, [her daughter owes her] birth (242; emphasis added).

The nearly identical syntax draws attention to similarities between these two passages. Through this parallelism, does Wollstonecraft authorize a reading of *Mary*, in which she is the silent victim of marital rape from the seemingly innocent Charles? The similarities offer a possible motive for Wollstonecraft to write *Wrongs of Woman*. If Wollstonecraft was as embarrassed of *Mary* as her epistolary communications would suggest, *Wrongs of Women* is intended to rewrite the philosophy authorized by her work in a genre she had previously employed; much like *Fragment of Letters on the Management of Infants* and *Lessons revised Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *Original Stories from Real Life* (see Chapter Two), and *Letters from Scandinavia* revised *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman* (Chapter Four). As this suggests, *Wrongs of Woman* is written with the hindsight that her first novel’s focus and ideology were too restricted to provide readers

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57. Ashley Tauchert, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Accent of the Feminine* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 37.

with the material-feminist education that Wollstonecraft aimed to provide in the last year of her life.

### **Material Conditions**

Mary and Maria's brushes with poverty paint very different pictures of women's lives in Wollstonecraft's novels. The class politics and material affordances that benefitted middle-class women are rendered invisible in *Mary*, while *Wrongs of Woman* purposefully foregrounds the intersection of class and gender. Mary is bedeviled by marriage, yet her bourgeois union provides for her cosmopolitan lifestyle and charitable work. That is not to say that the intangible effects of matrimony are illegitimate or hypocritical for Mary. Rather, the novel interpolates the bourgeois woman reader into a belief that middle-class life is the default experience for women. *Wrongs of Woman* pushes back against such assumptions by integrating the perspectives of less fortunate women. In what Barbara Taylor declares to be "the beginnings of modern feminism,"<sup>58</sup> the stories of Jemima and the landlady, the material effects of poverty and labor, are made visible. These multiple perspectives allow readers to see the commonalities they share as women across gender, while also highlighting the differences of class that exacerbate other women's experiences. Instead of sympathizing with the familiar heroine of *Mary*, readers of *Wrongs of Woman* are asked to empathize with others, forming a gendered solidarity that crosses class lines.

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58. Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 238.



In *Mary*, working class women are marked as inferior through the protagonist's interaction with them. Upon seeing women in the streets of London, Mary "shrink[s] into herself, and exclaim[s], are these my fellow creatures!" (130). This disidentification continues when Mary begins to offer charity. As she attempts to console a grieving widow, Mary "endeavored to calm her at first, by sympathizing with her ... [but] in doing this she found her grossly ignorant ... [and] beguile[d] the hours ... by adapting her conversation to her capacity" (129). This passage marks Mary and her interlocutor as qualitatively different beings due to their differences of education and status. It also suggests that poor, uneducated women like the widow ought to be treated differently by their supposed superiors. By aligning the narrative so closely to Mary's bourgeois experience, the novel presents lower class women as inferior to the bourgeois heroine/reader.

When Mary does interact with poverty in the novel, she does so through a transactional model of charity. On the surface, the novel suggests that Mary becomes sympathetic to the lived realities of poverty and the experience of the working-class women she tries to help. As Mary attempts to relieve the poor women of the village, "she became more intimate with misery—the misery that arises from poverty and the want of education" (131). If Mary is familiar with the effects of poverty, she is less familiar with the causes of poverty. This becomes clear from the "ingratitude" Mary experiences. On one occasion, Mary suggests to a woman she has previously been charitable towards "that she ought to try to earn her own subsistence: the woman in return loaded her with abuse" (133). While the woman's words are not directly reported (none of the women whom Mary helps are given any voice in the novel), this scene opens up a hypocrisy that is

otherwise ignored throughout the rest of the novel. Mary urges the woman to work for her own living, a task Mary herself has not had to undertake. Presumably, the cause of this woman's poverty is not a lack of desire to work, as Mary ascribes to her, but rather the structural forces of the industrial revolution that have immiserated many villages. What might otherwise be a commentary on the differences of class experience among women in Britain, this scene reinforces for readers the fantasy of individual will, rather than the structural determinism that dictated the lives of most eighteenth-century women.

The limits of Mary's charity are tested once she falls ill and is no longer able to render financial aid to the village women. As the narrator remarks, "for some time she had observed, that she was not treated with the same respect as formerly; her favors were forgotten when no more were expected" (133). What is interpreted as ingratitude from a bourgeois perspective, can just as easily be seen as pragmatic. Mary aids the people of the village because their gratitude eases her misery, and the people express their gratitude to Mary because of the financial assistance they gain in return. Clearly, there is a mutual lack of empathy between Mary and the village; yet only the village is held to account for this within the novel. For Mary, charity becomes a means of sympathizing with her impoverished counterparts without challenging her notion of class hierarchy. The charitable individual comes in to alleviate the suffering of their benefactors, without understanding the causes or effects of suffering. *Mary* carefully upholds the distinction between bourgeois and laboring women; ostensibly both author and reader remain ignorant of how their material conditions are fundamentally different than the other women who are described in the novel.

Where *Mary* interpolates the bourgeois experience of gender, *Wrongs of Woman* resists such interpolation through its narrative proximity with other women. *Wrongs of Woman*, although subtitled *Maria*, it is not solely the story of Maria. As the protagonist she also serves as a narrative flaneur for readers to experience the lives of other women. Maria observes through the lives of laboring women as detached observer, while simultaneously fleeing the patriarchal arm of the law. For much of the novel Maria remains aloof to the ways in which her plight intersects with those around her, yet this characteristic is presented as unadmirable by the narrative. When Jemima narrates her life of unspeakable violence and poverty as a foundling woman, Maria often interrupts the narrative with trifling questions and comments. While Maria is eventually moved by Jemima's story, it is a transient thought which instead sublimates into concern for her own daughter: "she dwelt on the wretchedness of unprotected infancy, till sympathy with Jemima changed to agony, when it seemed probable that her own babe might now be in the very state she so forcibly described" (206).

Maria's interaction with the landlady is a less subtle instance of a potential empathetic moment. Of the landlady's willingness to tell her story, Maria remarks that "she was in a talking mood ... I perceived that she would be very much mortified, were I to not to attend to her tale, though I wished her, as soon as possible, to go out in search of a new abode for me" (264-265). Maria's interactions with others reveals the limits of bourgeois subjectivity, allowing the experiences of women in other situations to be presented and to reveal the intersecting factors that shape those women's experiences. While Mellor has argued that *Wrongs of Woman* offers the lesson that "in order to

survive, women are often forced to turn against each other,”<sup>59</sup> the episode with the landlady offers a different interpretation. It is instead the apathy of bourgeois women to the plight of their laboring counterparts that makes these women turn against them.

Jemima’s story is significant because of its novelty. It is “the first of its kind,” according to Lorch: “a socially accurate” and frank depiction of a (fictional) laboring class woman’s lived experience.<sup>60</sup> Whereas poor women were not given voice in *Mary*, Jemima’s life is a significant component of *Wrongs of Woman*. Jemima describes herself as “born a slave [to poverty], and chained by infamy to slavery during the whole of my existence, without having any companions ... to teach me how to rise above it” (193). Her narrative recounts her rape at the hands of the patriarch whose family she served, her eviction from their house, her procurement of an abortion, and her eventual employment as jailor in the asylum where Maria is held. The primary function of Jemima’s narrative is to demonstrate the stark differences between working-class and bourgeois women’s experiences. Mary Poovey goes so far as to argue that Jemima’s narrative “has the potential to call into question both the organizational principles of bourgeois society and the sentimentalism that perpetuates romantic idealism.”<sup>61</sup> But the remainder of the narrative demonstrates the potential for solidarity between middle- and working-class women. Upon securing a residence for both of them, “Jemima insist[ed] on being considered as the house-keeper, and to receive the customary stipend. On no other terms

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59. Mellor, 200.

60. Lorch, 92-93.

61. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), 104.

would she remain her friend” (276). Taylor observes that Maria and Jemima’s arrangement “is both effective and heroic, yet remains strongly marked by the two women’s divergent class positions and expectations.”<sup>62</sup> Far from an ideal situation, Jemima’s role in *Wrongs of Woman* demonstrates a stark reversal of the pessimistic individualism espoused by *Mary*. What readers may find in this partnership is the fact that bourgeois women are dependent on the labor of their women helpers, and that in a society which devalues women, labor, and especially laboring women, the latter must rely on the former for reciprocal support.

Maria and Jemima’s partnership may be unequal, but it offers the most coherent resistance to British industrial capitalism articulated in either of Wollstonecraft’s novels. British society relied upon the concept of heterosexual marriage and the ideology of separate spheres to bring men and women together for procreation and separate them to ensure material production (men laboring for wages outside of the home) and social reproduction (women caring for men and children without wages). By forming a two-woman household, Maria and Jemima construct a less coercive, less patriarchal model of living for women. This arrangement is a manifestation of the alternative nineteenth-century household, described by Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman as “that place where members who may not have been biologically related ... each contributed their various incomes, significantly increasing their individual chances of survival.”<sup>63</sup> Due to the unfinished nature of the manuscript, we know little else of how Wollstonecraft

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62. Taylor, 244.

63. Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman, “Without Reserves, in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, edited by Tithi Bhattacharya, 37-67 (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 40.

envisioned this household would operate, who would be responsible for waged work and for care work, or how much each member would contribute. Nevertheless, Maria and Jemima's household offers a vision of the proto-feminist household, one that is especially promising for Maria's daughter.

## **Conclusion**

Wollstonecraft's novels are evidence of her attempt to teach young and adult women about their subordination within a misogynistic society and to articulate forms of resistance. Despite her disgust at the novel's role in convincing women that their subordination was natural, Wollstonecraft leveraged the aesthetic conventions of the novel and sentimentality to find women readers and subvert the ideology of the sentimental novel. Novels typically reinforced beliefs that women were inherently physically, intellectually, and emotionally weaker than men; Wollstonecraft's novels instead offered models of strong, rational women, narrowly defined by a middle-class perspective. Although *Mary* arguably makes violence and poverty invisible as part of the experience of being a woman, *Wrongs of Woman* revises her earlier narrative by focusing on the material conditions of women from varying class positions. This revision is an important development in proto-feminist history, as it begins to articulate the matrix of domination that affected women differently depending upon their economic status.

Perhaps most importantly, Wollstonecraft's articulation of social reproduction theory in *Mary* and *Wrongs of Woman* highlights how the contemporary mode of production subordinates women and also offers alternative forms of resistance to the system. *Mary*, through its emphasis on the coercive and compulsory nature of marriage,

reveals British industrial capitalism's dependence on women's non-consensual participation in reproductive labor: women are vital for the transfer of wealth from one family to another and for maintaining the national population. Mary resists by using her wealth to aid other women and by not having children, yet ultimately efforts leave her unhappy and in an untimely grave. This pessimistic vision of resistance is reimagined in *Wrongs of Woman* where some of the wrongs are righted with the formation of the two-woman household, one free of men's violence and compulsory reproduction. Whereas *Mary* viewed resistance as an individual practice, *Wrongs of Woman* suggests collective action as the key to effective resistance.

## Chapter Four: Wollstonecraft's Dialectics of Public Pedagogy

Mary Wollstonecraft's commitment to pedagogy extended beyond the typical domains of education. Alan Richardson observes that "a keen and vital concern with education ... runs throughout Wollstonecraft's writing and remains a dominant theme to the abrupt end of her career."<sup>1</sup> She wrote texts intended to educate young girls and boys and texts outlining the principles that teachers ought to employ for their own pupils. Her dedication to teaching women to see their position in society for what it was is further evidenced by her novels, designed as they were for an audience of women readers. Just as explicitly educational works for children and novels for women sought to educate their readers, Wollstonecraft's political writings act as public pedagogy. The eighteenth-century public, as far as political and philosophical discourse extended, was exclusively gendered masculine.<sup>2</sup> While the education of a younger generation would sow the seeds for a more educated generation of adults, such a gradual change was not conducive to changing the course of events in the 1790s, when Wollstonecraft first ventured into political writing. If she wanted to make a difference in the present, she would need to do so in the present. Furthermore, as her work for the *Analytical Review* certainly would have indicated, adult

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1. Alan Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24.

