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FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

EDITED BY MARIA J. FALCO

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To the Women's Caucus for Political Science, the Research on Women and Politics section of the American Political Science Association, and to all women, before and since, who have shared in Mary Wollstonecraft's struggle for independence and dignity.

Contents

Foreword

Take into your hands any history of philosophy text. You will find compiled therein the "classics" of modern philosophy. Since these texts are often designed for use in undergraduate classes, the editor is likely to offer an introduction in which the reader is informed that these selections represent the perennial questions of philosophy. The student is to assume that she or he is about to explore the timeless wisdom of the greatest minds of Western philosophy. No one calls attention to the fact that the philosophers are all men.

Though women are omitted from the canons of philosophy, these texts inscribe the nature of woman. Sometimes the philosopher speaks directly about woman, delineating her proper role, her abilities and inabilities, her desires. Other times the message is indirect—a passing remark hinting at woman's emotionality, irrationality, unreliability.

This process of definition occurs in far more subtle ways when the central concepts of philosophy—reason and justice, those characteristics that are taken to define us as human—are associated with traits historically identified with masculinity. If the "man" of reason must learn to control or overcome traits identified as feminine—the body, the emotions, the passions—then the realm of rationality will be one reserved primarily for men,[1] with grudging entrance to those few women who are capable of transcending their femininity.

Feminist philosophers have begun to look critically at the canonized texts of philosophy and have concluded that the discourses of philosophy are not gender-neutral. Philosophical narratives do not offer a universal perspective, but rather privilege some experiences and beliefs over others. These experiences and beliefs permeate all philosophical theories whether they be aesthetic or epistemological, moral or metaphysical. Yet this fact has often been neglected by those studying the traditions of

philosophy. Given the history of canon formation in Western philosophy, the perspective most likely to be privileged is that of upper-class, white males. Thus, to be fully aware of the impact of gender biases, it is imperative that we re-read the canon with attention to the ways in which philosophers' assumptions concerning gender are embedded within their theories.

This new series, *Re-Reading the Canon,* is designed to foster this process of reevaluation. Each volume will offer feminist analyses of the theories of a selected philosopher. Since feminist philosophy is not monolithic in method or content, the essays are also selected to illustrate the variety of perspectives within feminist criticism and highlight some of the controversies within feminist scholarship.

In this series, feminist lenses will be focused on the canonical texts of Western philosophy, both those authors who have been part of the traditional canon, as well as those philosophers whose writings have more recently gained attention within the philosophical community. A glance at the list of volumes in the series will reveal an immediate gender bias of the canon: Arendt, Aristotle, de Beauvoir, Derrida, Descartes, Foucault, Hegel, Hume, Kant, Locke, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Plato, Rousseau, Wittgenstein, Wollstonecraft. There are all too few women included, and those few who do appear have been added only recently. In creating this series, it is not my intention to reify the current canon of philosophical thought. What is and is not included within the canon during a particular historical period is a result of many factors. Although no canonization of texts will include all philosophers, no canonization of texts that exclude all but a few women can offer an accurate representation of the history of the discipline as women have been philosophers since the ancient period.[2]

I share with many feminist philosophers and other philosophers writing from the margins of philosophy the concern that the current canonization of philosophy be transformed. Although I do not accept the position that the current canon has been formed exclusively by power relations, I do believe that this canon represents only a selective history of the tradition. I share the view of Michael Bérubé that "canons are at once the location, the index, and the record of the struggle for cultural representation; like any other hegemonic formation, they must be continually reproduced anew and are continually contested."[3]

The process of canon transformation will require the recovery of "lost" texts and a careful examination of the reasons such voices have been

silenced. Along with the process of uncovering women's philosophical history, we must also begin to analyze the impact of gender ideologies upon the process of canonization. This process of recovery and examination must occur in conjunction with careful attention to the concept of a canon of authorized texts. Are we to dispense with the notion of a tradition of excellence embodied in a canon of authorized texts? Or, rather than abandon the whole idea of a canon, do we instead encourage a reconstruction of a canon of those texts that inform a common culture?

This series is designed to contribute to this process of canon transformation by offering a re-reading of the current philosophical canon. Such a re-reading shifts our attention to the ways in which woman and the role of the feminine is constructed within the texts of philosophy. A question we must keep in front of us during this process of re-reading is whether a philosopher's socially inherited prejudices concerning woman's nature and role are independent of her or his larger philosophical framework. In asking this question attention must be paid to the ways in which the definitions of central philosophical concepts implicitly include or exclude gendered traits.