2. Wollstonecraft was one of just a few women to engage explicitly in matters of politics or philosophy in this century, the other being Mary Astell. Women were of course conversant on these issues and expressed them in public writing, though they often turned to "feminine" genres for this expression. Examples include Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France* (1790), Maria Edgeworth's *Letters to Charlotte Smith's Desmond* (1792), and *Literary Ladies* (1795).



men, given the cares of business and family, needed to be instructed about the events of the world and how they should react. Published with the intention of digesting the latest political and philosophical treatises, the *Analytical Review* was designed for the bourgeois man who had less time than necessary for reading the latest tomes. Having written to educate children and women in the 1780s, the political upheavals that extended into the '90s proved to be the catalyst for Wollstonecraft venturing into the domain of political writing.

Writing to instruct an audience of already educated men, posed its own unique challenges that indelibly conditioned the strategies Wollstonecraft employed in her writing and the degree to which she would confront her interlocutors. As a woman, Wollstonecraft was something of an anomaly in the business of political and philosophical writing. Paul Guyer reminds us that “Philosophy in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment was a game for young *men*.”<sup>3</sup> Edmund Burke was no longer a young man when he wrote *Reflections of the Revolutions in France* (1790),<sup>4</sup> which moved Wollstonecraft to mount her sustained attack against him in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790).<sup>5</sup> However, Burke had established his reputation much earlier in the century

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3. Paul Guyer, introduction to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, by Edmund Burke (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2015), vii; emphasis added.

4. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993).

5. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993).

with the publication of his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).<sup>6</sup> Wollstonecraft's eventual husband, William Godwin earned recognition himself by writing *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) before turning to novels and children's books for most of his remaining years.<sup>7</sup> What matters, of course, is that Wollstonecraft was entering into an arena dominated by men and would thus be addressing men. That a woman would venture to challenge the public discourse established by men, and to then teach them a thing or two, would likely have galled many men, much less made the substance of her work beyond reproach.

For this very reason, Wollstonecraft shaped the form and content of her political writings to appeal to a masculine public. Each of the three political texts analyzed in this chapter address certain contingencies that Wollstonecraft reacted to when composing each text. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft reacted to Burke's veneration of rank and property rights by mimicking his grandiose style while refuting his materialist claims. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792),<sup>8</sup> she responded to criticisms of her gender in reviews of the first *Vindication* by adopting an ultra-rationalist style and mode of writing in order to justify the rights of woman. She would not find unanimous acclaim in reviews of *Rights of Woman* either, which would galvanize her to look for the intersections between her two *Vindications*. The result was *Letters Written*

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6. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Paul Guyer (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2015).

7. William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2013).

8. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993).

during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796)<sup>9</sup> where Wollstonecraft arrived at an equilibrium between reason and emotion, at an intersection of material and gendered analysis. *Letters* earned her the most positive contemporary acclaim of any text she had published in her lifetime, particularly from the male philosophical establishment. This arc of her career does not only demonstrate that her thinking and writing evolved while she educated herself as an adult. It also instructs and models for a male readership their own capacity to evolve intellectually, particularly when encountering foreign subject positions.

### ***Rights of Men: The Flowers of Rhetoric and the Demon of Property***

Opposing the arguments of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Wollstonecraft tried to capitalize on the style that made Burke's pamphlet so effective. The popularity of *Reflections* was explosive. Horace Walpole claimed that it had sold 7,000 copies in just a single week.<sup>10</sup> By the time Wollstonecraft's response had been put to press, a month later, *Reflections* had allegedly sold 13,000 copies.<sup>11</sup> Part of the appeal of Burke's text may be owed to "expectations of openness and selectivity," which Clare Brant attributes to the epistolary genre.<sup>12</sup> Epistolary forms of communication invite this reading because of the intimate connection they draw between author and reader, through

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9. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, ed. Ingrid Horrocks (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2013).

10. Richard Bourke, *Empire & Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 744.

11. Bourke, 744.

12. Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.

the use of second person pronouns, and because of the occasional nature of the composition process, which renders the writer's spontaneous impressions with contrivance. Of course, as Marilyn Butler has observed, *Reflections* is "cunningly adapted to circumstances, though reworked over nearly a year to look spontaneous."<sup>13</sup>

Wollstonecraft's rebuttal—written in less than a month—was successful in that it was the first published response and sold out of its first edition in just three weeks. Anecdotes about the composition of *Rights of Men* suggest that Wollstonecraft sent her manuscript to Joseph Johnson by the page, prioritizing a speedy publication over all else.<sup>14</sup> If Burke had to artificially make *Reflections* appear spontaneous, *Rights of Men* was literally written at the spur of the moment. Wollstonecraft characterizes her own remarks as "effusions of the moment" in the advertisement to *Rights of Men* (3). Reviewers of the first editions noted the extemporaneousness of Wollstonecraft's text, but their ideological commitments determined whether they praised or derided her hasty style of writing. The radical *Analytical Review* stated that *Rights of Men* "abounds with just sentiments, and lively and animated remarks, expressed in elegant and nervous language, and which may be read, with pleasure and improvement."<sup>15</sup> However, the conservative *Critical Review*, "sworn foe"<sup>16</sup> of the *Analytical Review*, agreed with

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13. Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 35.

14. Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft & Mary Shelley* (New York: Random House, 2015), 151-152.

15. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, *Analytical Review* 8 (1790): 418-419.

16. Ralph M. Wardle, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1951): 120-121.

Wollstonecraft's own assessment of the work as "hasty." The *Critical Review* complained about the "incongruity of the title with the substance of the pamphlet," as well as the language, "so animated and rapid, that the author forgets at the end of a sentence the metaphor with which [s]he began it."<sup>17</sup> Both reviewers note similar aesthetic characteristics by use of terms such as "hasty" or "nervous," while drawing quite different ideological implications.

The first edition of *Rights of Men* may have met with a relatively positive reception, but praise for the second edition was no doubt tempered by the fact that it now carried Wollstonecraft's name on its title page. From there on, reviews would primarily focus on her person as the object of interest in examining the vindication, emphasizing aesthetic elements of her writing. Gender was undoubtedly tied to the reception of Wollstonecraft's aesthetics. The *Gentleman's Magazine* expressed reservations about whether Wollstonecraft was "a real and not a fictitious lady," characterizing her response to Burke as "a great deal of rant," without "a shadow of reason in her declamation."<sup>18</sup> The aesthetics of Wollstonecraft's pamphlet became conflated with her gender, as the reviewer even questions Wollstonecraft's existence. The *General Magazine and Impartial Review* makes a much greater deal about Wollstonecraft's identity in their review of *Rights of Men*. The review suggests that Wollstonecraft's authorship is a stunt to generate sales because a woman advocating for the rights of man has "furnished the prurient wags, who feed the public mind, with diurnal lubrications, with many a clumsy

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17. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, *The Critical Review* 70 (1790): 694-695.

18. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, *Gentleman's Magazine* 41 (1791): 151-154.

jest and a pointless sarcasm.” But the reviewer goes on to make their own prurient jest, claiming that it is “the prerogative of reason, to aim at all the excellencies our faculties can command; but reason is *prostituted*, when occupied in suggesting apologies for discontent.”<sup>19</sup> The review subordinates the text to the identity of its author, and it promotes quite tawdry insinuations about the nature of the pamphlet itself. Meanwhile, the same publication offered simpering congratulations to Burke in their earlier review of *Reflections*: “we sincerely thank the elegant writer for the pleasure and the instruction we have reaped from his labors.”<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, Wollstonecraft’s argument against Burke did not hinge entirely upon the cool elegance of reason, even though reviewers were likely to distort how reasonable her remarks were. If, as Chris Jones argues, Wollstonecraft was “scathing” in her denunciation of sensibility,<sup>21</sup> she was not immune to pursuing emotion to fuel her own arguments. Wollstonecraft spends a significant amount of space in *Rights of Men* pursuing *ad hominem* attacks against Burke that do little to advance an argument against his actual points. Wollstonecraft opens her letter to Burke with dripping sarcasm, avowing that “it is not necessary, with courtly insincerity, to apologize to you for intruding upon your precious time” (5). Not much later, Wollstonecraft compares the act of pointing out the internal contradictions within *Reflections* to the “cowardice” of

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19. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, *The General Magazine and Impartial Review* (Jan. 1791): 26-27.

20. Review of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, *The General Magazine and Impartial Review* (Dec. 1790): 539.

21. Chris Jones, “Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindications* and their Political Tradition,” *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); 42-58.

“fight[ing] with a man who had never exercised the weapons with which his opponent chose to combat” (8). These caustic remarks about Burke’s self-importance and weakness culminate with Wollstonecraft’s claim that *Reflections* is largely a device to make Burke’s own name relevant once more after fading into relative unimportance: “you were the Cicero of one side of the house for years; and then to sink into oblivion, to see your blooming honors fade before you, was enough to rouse ... you [to] produce the impassioned *Reflections* which have again been a glorious revivification of your fame” (44). The use of emotion rather than pure reason may not be indictment of a writer from a presentist perspective, but it is fair to acknowledge that Wollstonecraft’s personal attacks against Burke may be termed a “rant” as some reviewers termed *Rights of Men*.

Wollstonecraft also relied on strategies of containment to steer readers towards her own viewpoint rather than relying on reason alone to win support to argument. *Reflections* is framed as a spontaneously written letter to a known correspondent and *Rights of Men* takes the form of a letter openly addressed to Burke. While under the conceit of speaking to a single intimate audience, Burke’s *Reflections* can easily be addressed to any reader who may answer to the “Dear Sir,” with which he begins his pamphlet.<sup>22</sup> Wollstonecraft inverts this model when she, as the anonymous writer, addresses the known quantity that is Burke, “a man whose literary abilities have raised him to notice in the state.”<sup>23</sup> With this clever reversal, the reader of *Rights of Men* occupies the subject position of the letter-writer opposed to Burke; the reader is not the

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22. Burke, *Reflections*, 3.

23. Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men*, 5; all subsequent references in the sections of this essay dealing with *Rights of Men* will be indicated by parenthetical page numbers.

recipient of the letter, but rather on the same level as its anonymous author.

Wollstonecraft responds to Burke by taking the genre of epistolary discourse quite literally. Her response to Burke is framed as a response from the gentleman to whom Burke is addressing. Readers of the conversation of between Burke and Wollstonecraft simultaneously occupy the role of the addressed in *Reflections* and the addresser in *Rights of Men*. The result is that Wollstonecraft interpellates readers into the viewpoint expressed within the text by aligning readers with her writing persona. This is only successful, however, insofar as her identity as the author is obscured. As a woman, she is neither the “Dear Sir” being addressed, nor is she a relatable proxy for the predominantly male audience of the conversation. Once gender becomes visible in this exchange, identification with her as the author of the text is no longer desirable or neatly compatible with the terms of debate indicated by Burke’s opening address. The flagging success of *Rights of Men* in successive editions makes even more sense given her identity as a woman was revealed in the second edition.

*Rights of Men* contains techniques that rely on emotion and containment to appeal to Wollstonecraft’s readers, but her stated opinions about such moves present a conflicted stance. Her stated position on aesthetics indicate that she is against emotion and sensibility as being legitimate means of persuasion, specifically when used by Burke, and that rationality and reason ought to be the dominant mode that dictates human decision-making. This adds a significant degree of nuance to any discussion of aesthetics in *Rights of Men*, because Wollstonecraft appears to *ideologically* oppose the *aesthetic* choices she makes. This becomes readily apparent when the aesthetic characteristics of *Rights of Men*, as described above, are compared to Wollstonecraft’s description of Burke’s



aesthetics in *Reflections* and when compared to Wollstonecraft's description of her own aesthetic practices, as detailed below.

Ironically, Wollstonecraft attacks the Burkean style of *Reflections* in by calling attention to the "feminine" sensibility of his text. After her opening lecture about Burke misrepresenting the rights of man, Wollstonecraft invites Burke to a tête-à-tête: "Quitting now the flowers of rhetoric, let us, Sir, reason together" (7). The metaphor "flowers of rhetoric" points up a highly ornamental style that Burke has used to inflate his actual arguments (as well as lend a feminine connotation to his arguments). Elsewhere, Wollstonecraft comments on the popularity of Burke's *Reflections*, wryly observing that "the witty arguments and ornamental feelings are on a level with the comprehension of the fashionable world ... Even the ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail many of your sentimental exclamations" (6). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, by the end of the eighteenth century, sentimentalism was closely associated with femininity and an excess of emotion. Wollstonecraft addresses Burke by remarking "passions ... cloud your reason," which simultaneously emasculates Burke's performance in *Reflections* and suggests his arguments have been impeded by his emotion or fancy (44). It is evident from *Rights of Men* that reason and emotion are inimical in this worldview, as Wollstonecraft charges Burke with "frequently advert[ing] to a sentimental jargon, which has long been current in conversation ... though it never received the *regal* stamp of reason" (29; emphasis in original).

Although Wollstonecraft is complicit in delivering her argument through emotionally charged rhetoric, the same rhetoric she castigates Burke for using, she repeatedly refers to her production as "manly" and thus reasonable, according to the

reason/sensibility dyad. There are two instances of note in which Wollstonecraft explicitly marks her style as “manly.” The first appears in the opening salvo, where she dares to give a “manly definition of ... the *rights of men*” in contrast to what “lively fancy” has misrepresented (5; emphasis in original). The second occurs when Wollstonecraft challenges, “with manly plainness,” the idea that English parliament has a divine basis for its structure (35). In both situations, Wollstonecraft draws a contrast between Burke and herself, positioning manliness in alignment with reason, while her interlocutor is, by implication, branded as effeminate and unreasonable. Further, by speaking with “manly plainness,” Wollstonecraft is trying to draw a distinction between the ornamentation of Burke’s writing (his “flowers of rhetoric”) and the presumable frankness of her own; the less jargon and ornament, this suggests, the more truthful and self-apparent the arguments. Wollstonecraft goes so far as to pantomime this rejection of emotion in favor of reason within the material text. When Wollstonecraft chastises Burke’s prevarications, she writes: “I pause to recollect myself; and smother the contempt I feel rising for your rhetorical flourishes and infantine sensibility” (60) followed by two lines of dashes before beginning a new paragraph (60). These dashes represent for readers the time and effort between Wollstonecraft’s visceral reaction to Burke and the resumption of her writing after presumably regaining her poise and perspicacity. Though Wollstonecraft certainly did not write dispassionately (who can?), there is clear effort on the part of the author to portray nonchalance.

Wollstonecraft’s aesthetics of visceral feeling are complemented by an ideology of class struggle. In response to Burke’s claims about the sanctity of tradition and the inheritance of property, Wollstonecraft embarks on a material analysis in *Rights of Men*

that challenges the justness of a wealth-stratified society. Indeed, Wollstonecraft herself was of the middle class, coming from a family that had owned a successful weaving business and earning her own way using her pen and head, rather than bodily toil. Though she was never wealthy in her adult life, Wollstonecraft employed servants and her ideas are conditioned by her experience of middle-class society. If Wollstonecraft believed in some way that the bourgeoisie was the superior of the aristocracy and the poor, she held more distaste for the former than she did for the latter.<sup>24</sup> For these reasons, it becomes clear in reading *Rights of Men* that the poor and the laboring of England were held in thrall by the avarice of the wealthy and the idle. Burke would argue in *Reflections* that the system of hereditary property was best for England because it was for the benefit of the elite and tradition. Wollstonecraft would argue in *Rights of Men* that hereditary property ought to be dismantled in England because it was inimical to the spirit of justice. Because of her subject position as a member of the middle class, and her feigned subject position as a male author in *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft also demonstrated a paternalistic attitude towards the poor and little consideration for the material conditions of women in the text.

In *Reflections*, Burke argues that “perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances ... which tends the most to the perpetuation of society.”<sup>25</sup> Wollstonecraft parries this claim by arguing that “the demon of property has ever been at hand to encroach on the sacred rights of men, and to fence round with awful pomp laws that war with justice” (7). The reason for Wollstonecraft’s

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24. See Gordon, esp. 11-13.

25. Burke, *Reflections*, 51.

disagreement with Burke is that her materialist analysis extends beyond the interests of the aristocrats that Burke represents. Wollstonecraft asserts that the “definition of English liberty” is “security of property” but that it is “only property of the rich that is secure; the man who lives by the sweat of his brow has no asylum from oppression” (13). Hereditary property, according to Wollstonecraft, is antithetical to the progress of civilization because of the generational disparity it creates. This is particularly true when property is only protected for one sector of society and is expropriated from another. As Wollstonecraft elaborates, the poor are reduced to “dreadful extremities” when “their property, the fruit of their industry, being entirely at the disposal of their lords, who were so many petty tyrants” is expropriated (10). Invoking the language of lord-vassal feudalism, Wollstonecraft calls attention to how little the British mode of production has changed the conditions of the poor and laboring people. Indeed, when Wollstonecraft asks, “What has stopped [civilization’s] progress?” her answer is a resounding refutation of Burke’s ideology: “hereditary property” (8).

Wollstonecraft identified the expropriation and accumulation of wealth and property as the greatest ill of British society, but *Rights of Men* did not exactly express the “levelling” tendency that some reviewers accused her of. With consideration of Wollstonecraft’s middle-class background, the values expressed in *Rights of Men* clearly derive from an eighteenth-century bourgeois ideology. As Gary Kelly reminds us, “Enlightenment writers,” like Wollstonecraft, “often stressed individual moral and intellectual worth or merit against ‘artificial’ social categories such as rank or other forms

of ascribed or unearned status.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Wollstonecraft promotes an ideology of meritocracy rather than plutocracy in *Rights of Men*. Remarking on the current system of social advancement in England, Wollstonecraft observes that “a man of merit cannot rise in the church, the army, or navy, unless he has some interest in a borough” (20). Connections rather than merit determine the professional trajectory of men, a reality that Wollstonecraft returns to throughout her career.<sup>27</sup> Rather than supporting a system that rewards one for their situation at birth, Wollstonecraft avows that “the only security of property that nature authorizes and reason sanctions is, the right a man has to enjoy the acquisitions which his talents and industry have acquired” (23). One’s wealth and position in society, Wollstonecraft informs the reader, ought to be determined by the active sweat of their brow or fruit of their intellect, not the passive reception of gifts or birthright. As this demonstrates, Wollstonecraft did not endorse the notion that all things should be distributed equally, but she did advocate for a degree of equity. Using the metaphor of a nurturing rain, she reasons that while wealth can be held for the benefit of one, it is more fruitful for wealth to be “disembogued into the sea that affords clouds to water all the land” (49). By analyzing the way that wealth becomes unequally distributed, Wollstonecraft demonstrates the virtue of rewarding labor with all that it has produced.

The merit-based system of wealth distribution that Wollstonecraft advocates for in *Rights of Men* has the effect of improving the lives of the poor, but Wollstonecraft approaches this with an attitude of paternalism rather than liberation. The bourgeois

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26. Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), 11.

27. See Chapter Three for the discussion of bourgeois ideology in *The Wrongs of Woman*.

analyses of material conditions in *Rights of Men* attacks the monopoly on wealth and power held by the aristocracy, just as the poor are also subject to scrutiny. It is true that Wollstonecraft chides Burke for the belief that the poor are the “livestock of an estate” (16). She further argues that while the wealthy may offer charity to the poor, they do so out of obligation, rather than to do justice (53). Reflecting on the relationship between the wealthy and the destitute, for example, Wollstonecraft observes that “the poor consider the rich as their lawful prey; but we ought not too severely animadvert on their *ingratitude*” (53; emphasis added). In this case Wollstonecraft perpetuates the idea that rich and poor are inherently antagonistic classes of people, seeming to elide the key issue that wealth is the source of this contention. Further, she misidentifies the source of power in this relationship, placing it in the poor who apparently victimize the wealthy and are ungrateful for the charity they receive. Rather than arguing for the dignity or self-determination of the poor and laboring class, Wollstonecraft approved of a paternalistic oversight of the poor as a means of saving them from themselves: “Instead of the poor being subject to the gripping hand of an avaricious steward, they would be watched over with fatherly solicitude ... and shield from rapacity the beings who, by the sweat of their brow, exalted him above his fellows” (58). This reformulation of society moves responsibility of the poor from the greedy aristocracy to the liberal middle class, while creating a distinction between the deserving poor, who is “exalted ... above his fellows” and the undeserving poor who would grasp at the heels of their hardworking brethren. As this demonstrates, Wollstonecraft is not quite as revolutionary as some reviewers would accuse of her being, while still arguing for the necessity of reforming the British system of rank and class.

*The Rights of Men* is far from being aesthetically or ideologically coherent, in no small part because of its rushed publication. It is nonetheless an important document, exhibiting Wollstonecraft's first venture into the realm of public pedagogy as well as her first attempt at explicitly dealing with issues of class in British society. In *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft attempts to stake her claim to rationality with a pose of masculinity, though it is ultimately undermined by her reliance on emotional discourse and her revealed identity as a woman. She also attempts a materialist analysis of the then current state of society but is ultimately dependent on her own experience of bourgeois material conditions when attempting to offer a reformed vision of the future. This is important to note because when she returns to public pedagogy in *Rights of Woman*, her text is entirely stripped of emotional appeals and structure, while having abandoned a materialist analysis in favor of a gendered analysis.

***Rights of Woman: "This Divine Instructress"***

*Rights of Woman* represents a significant divergence from *Rights of Men*, abandoning the epistolary format and the materialist analysis that defined the latter text. No longer in dialogue with Edmund Burke, Wollstonecraft wrote *Rights of Woman* as a standalone text on its own aesthetic and ideological terms. Whereas *Rights of Men* relied on a discourse of emotion and sensibility to refute Burke's assertions, *Rights of Woman* is composed in a more typical genre and style for a political treatise; and while Wollstonecraft was in dialogue with Burke over largely material interests such as the distribution of wealth and property in *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft returns to her former domain of inquiry: the role of education in women's inequality. Indeed, the thesis of *Rights of Woman* can be

found in the preface to the volume, where she draws the connection between “the rights of woman and national education” (65). To make this argument successfully, as Jamie Barlowe tells us, she would need to address an audience of elite men, because it was men that “not only shaped the thinking of her time but the policy as well.”<sup>28</sup> In this section, I explore how Wollstonecraft’s aesthetic choices were calibrated to educate and to persuade an audience of learned men.

If the relationship between Wollstonecraft’s identity and the aesthetics of *Rights of Men* were problematic for its reception, *Rights of Woman* appears calculated to address those negative reviews. Those reviews referred to *Rights of Men* as “hasty,”<sup>29</sup> being “without a shadow of reason,”<sup>30</sup> and having the tendency to “digress a little too often.”<sup>31</sup> *Rights of Woman* is instead a lengthy and well-detailed examination, rigorously argued without the crutch of emotion, and generically and stylistically familiar to an audience accustomed to reading conventional philosophy. *Rights of Men* was inconsistent in championing reason while relying on emotion to make the claim in favor of reason, particularly galling as it came from a woman. The coherent content and style of *Rights of Woman* affirms Wollstonecraft’s commitment to reason as a unifying capacity for men and for women. For those who did not harbor an *a priori* prejudice against women’s

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28. Jamie Barlowe, “Daring to Dialogue: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Rhetoric of Feminist Dialogics,” *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 118.

29. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, *The Critical Review* 70 (1790): 694-695.

30. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, *Gentleman’s Magazine* 41 (1791): 151.

31. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, *English Review* 17 (1791): 61.



capacity for reason, *Rights of Woman* served as proof and lesson in one. “With one important exception,” according to R.M. Janes, “every notice that *Rights of Woman* received when it first appeared was favorable.”<sup>32</sup> Recognizing the educational import of the work, for example, the *Analytical Review* states that they are “convinced all will find some partial instruction” from reading *Rights of Woman*, regardless of the reader’s background.<sup>33</sup> Though they had savaged Wollstonecraft’s work in the past, the *Critical Review* styled her “the female Plato,”<sup>34</sup> while the *Monthly Review* would refer to her as a “divine Instructress.”<sup>35</sup> It was no doubt because of the aesthetics of *Rights of Woman* that this text would be seen as educational in comparison to *Rights of Men*, which received no such notice in this regard.

The partitioning of *Rights of Woman* into sections and subsections is worth observing in detail because of its departure from the first *Vindication* and its similarity to the structuring of contemporary male philosophers’ works. Wollstonecraft certainly succeeded in the eyes of a more politically conservative outlet, such as the *Monthly Review* who placed her within a “class of philosophers ... [that have] a right to a distinguished place.”<sup>36</sup> In order for Wollstonecraft to be taken so seriously, she needed to

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32. R.M. Janes, “On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39.2 (1798), 293-302.

33. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Analytical Review* 13 (1792), 489.

34. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Critical Review* 4 (1792), 390.

35. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Monthly Review* 8 (1792): 198.

36. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Monthly Review* 8 (1792): 198.

adopt the generic and textual markers found in other works of philosophy. The letter format of *Rights of Men* had suited her needs for responding to Burke and dashing off a rapid reply, but the format of the philosophical tome would lend an ethos to her controversial claim that women were capable of reason and deserving of the same rights as men. The extemporaneous style of *Rights of Men* could be written off as the effusions of an emotional woman by her contemporaries in a way that the cool and articulate structure of *Rights of Woman* could not. This structure includes a letter “To M. Talleyrand-Périgord Late Bishop of Autun,” an advertisement from the author, an introduction, and thirteen chapters, some with numbered sections. No one work of eighteenth-century philosophy serves as the ur-text for *Rights of Woman*’s structure but taken as a collective it becomes clear that Wollstonecraft was working from a conventional template defined philosophy as a literary genre.

Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* (1791)<sup>37</sup> and David Hume’s *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748)<sup>38</sup> have a clear influence on the paratextual materials of Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft begins her second *Vindication* with an epistolary dedication to the French politician Talleyrand, in which she places her own philosophy on coeducation and its influence on women’s role in society in juxtaposition with Talleyrand’s, which had been recently published in pamphlet (65). Similarly, Paine had begun *The Rights of Man* with a dedication to another foreign politician, the American President George Washington, “whose

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37. Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins (New York: Penguin, 1985).

38. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008).

exemplary virtue hath so eminently contributed to establish” the rights of man.<sup>39</sup>

Wollstonecraft is characteristically less flattering in her dedication to Talleyrand, than Paine to Washington. For instance, Wollstonecraft challenges Talleyrand to stand by his claim that women should be taught to reason yet ought to be rendered subservient to men, “for surely, Sir, you will not assert, that a duty can be binding which is not founded on reason?” (67). Wollstonecraft begins with this epistle that directly addresses a specific reading audience, but like Hume, she also includes an author’s advertisement intended to inform the general readership of the text’s composition and publication. Hume, in the advertisement to his *Enquiry*, explains that the present essay had previously been part of a larger work which had met with censure when it had been published anonymously.<sup>40</sup>

Wollstonecraft addresses her audience with the opposite intelligence, alluding to the fact that the extant text of *Rights of Woman* was to be the first of two volumes that would “elucidate some of the sentiments, and complete many of the sketches begun in the first” (69). While Wollstonecraft adopted the generic patterns of Paine and Hume, she did not simply mimic conventions, but rather used them to her own advantage.

The organization and arrangement of *Rights of Woman* is worth examination, particularly as it relates to the charges of digression and unreason levied against *Rights of Men*. Reason and logic are heuristically synonymous with the quantity of fact and the quality of proof, but rhetoricians since Aristotle have observed that “speech which fails to

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39. Paine, 33.

40. Hume, 2.

convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do.”<sup>41</sup> Both organization and style are implicated under the domain of reason, and Wollstonecraft addressed both of these in *Rights of Woman*. Whereas *Rights of Men* had been an unabridged text without breaks or headings aside from a brief advertisement, *Rights of Woman* uses headings and subheadings as organizational tools, like other philosophers of her day. As a point of comparison, Book I Chapter VII of Godwin’s *Political Justice* considers “Three Principle Causes of Moral Improvement,” which are elaborated upon in three discrete subsections labeled “I. Education,” “II. Literature,” and “III. Political Justice.” Like Godwin, Wollstonecraft uses chapters and roman numeral subsections to structure her argument for clarity. Chapter V of *Rights of Woman*, for example, is a lengthy critique of individual authors who have denigrated women on the basis that they are unfit for formal education. Wollstonecraft uses section headings to break this, her longest chapter in the volume, into more manageable passages, numbered I-V. While these sections are not descriptively titled, like Godwin’s, it is clear from topic sentences that Wollstonecraft examines Jean-Jacques Rousseau, James Fordyce, John Gregory, various women authors, and works of general education, under each respective heading. By appropriating these markers and conventions of divisions, Wollstonecraft established her ethos as a serious philosopher and attentive instructor of her audience.

If reviewers of *Rights of Men* were eager to conflate Wollstonecraft’s gender with a susceptibility to an overly emotional style, *Rights of Woman* accounts for this reader bias with language and style strongly rooted in rationalist discourse. In their review of

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41. Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and the Poetics*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Modern Library College Editions, 1984), 167.

*Rights of Woman*, the *Analytical Review* noted that “the style is strong and impressive,” traits associated with masculine logics.<sup>42</sup> As Miriam Brody has argued, Enlightenment argumentation continued to be based on classical models that constructed argument as “an inherently masculine enterprise [that] still required muscular strength to bespeak ... mental agility.”<sup>43</sup> It was as much for the sake of clarity as for the sake of validating the “manliness” of her arguments that Wollstonecraft vowed “to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels” (74). This tendency towards plainness is echoed in Wollstonecraft’s wish to “persuade by the force of [her] arguments” (74). As in *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft condemns sentimental and emotion-laden discourse; but in *Rights of Woman* she makes the concerted effort to purge her own language of emotion, avoiding the apparent hypocrisy she had been accused of two years earlier.

Reviewers noticed that Wollstonecraft had eschewed the Burkean style that had suffused her first vindication and had adopted the rhetorical devices of the philosopher. Although they remained unconvinced of her doctrines, the *Critical Review* acknowledges the system of Wollstonecraft’s arguments, comparing them to “the strictest proofs in mathematical demonstrations.”<sup>44</sup> There are many examples of Wollstonecraft’s use of rhetorical figures such as syllogisms, inferences, and thought experiments, as well as

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42. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Analytical Review* 13 (1792), 489.

43. Miriam Brody, “The Vindication of the Writes of Woman: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Rhetoric,” *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 109-111.

44. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Critical Review* 4 (1792), 389.

locating the fallacies in the arguments of her opponents in *Rights of Woman*. Her use of analogy, however, stands out for its self-consciousness. For example, Wollstonecraft likens growth of the human body to the growth of a tree, commenting that “there appears to be something analogous in the mind” (190). Elsewhere, Wollstonecraft observes that humans are liable to submit to oppression by taking the path of least resistance, in order to argue the following: “women, *I argue from analogy*, are degraded by the same propensity to enjoy the present moment; and, at last, despise the freedom which they have not sufficient virtue to struggle to attain” (121; emphasis added). By signaling to the reader in each example that she is using an analogy, made particularly clear in the second example, Wollstonecraft calls attention to the logical thinking and style that is evident on the page. If the *Critical Review* is at all representative of her audience, her readers certainly noticed the aesthetic commitment to reason.

Wollstonecraft’s identity as a woman clearly inflected the aesthetic choices that were made when composing *Rights of Woman*, a text which deals primarily with gendered ideology of the eighteenth century. In arguing for equity in education and power between men and women, Wollstonecraft writes herself into the position of authority necessary to make such an argument. If women were thought to be too emotional to acquire a rational education, Wollstonecraft needed to demonstrate her learned abilities and the strength of her reason as proof of concept; simply making this claim would not suffice. For this very reason, Wollstonecraft would once again condemn sentimentality and emotion as conditions of weakness. To an extent, it was necessary to disavow emotion in favor of reason because of the strong connection between women and emotion. Rather than recuperating emotion as a valid subjectivity, Wollstonecraft

made the expedient decision to accept the binary between reason and emotion, continuing to privilege the former.

As Wollstonecraft had established in *Rights of Men*, she was a partisan for reason in the debate between reason and sensibility, a position that she would retain in *Rights of Woman*. While her argument in *Rights of Men* was designed to refute reactionary appeals to nostalgia, *Rights of Woman* argues that sentimentality is designed to subordinate women and that reason has the power to liberate women. Wollstonecraft observes that without a rational education, women “become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling” (130). Rather than stoking the passions, Wollstonecraft suggests, reason ought to subordinate emotion and guide the feelings. “The formation of the temper,” she observes, “is the cool work of reason” (156). Adopting reason as a feminine ideal, in lieu of sentimentality, allows women the “dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge [to] raise the mind above those emotions which rather imbitter than sweeten the cup of life” (97).

Unfortunately, Wollstonecraft was up against a significant body of literature with her argument that women had the capacity for reason and that they ought to exercise their rational faculties. One of the more common arguments that Wollstonecraft addresses is that reason and emotion are analogous for the opposite sex. For example, in the words of John Gregory, “the power of wom[a]n ... is her sensibility” (135). Gregory essentially argues that reason and sensibility are equivocal, in that one is the innate faculty of men (and therefore superior) and that one is the innate faculty of women. Similarly, Wollstonecraft elsewhere alludes to the notion that emotion and sensibility are “women’s reason” (189). Wollstonecraft confronts these absurd notions put forth by her male

contemporaries, specifically the idea that women were “created rather to feel than reason” (132). This argument is corollary to the idea that reasoning is the domain of men and feeling the domain of women, “and that together, flesh and spirit, they make the most perfect whole” (133). Wollstonecraft rejects the gendered formulation of reason because reason is not inherently masculine and because, to her mind, sensibility is the subordinate of reason. Wollstonecraft’s view of this is made most clear in her analysis of Catharine Macaulay’s pedagogical writing, where she claims that in Macaulay’s writing “no sex appears, for it is like the sense it conveys, strong and clear” (180). While Macaulay’s writing might otherwise be considered “masculine” by her contemporaries, Wollstonecraft denies this conflation of gender and style: “I will not call hers a masculine understanding, because I admit not of such an arrogant assumption of reason” (180).

Wollstonecraft denies that reason is an innately gendered concept, and in doing so begs the question: how came women to be (perceived as) less rational and more sentimental than men? “In the education of women,” Wollstonecraft answers her reader, “the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment” (88). Education thus becomes a form of social reproduction, according to Wollstonecraft, ensuring that women fill the role prescribed for them within society and justifying the proscription of reason. Wollstonecraft strips bare the workings of this process by going to the initial stages of social reproduction: childhood education. By confining the corpus of women’s practical education to superficial “accomplishments,” girls, and young women in turn, are left “in a state of perpetual childhood,” without the intellectual means to procure an independent existence (73). The gendered ideology that promotes the innateness of sentimentality for women is also



abetted by gendered aesthetics, as Wollstonecraft demonstrates. “Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation,” as has been affirmed by the previous chapter (131). Through these vehicles, girls are exposed to “*mellifluous* precepts,” which “hunt every spark of nature out of their composition, melting every human quality into female meekness and artificial grace” (167). By going to the root of the issue, Wollstonecraft instructs her male peers as to how their prejudices against women came into being and continue to self-perpetuate.

*Rights of Woman* inverts the hierarchy of concerns expressed in *Rights of Man* by primarily focusing on issues of gender with a secondary consideration given to issues of class and material conditions. Just as in *Rights of Men*, gender and class are treated as exclusive, non-intersecting issues within *Rights of Woman*. As can be observed in the previous references to gender in this section, Wollstonecraft’s analysis of gendered ideology fails to imbricate issues of class into the analysis. Instead, when Wollstonecraft discusses class and material issues in *Rights of Woman*, she speaks about society at large, rather than the specific issues that affect women of a certain status. Wollstonecraft’s gambit, it appears, is to suggest that the effects of coeducation and the abolition of arbitrary divisions have material benefits for men as well. For example, having already demonstrated the ill effects that artificial distinctions have upon women, Wollstonecraft observes the negative effects of wealth on the wealthy: “hereditary property sophisticates the mind, and the unfortunate victims to it ... seldom exert the locomotive faculty of body or mind ... [and] they are unable to discern in what true merit and happiness consist” (222). Though a limited argument, the thrust of Wollstonecraft’s argument is that

artificial distinctions such as class and gender manufacture conflict and have negative consequences for those who would otherwise appear to benefit from them.

Wollstonecraft's analysis in *Rights of Woman* is not occupied with how gender and class co-construct material conditions, but rather provides analogies between gender and class conflict to illustrate how they negatively impact people. In the opening of her vindication Wollstonecraft compares the entirety of woman to the upper classes, as the "education of the rich tends to render them vain and helpless, and the unfolding mind is not strengthened by the practice of those duties which dignify the human character" (73). She affirms this comparison later, observing that "the whole female sex are, till their character is formed, in the same condition as the rich: for ... few will ever think of works of supererogation, to obtain the esteem of a small number of superior people" (127). By making these comparisons, Wollstonecraft constructs gender as a category that is independent of class consideration; that is to say, socioeconomic class only serves to distinguish *men* of differing ranks, while *women* are socioeconomically homogenous. It is clear from Wollstonecraft's analogies that, while women are like the wealthy, they ought not to be. Wollstonecraft's language ("tends to render them," "till their character is formed") suggests that women are artificially made to be something that they are not, while more education and autonomy could allow them to actualize into their proper state of being. To no great surprise, *Rights of Woman* suggests that the bourgeois subject position is the very state to which women ought to aspire.