This type of reading strategy is not limited to the canon, but can be applied to all texts. It is my desire that this series reveal the importance of this type of critical reading. Paying attention to the workings of gender within the texts of philosophy will make visible the complexities of the inscription of gender ideologies.

Notes

1. More properly, it is a realm reserved for a group of privileged males, since the texts also inscribe race and class biases that thereby omit certain males from participation.

2. Mary Ellen Waithe's multivolume series, *A History of Women Philosophers* (Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1987), attests to this presence of women.

3. Michael Bérubé, *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers: Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 4–5.

Preface

Unlike the other volumes in this series on feminism and the canon of philosophers, this collection of essays began as two roundtable discussions I organized for the Indiana and American Political Science Associations in 1992, followed by a symposium held at DePauw University in February 1993, to commemorate the bicentennial of the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Except for Virginia Sapiro's *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), the political science academy had virtually ignored her work as a genuine contribution to political theory, and in fact had, with one or two exceptions, relegated her to the "ghetto" of women's studies.

The purpose of this series of panels was to draw the academy's attention to the value of her political thought through the presentation of some new assessments by outstanding political scientists, many of whom had in one way or another already written about her in other publications and from other perspectives. The fact that these were women authors was more the result of that "ghetto-ization" than of choice.

The bulk of these papers, therefore, were the results of those panel presentations by Virginia Sapiro, Penny Weiss, Dorothy Stetson, Carol Poston, and Wendy Gunther-Canada. Of that original number, only Carol Poston is not a political scientist, but her interest in the psychological aspects of Wollstonecraft's experience as an abused child is one that political psychologists have pursued over the years for other political theorists and actors, and seemed to be especially appropriate here. The other papers were added later to round out the scope of the materials for this volume. Of that number, Virginia Muller and Louise Byer Miller are also political scientists but Miriam Brody and Moira Ferguson are not.

Nevertheless, Brody's discussion of Wollstonecraft's political rhetoric and Moira Ferguson's article on Wollstonecraft's use of the concept of colonial slavery, previously published in *Feminist Review* (42 [Autumn 1992]: 82–102), come well within the aegis of political analysis. Two years after the original roundtable discussion at the 1992 convention of the American Political Science Association, Virginia Sapiro and Penny Weiss were invited to construct a dialogue from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft for the Foundations of Political Theory Group at the 1994 APSA convention—recognition of Wollstonecraft by the academy at last. That dialogue has been included in this collection, as has Wendy Gunther-Canada's annotated bibliography.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to Nancy Tuana, editor of this series of volumes on feminist interpretations of the canon of philosophers and professor of philosophy at the University of Oregon at Eugene, and to Sanford Thatcher, director of Penn State Press. Their agreeing to include Wollstonecraft in that number is surely a landmark.

We also thank President Robert Bottoms and Provost Leonard DiLillo of DePauw University for their unstinting financial support for this project, in both its symposium and publication phases; to the Faculty Development Committee of DePauw for its support of convention travel; to Keith Nightenhelser and the Public Occasions Committee, to Meryl Altman and the Women's Studies Program, and to my colleagues in the political science and history departments for sharing their departmental funds to finance the symposium, including the grant from the Guy Morrison Walker Lecture Fund. Without their combined support and encouragement, this project could not have been completed.

A word of thanks is also owed the Computer Center at DePauw for continuing to allow me the use of their facilities, including BITNET and INTERNET, to correspond first with the 1992 APSA program officers (Arlene Saxonhouse of the University of Michigan who chaired the program for the Research on Women and Politics section, and Jennifer Hacha of the APSA staff who compiled the program), and later with the DePauw symposium participants, throughout 1992 and 1993, and long after my effective retirement from DePauw in June 1993.

Maria J. Falco

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Introduction: Who Was Mary Wollstonecraft?

Maria J. Falco

During the spring of 1992, the students in my Women and Politics seminar and I were discussing Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* the bicentennial of whose publication we were then celebrating. Toward the end of our three-hour session, I asked them how they would answer the question I had assigned to myself to answer for this introduction: "Who was Mary Wollstonecraft?" I got several rather interesting adjectives at first: "She was an angry woman"; "she was a modern woman"; "she was a woman who was trying to break out of the mold imposed on her by her society." Finally one student said, "You can't define her—definitions impose limits; to define her is to limit her."