Like Wollstonecraft's previous publications, *Rights of Woman* is indelibly conditioned by her standpoint as a bourgeois woman. In *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft positions the bourgeois woman as the normate. According to disability theorist

Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, normate refers to “the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definite human beings,” one that is only made visible “when we scrutinize the social processes and discourses that constitute physical and cultural otherness.”<sup>45</sup> While mythical, the concept of the normate is used as a figure to exclude those who do not cohere to the narrow limits that define the normal. The specific case of *Rights of Woman* configures the middle-class woman as the normate, while poor and wealthy women are considered deviant. This is most explicit in the introduction to the text, where Wollstonecraft admits, “I pay particular attention to those [women] in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state” (73). By naturalizing the condition of bourgeois women, those women who deviant from this norm are construed as Other. Although intended to show how women are disadvantaged by gendered ideology, treating class and gender as mutually exclusive categories ultimately has the effect of marginalizing women who do not fit bourgeois standards.

Focusing on the bourgeois woman as the normate, Wollstonecraft often excludes poor women from the conversation of gendered ideology and oppression. For example, Wollstonecraft argues that in order to “render the poor virtuous they must be employed, and women in the middle rank of life, did they not ape the fashions of the nobility, without catching their ease, might employ them, whilst they themselves managed their families, instructed their children, and exercised their own minds” (147). Here Wollstonecraft portrays aristocratic manners as an infection (“catching their ease”) that renders otherwise able middle-class women as incapable of fulfilling their duties. Turning

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45. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 8.

to laboring-class women, Wollstonecraft elides their very existence later in *Rights of Woman* when discussing the employment of women: “but what do women have to do in society? I may be asked, but to loiter with easy grace?” (229). Wollstonecraft argues that there is a dearth of respectable employment for (bourgeois) women, suggesting that they could be employed as physicians, nurses, midwives, politicians, and historians were it socially acceptable. To argue for women’s right to employment, however, Wollstonecraft expediently denigrates the employment that is available to women, which she names as prostitution, millinery, mantua-making, and teaching, while ignoring the majority of lower-class women who perform manual and menial labor in order to procure a scant existence.

Wollstonecraft’s designs on educating the male public begin, as this section demonstrates, with an aesthetic acquiescence to the expectations of philosophical discourse, and end with a proto-feminist ideological challenge to the dominant perceptions of women. With a keen eye to the criticism that surrounded her publication of the *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft promotes reason through reason in *Rights of Woman*, making a rational argument in dispassionate language. While perception and social reproduction constructs women as irrational, emotional entities, Wollstonecraft proves herself to be the exception to the rule, while denouncing emotion and sentimentality as subordinate to reason in all humans. In advocating for the rights of woman, Wollstonecraft presents a rational argument that women ought to participate in the same public as men, through both labor and representation. The result is that Wollstonecraft overidentifies women with a single socioeconomic class, claiming that women are currently like the upper class, when they should be more like the middle class. Although

*Rights of Woman* demonstrates Wollstonecraft's ability to make sense of a proto-feminist argument for a male readership, it does so at the expense of investigating how reason and emotion, gender and class, intersect and have the potential for the type of justice Wollstonecraft advocates for in her philosophical writing. It was not until her final completed work, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, that Wollstonecraft would begin to explore these nexuses and produce her most contemporarily acclaimed piece of writing.

***Letters from Scandinavia: "We Reason Deeply When We Forcibly Feel"***

On 16 June 1795, Mary Wollstonecraft boarded a ship bound for Gothenburg, Sweden, the beginning of her Scandinavian journey. The story behind *Letters from Scandinavia* begins in France, several years prior to her voyage north. Sympathetic to the spirit of the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft left for France to serve as a correspondent for the *Analytical Review* in 1792, shortly after the publication of *Rights of Woman*. While in Paris, Wollstonecraft met a fellow writer and idealist, the American Gilbert Imlay, with whom she had a romantic affair for several months. When the revolution grew hostile towards both women and British emigres, Wollstonecraft and Imlay agreed to a fictitious marriage, which would keep Wollstonecraft safe as the wife of an American. Imlay, however, had grown ambivalent towards Wollstonecraft and became more interested in mercantile affairs, despite Wollstonecraft's pregnancy. Shortly after the birth of their child Fanny, Imlay would leave for Britain. Wollstonecraft remained behind in Paris for several months as she recovered from her pregnancy and continued writing. Upon returning to London, Wollstonecraft was devastated to find Imlay living with a new

woman and no longer interested in maintaining the pretense of a relationship. This devastation, in addition to a more general depression that had dogged her since childhood, led Wollstonecraft to make an attempt on her own life. As a response to her suicide attempt, Imlay sent Wollstonecraft to Scandinavia as his business agent. In France, Imlay had turned his attentions from revolutionary idealism to smuggling goods from revolutionary France, past the British blockades, into neutral Sweden. One of Imlay's blockade-running silver-ships, captained by Peder Ellefsen, ran aground and sank off the Norwegian coast, resulting in his arrest and the disappearance of £3500 of Bourbon silver, a commercial disaster for Imlay. Under the name of Mary Imlay, Wollstonecraft was given authority as Imlay's agent to help resolve the pending legal case against Ellefsen and to recover any damages from the disappeared silver. Despite her efforts, Wollstonecraft appears to have returned to London empty-handed, before the criminal action against Ellefsen was resolved. Though these events are omitted from *Letters from Scandinavia*, they form an important background for understanding the composition and reception of the text.<sup>46</sup>

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46. The nature of Wollstonecraft's travels in Scandinavia were not fully understood until very recently. Wollstonecraft does not write explicitly about why is in Scandinavia *Letters from Scandinavia* and Godwin's *Memoirs* obfuscate the commercial reasons for her voyage. While Godwin published the original letters written to Imlay, which would form some of the basis for *Letters from Scandinavia*, in *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, he excised every reference to the Ellefsen business. It was not until 1972 that the true nature of Wollstonecraft's travels in Scandinavia was realized, thanks to Per Nyström's lecture to the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences at Gothenburg. Nyström's lecture was not translated into English until 1980 and it was only in 1987 that it was introduced to Wollstonecraft scholarship in Richard Holmes's Penguin edition of *Letters from Scandinavia*. For this reason, much scholarship and biographies are inconsistent in covering the composition history of *Letters from Scandinavia*; Per Nyström, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian Journey," *Acts of the Royal Society of Arts and Letters of Gothenburg, Humaniora* 17 (1980); Richard Holmes, *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark and Memoirs of the Author of "The*

There is a perverse truth to Godwin's characterization of *Letters from Scandinavia* as a seductive text. Published a few months after Wollstonecraft's death, her widower's memoirs of her life claim that "if ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, [*Letters from Scandinavia*] appears to me to be the book."<sup>47</sup> Scholarship has reached a consensus in viewing Godwin's parochial argument here as a sexist slight against Wollstonecraft's artistic and intellectual abilities. It is easy to see how Godwin's comments privilege his own response to the text and minimize the political and philosophical stakes of *Letters from Scandinavia*, reducing it to the pleadings of a jilted lover. And yet, as the previous sections of this chapter have observed, Wollstonecraft was attentive to the criticisms of her work by the male critics who reviewed her work and was attentive to shape her next production to answer these barbs. Wollstonecraft, in her philosophical writings, wrote for a male audience, and she came to know that audience well and to conform to their expectations, no matter how retrograde their expectations were. Her goal was not to provoke, but to persuade, educating her male readers that women were as deserving of rights as their male counterparts and that these rights ought to be equitably distributed regardless of arbitrary rank. In order to achieve this proto-materialist-feminist goal in *Letters from Scandinavia*, she would endeavor to present her ideas in the conventionally feminine genre of the epistolary travel narrative, while arriving at the decidedly unconventional conclusions

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*Rights of Woman*", by Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin (New York: Penguin, 1987); Gordon, esp. 308-321.

47. William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 95.

that reason and emotion are co-constitutive faculties and that positionalities such as gender and class could intersect to create greater degrees of oppression. In other words, *Letters from Scandinavia* reaches a synthesis between the sentimental materialism of *Rights of Man* and the rational feminism of *Rights of Woman*: humans were meant to feel and reason with equal measure; poverty and femininity were not mutually exclusive categories but frequently overlapping conditions which harmed their subjects at an exponential scale.

In *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft had successfully appealed to those who were not immediately prejudiced against her claims for women's rights, such as the staff at the *Analytical Review* and their circle of readers. *Letters from Scandinavia* offered an opportunity to reach those who were put off by the assertiveness of a woman writing in a masculine genre. The *Critical Review* was scandalized by the impropriety of a woman publishing in the genre of philosophy and critical of her decision to "sacrifice [her] pleasing qualities for the severity of reason."<sup>48</sup> In a very brief review, the *Town and Country Magazine* pans *Rights of Woman* as "an indignant invective," characterizing the treatise as an angry, and therefore emotional text, despite its overwhelming commitment to dispassionate discourse.<sup>49</sup> According to R.M. Janes, Wollstonecraft's friend, Mary Hays, noted in the years following Wollstonecraft's death that "Wollstonecraft's tone had alienated many readers who would have been sympathetic to her vision."<sup>50</sup> To a certain

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48. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Critical Review* 5 (1792), 141.

49. Review of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, *Town and Country Magazine* 24 (1792), 279.

50. Janes, 300.



type of male reader, Wollstonecraft pursued a vain task in trying to be perfectly reasonable and dispassionate in her argument; as a woman, she would always be presumed to be too emotional and too close to the matter at hand to hold “rational” opinions. In order to cajole those reactionary readers into the right frame of mind to accept her ideas about gender and material conditions, Wollstonecraft would adopt a more conventionally feminine style of discourse. This strategy of containment (which would be reprised in her unfinished novel *The Wrongs of Woman*) would allow her to smuggle her proto-materialist-feminist ideology into a text that nominally adheres to the conventions of women’s writing.

As one of the reactionary readers whom Wollstonecraft attempted to educate, Godwin’s reviews of *Letters from Scandinavia* are significant. Wollstonecraft and Godwin met briefly at a dinner party held for Thomas Paine, hosted by Johnson in 1791. Wollstonecraft “was eager to tell Paine her views on liberty, education, justice, and just about anything else that occurred to her,” much to the chagrin of the other guests, none more so than Godwin.<sup>51</sup> In his recollection of the dinner party, Godwin wrote that “I, of consequence, heard her, very frequently when I wished to hear Paine,”<sup>52</sup> and that they left the dinner “mutually displeased with one another.”<sup>53</sup> Wollstonecraft’s outspokenness rankled Godwin because of his essentialist belief in “the softness of [women’s] natures

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51. Gordon, 178.

52. Godwin, *Memoirs*, 80.

53. William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), 497-503.

[and] the delicacy of their sentiments.”<sup>54</sup> Had Godwin recorded his feelings about the publication of Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman*, he likely would have been among the select few who were critical of it. The frankness and assertiveness with which *Rights of Woman* argues in favor of equality for women would meet Godwin’s definition of “unfeminine.” Clearly, Godwin felt differently about *Letters from Scandinavia*, a text “calculated to make a man in love with the author.”<sup>55</sup> Godwin’s diary offers a look into his genuine reaction to the text, uncolored by his subsequent feelings for Wollstonecraft that informed his appraisal of it in *Memoirs*:

[She] speaks of her sorrows in a way that fills us with melancholy, and dissolves us in tenderness, at the same time that she displays a genius which commands all our admiration. Affliction had tempered her heart to a softness almost more than human; and gentleness of her spirit seems precisely to accord with all the romance of unbounded attachment.<sup>56</sup>

For Godwin, Wollstonecraft’s “genius” becomes apparent and palatable once her brash spirit had been “tempered” and tamed into “gentleness.” Wollstonecraft had sacrificed her aesthetic commitment to the androgyny of rational discourse, but with apparent success winning over her audience.

The reviews concurred with Godwin that *Letters from Scandinavia* showed a side of Wollstonecraft that was more pleasing to male readers. The *British Critic*, intent on knowing whether Wollstonecraft was “capable of joining to a *masculine* understanding,

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54. Godwin qtd. in Gordon, 365.

55. Godwin, 95.

56. Godwin, qtd. in Gordon, 365-366.

the finer sensibilities of a female,” were delighted to find her demonstrating “that delicacy and liveliness of feeling which is the peculiar characteristic of the sex.”<sup>57</sup> The *Monthly Review* astutely observed that Wollstonecraft’s portraiture of herself as “an unhappy mother, wandering through foreign countries with her helpless infant” in *Letters from Scandinavia* “appears, indeed, to have been intended as an appeal to our feelings.”<sup>58</sup> As always, the *Analytical Review* offered their encomium to Wollstonecraft, characterizing her prose as “effusions of the moment” and “effusion[s] of wounded sensibility.”<sup>59</sup> As these reviews demonstrate, *Letters from Scandinavia* offered a more agreeable aesthetic to male readers entrenched in the gender-aesthetic binary. Most readers familiar with Wollstonecraft knew her for her *Vindications* which respectively dealt with “masculine” issues and emphasized a “masculine” style of discourse. These reviews give only a partial window into the success of *Letters from Scandinavia*, as it was more profitable than any other piece she published during her lifetime and was translated into at least four languages.<sup>60</sup> Most importantly, according to Gordon, “the avant-garde of her generation viewed *Letters from Scandinavia* as the most significant and beautiful of all her works,” and became a source of inspiration for leading Romantic figures William

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57. Review of *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, *British Critic* 7 (1796): 602.

58. Review of *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, *Monthly Mirror* 1 (1796): 287.

59. Review of *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, *Analytical Review* 22 (1796): 229.

60. Gordon, 342.

Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, and Percy and Mary Shelley among many others.<sup>61</sup>

Much of this esteem for *Letters from Scandinavia* may be owed to readers' reception of it as a conventionally feminine text. Although Gordon observes that "travel writing was traditionally a male genre" in the eighteenth century, there existed a distinct tradition of epistolary travelogues written and published by women dating to the beginning of the century. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763)<sup>62</sup> represents the earliest most well-known entry into this tradition, with Helen Maria Williams' *Letters Written in France* (1790)<sup>63</sup> and Wollstonecraft's *Letters from Scandinavia* being among the more remarkable additions to the tradition. As Ingrid Horrocks demonstrates in her recent study of women wanderers in the latter stages of the eighteenth century, there is a significant body of work by women writers writing about women travelers, from Ann Radcliffe to Charlotte Turner Smith to Frances Burney.<sup>64</sup> Regardless of how travelogues were gendered at the time, Wollstonecraft's epistolary format acceptably "feminizes" the genre for her more skeptical male readers.

Indeed, by casting *Letters from Scandinavia* as a series of epistolary communiques, Wollstonecraft recycles a familiar strategy she used in *Rights of Men*. Her direct addresses to her unnamed correspondent, though self-consciously hectoring at

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61. Gordon, 342.

62. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2013).

63. Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001).

64. Ingrid Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

moments, convey a sense of intimacy with her readers that was not otherwise attainable in *Rights of Woman*. For example, after having expounded on the virtues and simplicity of the rural peasantry of Sweden, Wollstonecraft confides: “still, my good friend, I begin to think that I should not like to live continually in the country” (72). These subtle asides to an intimate relationship with the reader are repeated throughout the text, as when Wollstonecraft alludes to the relatively free sexuality of the Danish women. “You may add,” she says of her correspondent, “that that the remark need not be confined to so small a part of the world; and, *entre nous* [between us], I am of the same opinion. You must not term this innuendo saucy, for it does not come home” (117). This risqué and conspiratorial aside, particularly her use of the French “*entre nous*” would not be lost on the male reader, particularly not for the virginal Godwin. Such conspiracy and intimacy are not just for show, however, as Wollstonecraft leverages this bond between herself and her reader to rehearse her arguments from *Rights of Woman*. After an extended soliloquy on the social, legal, and material disparities between men and women, Wollstonecraft breaks off by stating, “still harping on the same subject, you will exclaim—How can I avoid it, when most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of my sex” (153). Here Wollstonecraft acknowledges, but does not quite apologize for, her insistence on women’s rights, making overtures to her readers patience while advocating for herself. It is this balance and interplay between adherence to and appropriation of textual gender norms that allows Wollstonecraft to intrigue a male audience while delivering information they would otherwise be accustomed to scoff at or ignore.

Aside from the genre and structure of *Letters from Scandinavia*, the style of Wollstonecraft's writing demonstrates a stronger synthesis of *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*. In the advertisement to *Letters from Scandinavia*, Wollstonecraft describes how she "determined to let [her] remarks and reflections flow unrestrained" after initially attempting an arrangement that she found "stiff and affected" (51). By her own admission, Wollstonecraft leans more towards the spontaneous style and composition of *Rights of Men* than the more laborious style and composition of *Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft's personal experience of emotion frequently comes across due this particular style. For example, while recalling some experience of homesickness, Wollstonecraft notes how "some reflections ... made a tear drop on the rosy cheek [of her daughter] I had just kissed; and emotions that trembled on the brink of extasy and agony gave poignancy to my sensations" (59). Wollstonecraft's depiction of her emotions during her voyage appear rather tumultuous, for, as she says, "let me catch pleasure on the wing—I may be melancholy tomorrow ... let me be happy whilst I can. The tear starts as I think of it" (114). These selections come from the first half of *Letters from Scandinavia*, before the fateful packet of letters that would arrive from Imlay informing her that their relationship was no longer viable. After this turn of events, Wollstonecraft's articulation of emotion and reason converges into a synthesis of the human faculties.

While the *Vindications* are aesthetically different in that *Rights of Men* relies on an emotionally charged strategy of persuasion and *Rights of Woman* is a staunchly rational text, they both explicitly affirm the supremacy of reason. *Letters from Scandinavia*, on the other hand, arrives at the conclusion that both reason and emotion are valid and co-constitutive faculties. This issue is first broached Letter VIII, when

Wollstonecraft, addressing her correspond, remarks that “for years I have endeavored to calm an impetuous tide—laboring to make my feelings take an orderly course.—I was striving against the stream.—I must love and admire with warmth, or I will sink into sadness” (97). The successive dashes in this and the surrounding passage (there are ten em dashes in that paragraph in total) textually demonstrate the course of her emotions and their effusiveness at the moment of composition. Most importantly this moment acknowledges her attempt and failure to do exactly what she had argued for over five years—that the emotions could be bridled by reason. On receiving Imlay’s “break-up” letter, Wollstonecraft writes about her attempt to come to grips with the news, but to little avail. “I reasoned and reasoned,” she writes, “but my heart was too full” (120). Here, Wollstonecraft demonstrates the quixotism of reason’s triumph over emotion, particularly raw grief and despair. To this point in her career, Wollstonecraft had adhered to the binary between reason and emotion, particularly as it was constructed along gender lines. If women were associated with emotion and were considered inferior to men, emotion must likewise be considered inferior to the reason of men. The way out of this binary was to disavow the feminine part of the dyad, and for women to claim equal share to reason at the expense of emotion. This was her argument for much of *Rights of Woman*.

In *Letters from Scandinavia*, Wollstonecraft confronts the experiential proof that she cannot simply overcome emotion through the exercise of her reason, for indeed she is strongly capable of both, and this is one of the greatest realizations of the book.

Returning to a familiar passage near the end of the text, Wollstonecraft reflects on her condition as a woman, writing that “most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of [her] sex; *we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel*”

(153; emphasis added). Reason and emotion are not mutually exclusive, as this passage openly states, but are rather co-constitutive, windows into one another. The crux of this passage for her readers, then and now, is to whom the “we” refers. If “we” refers to just women, a legitimate reading given that this passage immediately follows Wollstonecraft’s rumination on the “oppressed state of [her] sex,” women are possessed of a uniquely embodied epistemology. This passage could then be read as a recantation of her denial that there is such a thing as “women’s reason” in *Rights of Woman* (1790). The more generative reading of this passage, however, reads “we” as referring to men and women both. In this reading, reason and emotion are in no way innately gendered, but are misapplied to a binary. Furthermore, everyone’s sense of reason and emotion are co-constitutive, transcending a simplistic division along gendered lines. The latter reading has the most pedagogical potential for Wollstonecraft’s male reader as well. By degendering reason and emotion, the value connotations of these terms also evaporate. If emotion is neither masculine nor feminine, there is no intrinsic reason for men deny its validity, particularly if it is an auxiliary to reason. By merging a conciliatory aesthetic with her proto-feminist ideology, Wollstonecraft happens upon a new epistemological paradigm, accessible to the male audience she attempted to educate.

*Letters from Scandinavia* rehearses ideological points akin to those found in *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, but by bringing the ideas of these two texts into conversation she synthesizes a proto-materialist-feminist ideology. *Rights of Men* is essentially a treatise on the material conditions of the day resulting from the present state of British governance. One of the implicit assumptions of the text is that those material conditions are men’s concerns, both in that it is literally *Rights of Men* and in that



Wollstonecraft does not offer a significant analysis of women's experience in her analysis of socioeconomic class. *Rights of Woman* is a treatise on the oppression and disadvantage of women in British society. As with *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft does not mix discussion of gender and material conditions, instead flattening her analysis of women's rights as a bourgeois concern, at the expense of poor, laboring, and aristocratic women. Unlike in the *Vindications*, however, issues of gender and material conditions are both given consideration in *Letters from Scandinavia*. What is more, Wollstonecraft offers some surprising insights into how gender and material conditions intersect to exacerbate or mitigate the experiences of men and women. The implication for her male readership is that gender and class are not mutually exclusive concepts that can be isolated from one another in analysis. The rights of men are inextricably bound up with the rights of women.

Wollstonecraft's journey through Scandinavia offered a plethora of scenarios in which she could observe the conditions that women experienced in other countries as well as her own personal experiences as woman. Operating as Imlay's agent in Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft's engagement in business affairs drew the interest of her male interlocutors. On one of her first evenings in Sweden, Wollstonecraft observed at dinner that her "host told [her] bluntly that [she] was a woman of observation, for [she] asked him *men's questions*" (59). This forwardness from the men she met was no doubt due to her travelling alone, that is without the company of another man, for she was accompanied by her infant daughter and her maid Marguerite. While Wollstonecraft faces this unattachment to a male companion with sangfroid, the same cannot be said for Marguerite, whom Wollstonecraft observes, is often fearful of this condition and for good

reason. Wollstonecraft observes that “Marguerite’s respect for [Wollstonecraft] could hardly keep her from expressing the fear ... which putting ourselves into the power of a strange man excited” (55). Such fear conjured for Marguerite visions of “robberies, murders, or the other evil [rape] which instantly, as the sailors would have said, runs foul of a woman’s imagination” (55). What Wollstonecraft demonstrates to readers in these two scenarios is that women are liable to experience the psychic othering of gender prejudice that she personally faced, as well as the material consequences of gender prejudice that Marguerite was fearful of.

As in Britain, Wollstonecraft finds ample evidence of the evils that attend when women are left without the proper education deemed only suitable for men. Importantly, whereas *Rights of Woman* offered mostly theoretical objections to the effects of women’s lack of education, *Letters from Scandinavia* provides ethnographic proof and experiential examples of gendered education’s failure. Upon mingling with the women of Sweden, Wollstonecraft is disappointed to find that they do not “have much pretension” to “sentiment and imagination,” and have a tendency towards “voluptuousness” (71). Wollstonecraft’s sneering cosmopolitanism might do her little credit to contemporary readers, but to her eighteenth-century audience Wollstonecraft’s privileging of British women’s conduct is a point in her favor. Noting that “health and idleness will always account for promiscuous amours,” Wollstonecraft asserts that “exercise of the mind” is one of the most virtuous human traits, noting with sadness that the women of Sweden have little proper education to support such endeavors (71). Wollstonecraft is similarly disappointed by the Norwegian ladies: “as their minds were totally uncultivated, I did not lose much, perhaps gained, by not being able to understand them” (101). As much as the

system of education in Britain had failed women, as argued in *Rights of Woman*, in Scandinavia she finds conditions to be much worse, where “little attention is paid to education, excepting reading, writing, and the rudiments of arithmetic” among the entire population (93). While Wollstonecraft’s judgments of the countries she visited is certainly inflected by British nationalism, the juxtaposition between Scandinavian and British women and their respective educations suggest that the education of women is a necessary constituent of British nationalism.

The portrayal of domestic life during Wollstonecraft’s narrative also serves to demonstrate the gendered challenges uniquely posed to women. One of the most poignant scenes of *Letters from Scandinavia* involves Wollstonecraft’s ruminations on the future of her daughter, Fanny. “I feel more for her than a mother’s fondness and anxiety,” writes Wollstonecraft, “when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of her sex” (84). This sentimental image of the mother and child—vital to the aesthetics of *Letters from Scandinavia*—reinforces Wollstonecraft’s message about the perils of womanhood. Speaking from the position as a mother, Wollstonecraft reflects on the futurity of life for young girls and women like Fanny, who though they have learned from the love and actions of their mothers, “sharpen the thorns that will wound the breast [they] would fain guard” (84). As Wollstonecraft further intones, “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,” indicating how women’s treatment in society poses a threat to the continuation of the family (84).<sup>65</sup> Turning to her observation of domestic life in Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft

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65. This is a disconcertingly prophetic statement by Wollstonecraft, as Fanny’s acute sensitivity and the perceived rejection of her family led to her death by suicide in

remarks that Danish women “are simply notable housewives; without accomplishments, or any of the charms that adorn more advanced social life” (147). The effect is that these women’s “total ignorance . . . is far from rendering them better parents,” instead indenturing them to their infants and spoiling their children, “enfeebling both body and mind by false tenderness” (147). While the gendered ideology of male commentators asserts that women’s place is in the home and in servitude to husbands and to raise their children, Wollstonecraft demonstrates that this structure itself fails to perform its stated function.

For as much concern as Wollstonecraft has for women’s issues in Scandinavia, she gives almost equal measure to material conditions of socioeconomics.

Wollstonecraft’s travels provide ethnographic evidence of the stark divisions in material conditions among Scandinavians. When amongst the Swedish gentry, Wollstonecraft complains of the voluptuousness of Swedish meals, “a never ending, still beginning feast” (63). Desiring to escape these affairs, she notes that among the ladies “the quantity of coffee, spices, and other things of that kind, with want of care, almost universally spoil their teeth” (71). Wollstonecraft juxtaposes these decadent meals with those of the working classes, who have “an inferior sort of food here. . . . The wages are low, which is particularly unjust, because the price of clothes is much higher than provisions” (101). Moreover, Wollstonecraft observes that the servants of families eat rye bread, instead of the white bread that symbolized prosperity in England; such stark contrasts between the bourgeois and the laborers, Wollstonecraft assures her readers, “appears to me a remnant

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1816 at the age of 22; Janet Todd, *Death and the Maidens: Fanny Wollstonecraft and the Shelley Circle* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2007), 223-233.

of barbarism” (65). Not simply the food, but the habitation of the peasantry, the “wretched huts, as [she] had seen in Sweden” give insight into the conditions that the majority of Swedes faced and is “surely sufficient to chill any heart” (168).

Wollstonecraft is far from rendering these disparities as exotic, for she reminds readers that the “treatment of servants in most countries, I grant, is very unjust; and in England, that boasted land of freedom, it is often extremely tyrannical” (65). In England as elsewhere, resources are inequitably distributed.

Wollstonecraft demonstrates that the material conditions in Scandinavia are not significantly divergent from those in England, while also suggesting ways in which Scandinavia is a more equitable land. This is particularly true regarding property laws. As she had argued in *Rights of Men*, hereditary property preempts the possibility of a meritocracy. In Norway, Wollstonecraft is pleased to find that the rich “are obliged to divide their personal fortune amongst their children,” with the effect that “property has not a chance of accumulating till overgrown wealth destroys the balance of liberty” (88). The distribution of land is also notably more equitable than in England, where enclosure had effectively destroyed public commons and uprooted the lives of untold thousands. The Norwegian poor are often dependent upon their cattle for survival, and as Wollstonecraft observes, “near most of the towns are commons, on which the cows of all the inhabitants, indiscriminately graze” (89). Private land is also more equitably distributed into small farms, which “produces a degree of equality which I have seldom seen elsewhere” (88). By demonstrating the similarities and disparities between material conditions in England and Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft tempers the superiority of British nationalism and instructs her readers on the possible horizons of better life in Britain.

Through *Letters from Scandinavia*, Wollstonecraft educates her readers on the ways in which commercial capitalism warps the humanity of those it benefits. Wollstonecraft echoes the sentiments of *Rights of Men*, observing that “property is the root of all evil” (152). She differs from her previous observations in both *Vindications*, however, where she expressed her belief that the aristocracy maintain the control of wealth, while the middle class occupy what she considers a natural state of humanity. *Letters from Scandinavia* shifts this perspective, where Wollstonecraft finds “the sympathy and frankness of heart conspicuous in the peasantry” to be superior to the middle class “with their apish good breeding and prejudices” (71). The bulk of *Letters from Scandinavia* demonstrates how the employment of that middle class serves to deteriorate sympathy and frankness while instilling prejudice. In Norway, Wollstonecraft draws a connection between the profits of contraband commerce that dominated Scandinavian trade and a “shrewdness in the character of these people, depraved by a sordid love of money which repels me” (116-117). While the laborers of Scandinavia display an unimpeachable humanity, that of the businessmen is compromised by their quest after accumulation. But Wollstonecraft does not limit this critique to foreign countries. She confides in her reader, the Imlay persona, “that you—yourself, are strangely altered, since you have entered deeply into commerce—more than you are aware of—never allowing yourself to reflect” (172). By personalizing these observations, Wollstonecraft lifts the veil from the hidden effects of capital and commerce, revealing to the reader their own complicity in the dehumanization of nascent capitalism.

Wollstonecraft saves her most acerbic attacks in *Letters from Scandinavia* for the system that causes economic inequity, more so than the individuals who help propagate

it. She herself acknowledges that the reader may think her “too severe on commerce; but from the manner it is at present carried on, little can be advanced in favor of a pursuit that wears out the most sacred principles of humanity and rectitude” (126). This distance from a purely individualistic model of socioeconomics to a systemic approach demonstrates the evolution of Wollstonecraft’s thought from the bourgeois ideology of the earlier *Vindications*. Wollstonecraft’s revised perspective demonstrates the importance of considering those who are most materially disadvantaged, in her eyes, women and the laboring classes. As Wollstonecraft warns her readers, “it is [the] want of proportion between profit and labor,” the least profit going to the hardest working of the laboring class and the most profit going to the leisure of the middling class, “which debases men” (106). While the wealth of the few is often held up as an indicator of the prosperity of a nation, it “is only in proportion to the industry necessary to acquire wealth, that a nation is really benefitted by it” (66).

If appeals to the needs of women and laborers are not sufficient to win readers to her cause, Wollstonecraft uses moralistic arguments against commercial capitalism as well. The metaphor of gambling as a vehicle for capitalism is used by Wollstonecraft in *Letters from Scandinavia* and was later adopted by Godwin for similar use in the historical novel *St. Leon*. “What is speculation,” Wollstonecraft asks her readers, “but a species of gambling, I might have said fraud, in which address generally gains the prize?” (126). By connecting commerce to fraud and gambling, Wollstonecraft emphasizes the immorality of the speculation and war-profiteering that had so remarkably changed the financial and physical landscape of Scandinavia during the revolutionary period in Europe. She informs her readers that “mushroom fortunes have started up during the

war,” where men such as Imlay who “seem of the species of fungus,” made immense wealth for their role in aiding the misery caused by war in France, smuggling contraband goods and running guns (171). The most powerfully metaphorical condemnation of commercial capitalism comes in the closing pages of *Letters from Scandinavia*, and is worth quoting at length:

[I]n this whirlpool of gain, it is not very easy to find any but the wretched or supercilious emigrants, who are not engaged in pursuits which ... appear as dishonorable as gambling. The interests of nations are bartered by speculating merchants. My God! with what *sang froid* artful trains of corruption bring lucrative commissions into particular ... and can much common honesty be expected in the discharge of trusts obtained fraud...?

During this present journey ... I have had an opportunity of peeping behind the scenes of what are vulgarly termed great affairs, only to discover the mean machinery which has directed many transactions of moment. The sword has been merciful, compared to the depredations made on human life by contractors, and by the swarm of locusts who have battered on the pestilence they spread abroad. These men, like the owners of the negro ships, never smell on their money the blood by which it had been gained ... terming such occupations *lawful callings* (176).

The association of commerce and statecraft with gambling, plague, and slavery, each one a pestilence to good moral character in eighteenth-century Britain, serves to demonstrate that such new business is in fact the greatest cause of rot in the venerable structures that men such as Burke claim to protect.



Wollstonecraft extends the arguments of *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, not simply by talking about gender and class in the same text but bringing them into conversation for generative purposes. The material concerns of *Rights of Men* and the gendered concerns of *Rights of Woman* are synthesized in *Letters from Scandinavia* to form an emergent materialist-feminist critique that would unfortunately be extended little further in Wollstonecraft's lifetime. During Wollstonecraft's sojourn in Norway, she learns the story of a young woman who was sentenced to death for infanticide before being pardoned for her crime. Having since been married and become a mother this woman's case serves to demonstrate for Wollstonecraft that "a desperate act is not always a proof of incorrigible depravity of character; the only plausible excuse that has been brought forward to justify the infliction of capital punishments" (91). What this anecdote demonstrates is that like all humans, women may resort to desperate actions when presented with little alternative, such as the material and social ruination of bearing a child out of wedlock. Wollstonecraft observes that infanticide is "a crime seldom committed in this country [Norway]" and that murder itself "seldom occurs" (91). Consequentially, Wollstonecraft dedicates the pages preceding the narrative of the pardoned woman with her description of the equitably distributed land, referenced earlier in this chapter. The ordering of this information suggests that the frequency of gendered crime is correlated to the material conditions of women.

*Letters from Scandinavia* also demonstrates Wollstonecraft's attentiveness to how women's socioeconomic position determines their lived experience, rather than how one of those categories totalizes their experiences. Wollstonecraft's criticisms of British property in *Rights of Man* contested that labor was not properly rewarded with material

benefits, but her criticisms were absent consideration for how women's labor was expropriated to an even greater degree. While *Rights of Woman* made clear that women unduly suffered solely because of their gender, Wollstonecraft remained silent on how women's suffering was often due to the conditions of labor faced by those few who were not members of the ruling and middle classes. Wollstonecraft's descriptions of servants' lives in Sweden demonstrates how women bear the greatest brunt of labor because of how labor divisions are gendered. Observing the relations among servants, she finds that "the men stand up for the dignity of man, by oppressing the women. The most menial, and even laborious offices are therefore left to these poor drudges" (65). The reality faced by women laborers is brought into concrete terms by Wollstonecraft's report that they "take the linen down to the river ... though their hands, cut by the ice, are cracked and bleeding, the men, their fellow servants, will not disgrace their manhood by carrying a tub to lighten their burden" (65).

The brutality of their labor was not unique to servant women, however. While the men did not "disgrace their manhood" by partaking in the labor of the women, bourgeois women did not disgrace their class position by having empathy for their servants. Wollstonecraft reports that servants' "masters are not allowed to strike them with impunity" in Norway (101). Instead, it is apparently the mistresses who do the striking, "for it was a complaint of this kind, brought before the mayor, which led [Wollstonecraft] to knowledge of the fact" (101). What Wollstonecraft demonstrates through these foreign anecdotes is that the various forms of oppression visible in the eighteenth century do not occur in isolation, but rather constitutive of interlocking and intensifying experiences and subjectivities. These moments of proto-intersectional thought, though few, anticipate the

more thoroughly articulated material-feminism of Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel, *The Wrongs of Woman*, and the more expansive intersectional thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## **Conclusion**

Wollstonecraft sought to educate readers into adulthood, to help them to learn and evolve their thinking. She modelled this process herself by learning and evolving through the act of writing these pedagogical texts. In other words, Wollstonecraft experienced the very thing she wished to impart to others. The three most significant works of political philosophy in Wollstonecraft's career—*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*—demonstrate the evolution of her pedagogical aesthetics and ideology. In the realm of aesthetics, Wollstonecraft was engaged in a debate that pitted reason against sensibility. On ideological grounds, she confronted a belief that materialist analyses and feminist analyses were mutually exclusive; analyses of gender were thought to be independent of class and analyses of material conditions were thought to be independent of gender. It was only until she wrote *Letters from Scandinavia* that these binaries between reason and emotion, feminism and materialism, began to be resolved in her thinking. Leading up to Wollstonecraft's adventures in Scandinavia, she had essentially taken antithetical positions in each of her *Vindications*: in *Rights of Men* she used a sentimental argument to support a materialist analysis of British society, while in *Rights of Woman* she crafted a rigidly-reasoned argument to support a gendered analysis of British society. Through this dialectic between *Rights of Men* (thesis) and *Rights of*

*Woman* (antithesis), Wollstonecraft posed a synthesis in *Letters from Scandinavia* that acknowledged an equilibrium between reason and emotion and the intersections of gendered and material conditions.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

Mary Wollstonecraft's professional writing life barely spanned a decade, yet it is perhaps the most foundational life in the history of Western feminism. As the "founder of the early feminist movement"<sup>1</sup> who "anticipate[d] most positions of modern feminism,"<sup>2</sup> Wollstonecraft is owed a significant debt to contemporary and popular feminist thought. Modern critiques of toxic femininity echo Wollstonecraft's vexation with accomplishments and vanity, epitomized by the famous "gilded cage" in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,<sup>3</sup> while Wollstonecraft's metaphor of woman as slave has endured as a common topic of white feminists' refusal to think intersectionally about gender. Despite Wollstonecraft's omnipresent legacy, the breadth of her thought has largely been forgotten in the previous two centuries. *Rights of Woman* is Wollstonecraft's most famous text (and has been the landmark text in the recent revival of interest in her work from the humanities), and yet, as I have demonstrated throughout this project, it cannot adequately encapsulate the extent of her thought or her contributions to a more robust feminism.

Wollstonecraft's entire body of work depicts a trajectory of feminist innovation, culminating in a proto-marxist feminist theory of social reproduction. Although Susan

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1. Kirstin Collins Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft, Pedagogy, and the Practice of Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), i.

2. Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), 186.

3. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993).

Ferguson has argued that Wollstonecraft cannot be neatly labelled a marxist feminist, she builds her argument primarily from *Rights of Woman* and the novels, without fully engaging with the entire scope of Wollstonecraft's work where the marxist implications emerge<sup>4</sup> (notably Ferguson does not mention *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*).<sup>5</sup> The previous chapters have demonstrated that Wollstonecraft's views on gender and class evolved over the course of her life: at the time of writing *Rights of Woman* she could certainly not be considered a marxist feminist, but in her late and unfinished writings there is a clear articulation of what I have called Wollstonecraft's theory of social reproduction, a distinctly marxist-feminist methodology.

As I have argued throughout these chapters, Wollstonecraft's aesthetic and ideological commitments also evolved during her career. Although she began with a bourgeois proto-feminist ideology in the 1780s, by 1797 she had developed a more radical politics and a much craftier use of genre and form. Wollstonecraft's earliest writings were heavily indebted to the aesthetic whims of the times, particularly her use of sentimentalism in *Mary, A Fiction*<sup>6</sup> and her use of didacticism in *Original Stories from Real Life*.<sup>7</sup> However, in her later writing she used writing styles that were more attentive

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4. Susan Ferguson, "The Radical Ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 3 (Sep. 1999): 427-450.

5. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, edited by Ingrid Horrocks (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2013).

6. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction*, in *Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, edited by Michelle Faubert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012).

7. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

to the needs of her audience, such as the conversational letters of *Hints on the Management of Infants*,<sup>8</sup> the experiential form of *Lessons*,<sup>9</sup> and the deceptively rhapsodic prose of *Letters from Scandinavia*. Wollstonecraft's career demonstrates that there is no simple equation between ideology and aesthetics, but that aesthetics can be manipulated to serve the interests of the text's ideology.

In reconsidering Wollstonecraft as a marxist feminist, her role within her own family should also be reconsidered. Wollstonecraft has certainly been acknowledged as an influential figure for feminist thinkers,<sup>10</sup> and yet her influence on her husband, daughter, and son-in-law has been neglected. Most critical analyses of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley family either show a greater attention to the men as opposed to the women of the family (William St. Clair's *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family*<sup>11</sup> stands out as the most flagrant offender, particularly as it comes to Wollstonecraft) or are more focused on a particular dyad within the family

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8. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Hints on the Management of Infants*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 353-452.

9. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Lessons*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. Volume 4 (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 461-474.

10. See Andrew McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Deborah Weiss, *The Female Philosopher and Her Afterlives: Mary Wollstonecraft, the British Novel, and the Transformations of Feminism, 1796-1811* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Clarissa Campbell Orr, *Wollstonecraft's Daughters: Womanhood in England and France, 1780-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

11. William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989).

(think William Brewer's *The Mental Anatomies of William Godwin and Mary Shelley*<sup>12</sup> or Katherine Hill-Miller's *My Hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship*).<sup>13</sup> Julie Ann Carlson's excellent study, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley*<sup>14</sup> goes some way toward rectifying the misogyny and granular scope of previous examinations. However, Carlson's work is focused more on family dynamics than the radical politics of this present project and relegates Percy Shelley to a provocatively liminal role.

Godwin, Percy, and Mary Shelley were each affected by Wollstonecraft's writing well after her death. Although Godwin's grief following Wollstonecraft's death spawned the fateful *Memoirs* that sullied her reputation (although their impact has been overstated in the literature), his turn toward fiction and children's literature demonstrates how profoundly Wollstonecraft's theory of social reproduction marked Godwin's later career. His second novel, *St. Leon* (1799),<sup>15</sup> published just two years after Wollstonecraft's death, allegorizes her relationship with Gilbert Imlay, portraying the titular Count Reginald de St. Leon as a French noble who discovers the secrets of alchemy and eternal life after gambling away his fortune and abandoning his wife, Marguerite, and the rest of humanity to pursue his own greedy ambitions. Godwin borrows Wollstonecraft's

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12. William D. Brewer, *The Mental Anatomies of William Godwin and Mary Shelley* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001).

13. Katherine Hill-Miller, *My Hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995).

14. Julie Ann Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

15. William Godwin, *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, edited by William D. Brewer (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006).



metaphor of financial capitalism as gambling from *Letters from Scandinavia*, as well as Wollstonecraft's belief that capitalist production undermines social reproduction. As Marguerite says, echoing Wollstonecraft,

I fear ... that the splendor in which we lately lived has its basis in oppression; and that the superfluities of the rich are a boon extorted from the hunger and misery of the poor! ... I now practically perceive that the[y] ... are my brethren and my sisters; and my heart bounds with joy, as I feel my relations to society multiply.<sup>16</sup>

Such sentiments are a far cry from Godwin's cold utilitarianism that he espoused in his earlier works, just as his focus on children's literature in his later career belies the ponderous philosophy of his early career. Certainly, Godwin's turn toward pedagogy and children's literature was motivated by economics (as was Wollstonecraft's initial venture),<sup>17</sup> but the fact that he dedicated so much of his life to authoring and selling books for children shows some commitment to Wollstonecraft's belief in education and belief in children as the locus of long-term change.

Wollstonecraft's influence on the Shelleys is a little more difficult to draw a direct line from, as many scholars have taken to showing the literary influence Godwin held over the two. Like Godwin, Percy Shelley takes occasion to echo Wollstonecraft's sentiments. Compare Wollstonecraft's aphorism, "We reason deeply, when we forcibly feel"<sup>18</sup> to the end of the third stanza in Shelley's *Mont Blanc* (1817):

Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal

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16. Godwin, *St. Leon*, 123-124.

17. See Charlotte Gordon, *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft & Mary Shelley* (New York: Random House, 2016), 32.

18. Wollstonecraft, *Letters from Scandinavia*, 153.

Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood  
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good  
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.<sup>19</sup>

Wollstonecraft also makes a cameo in Percy's *Laon and Cythna*, "a Woman, beautiful as morning" who guides the poet through a vision of bloodless revolution and eventual usurpation by tyranny.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, much of Percy's major poetry offers visions of the future, giving shape to Wollstonecraft's anticipated "future improvement of the world"<sup>21</sup> in *Queen Mab* (1813)<sup>22</sup> and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820),<sup>23</sup> while "The Mask of Anarchy" (1832)<sup>24</sup> and *Laon and Cythna* picture "the state of man when the earth could no longer support him ... [and] the world appeared a vast prison."<sup>25</sup>

Percy captured the blither elements of Wollstonecraft's vision of futurity, but Mary Shelley was typically more preoccupied with the world as a prison and the failures of human society to look after its own reproduction. Although not millions of years in future as Wollstonecraft predicted in *Letters from Scandinavia*, an earth desolate of

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19. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Mont Blanc*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 99.

20. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City*, edited by Anahid Nersessian (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 65.

21. Wollstonecraft, *Letters from Scandinavia*, 115.

22. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002).

23. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002).

24. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Mask of Anarchy," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002).

25. Wollstonecraft, *Letters from Scandinavian*, 115.

humanity in the year 2100 is the subject of Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826).<sup>26</sup> But what each of these authors inherit from Wollstonecraft is her British ethno-nationalism. Like the "Hottentots," "Mahometans," and brutal Russians, who occupy a sinister place in Wollstonecraft's imagination, Godwin and the Shelleys draw on similar racist archetypes as foils to their Westernized European heroes. For example, the periphery of *St. Leon* is populated by obsequious Africans, bloodthirsty Hungarians, and zealous Catholics and Muslims. The mysterious disease decimating the Western world in *The Last Man* is represented as a foreign plague originating in the East and is nearly communicated to the protagonist by a "negro half clad, writhing under the agony of disease."<sup>27</sup> Percy's *Laon and Cythna* allegorizes the battle for Greek independence from the Ottomans, who in Percy's vision are represented by the "green and wrinkled eunuch" Othman.<sup>28</sup> Although Orientalism and white supremacy were not invented by Wollstonecraft, the Orientalization of Eastern Europe and the specific depictions of non-Europeans in these narratives of progress and decay bear a curious connection to Wollstonecraft's ideology. As Nigel Leask observes about the feminist politics of Percy's *Laon and Cythna*, "the liberation of ... women is premised, albeit at a subliminal level, on imperial domination."<sup>29</sup> The same may very well be said for Wollstonecraft's marxist-feminist politics.

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26. Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, edited by Anne McWhir (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996).

27. Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, 265.

28. Percy Shelley, *Laon and Cythna*, 157.

29. Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 122.

The continued heightening of the “social-reproductive contradictions of financialized capitalism,” Nancy Fraser’s term for what has elsewhere been dubbed the “crisis of care,”<sup>30</sup> provides a renewed exigence for studying Mary Wollstonecraft’s work—not just *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*—for literary scholars of the eighteenth century. Even today, as Cinzia Arruzza reminds us, there is a persistent belief among some that “reproductive rights and the fight against gender discrimination are clearly identifiable as feminist demands, [while] war, poverty, environmental crisis, and perhaps even the fight against racism extend beyond the scope of feminism.”<sup>31</sup> Yet 226 years ago, Wollstonecraft grasped that gender cannot entirely be isolated from other variables, even if her analysis was limited to the inequality of wealth and status. Perhaps if we can return to the basic site of feminism as understood across other categories of social difference with Wollstonecraft, we can appreciate how deeply entrenched the oppressions identified by intersectional feminism and social reproduction theory remain.

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30. Nancy Fraser, “Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism,” *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, edited by Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 21-22.

31. Cinzia Arruzza, “From Social Reproduction Feminism to the Women’s Strike,” *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, edited by Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 193.

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## Vita

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#### Education

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Ph.D. English. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. May 2022.

M.A. English. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. May 2017.

B.A. English. University of Michigan, Dearborn, MI. April 2015.

#### Teaching

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English 15: Rhetoric and Composition (15 sections).

English 15E: Rhetoric and Composition, Enhanced (2 sections).

English 202C: Effective Writing: Technical Writing (2 sections).

English 418: Advanced Technical Writing and Editing (1 section).

#### Publications

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“The Literacy Load is Too Damn High! A PARS Approach to Cohort-Based Discussion Online.” In *PARS in Practice: More Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*, edited by Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle, 71-81. Fort Collins: WAC Clearinghouse, 2021.

Editor. *Penn Statements: Student Compositions from the Program in Writing and Rhetoric*, Volume 40 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Department of English, 2021).

Review of *Brown Romantics: Poetry and Nationalism in the Global Nineteenth Century*, by Manu Samriti Chander. *Modern Language Review* 115, no. 1 (2020): 160-161.

#### Awards and Achievements

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Cindy and Dickie Selfe DMAC Fellowship.

Digital Media and Composition Institute at Ohio State, 2020/21.

CCCC Disability in College Composition Travel Award.

Conference on College, Composition, and Communication, 2021.

Liberal Arts Teaching and Research Scholarship.

Pennsylvania State University, College of Liberal Arts, Summer 2020.

Inaugural Online Teaching Excellence in Teaching Award.

Pennsylvania State University, Department of English, 2018.