Wollstonecraft was indeed so complex a person that complete description is impossible. The best one can do is to give a short sketch of her life and her accomplishments—more to provide a context for the essays that follow than to define or delimit the woman whose masterwork we discuss in this volume.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in 1759 in a rural community in

England. Her father was a failed gentleman farmer and an alcoholic. Her mother was a passive and battered housewife. Throughout her youth Wollstonecraft tried to protect her mother from her father's frequent attacks, and according to her husband, William Godwin, she was herself a victim of her father's abuse.

Wollstonecraft received very little formal education and was largely self-taught. Nevertheless, after several aborted attempts to earn her living as a lady's companion, a tutor, and even as a schoolteacher, she finally was able to support herself and her father and younger brothers and sisters as an author of books and short stories for the education of young girls, as a book reviewer for the *Analytical Review,* as a political commentator on the French Revolution, and for a brief period, as a tourist reporting on her travels to Scandinavia. In the process she produced a large volume of works, including several pieces of fiction based largely on her own life. At the height of her powers she engaged some of the most important political philosophers of her time in heated debate: Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the appropriate way to educate women, and Edmund Burke on the meaning of the French Revolution and the rights of man. This last experience yielded her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), written within a month of Burke's publication, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* and several months before Thomas Paine's own reaction to Burke in *The Rights of Man.* She came to think deeply about the social, economic, and political condition of women in this revolutionary environment, and two years later, to write her second *Vindication* (1792), this time on the rights of woman.

Wollstonecraft dedicated *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to Talleyrand, who at that time was designing a national education program for boys in France. She hoped to convince him that such a system should include girls on the same basis, for the same programs and in the same classrooms as boys. Her thesis was that the exclusion of girls from such a program should not be permitted unless it could be proved that women did not have the capacity for reason that men were presumed to have. The continued exclusion of women from full civic status, she believed, worked to the detriment of society generally, and to the goals of republicanism and of the French Revolution itself. What she was proposing was radical. There was no such national system of education anywhere in Europe at that time, for boys or for girls. There was private tutoring for wealthy children in their own homes and so-called public

boarding schools for boys from elite homes, such as Eton. There were occasional country day schools for the primary grades for children of yeoman farmers and local gentry; she had attended just such a school for two or three years as a child. But nowhere were the two sexes ever educated together with substantially the same curriculum such as she was proposing. In fact, the mere mention of teaching a girl a subject like botany, for example, was considered nothing short of "prurient."

In the process of making her argument on behalf of the equal education for women, however, Wollstonecraft also laid out her theories on the social, legal, and environmental causes for the status of women. She candidly described the behavior of her peers as insipid, flirtatious, inane, and sometimes vicious, with a sycophantic passive acceptance of their situation. Her term for it was "slavishness," not "virtuous" behavior at all. She believed that marriage as it was practiced at that time was the equivalent of legal prostitution, and that women would never be able to achieve virtue or to demonstrate the ability to be independent, reasoning, autonomous human beings as long as they were educated for nothing other than "to catch a man."

Wollstonecraft maintained that women should be educated to support themselves, with or without marriage, and that they should have the right to pursue the same professions as men—medicine, business, law—and even that they should be represented in Parliament. At the very least, she thought that women should be able to control their own money and should have equal rights to the custody of their own children, neither of which was permitted under the marriage laws of England or of Europe generally (although both of these rights had been permitted to women of ancient Rome, as indicated in the Roman Civil Law).[1] "Coverture," the legal term for the nonrecognition of married women in civil society, as explained in Blackstone's *Commentaries on the English Common Law,* stated that in marriage two persons had become one, and that one was the man.

Such conditions, Wollstonecraft felt, kept women in a perpetual state of childhood, legally and psychologically. Most middle-class women did little more than pick out materials for their dresses and devote themselves to their "toilette" for hours on end. Unless they were educated for independence, their capacity for reasoning would be undeveloped and the achievement of true virtue would be stunted. As a consequence of the current system, she thought, all of society suffers because of the

incapacitation of one half of the human race, and their inability to participate in, or to assist in, their children's achievement of "civic virtue."

In her introduction to the Penguin edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Miriam Brody has called this book the "feminist declaration of independence" and "the feminist manifesto." But many people reading it for the first time might think it a cry for help from an angry woman: one who felt it unjust to the extreme that the life options open to an unwed woman were seamstress, governess, lady's companion, servant, or prostitute/courtesan. True independence, dignity, and virtue, she felt, were simply unachievable under these circumstances. She called herself "a new genus": a woman who earned her living by writing. She was probably correct. Even the great women novelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, for example) could scarcely be said to have supported themselves entirely by their literary labors.

Wollstonecraft's life took a serious turn not long after she wrote this book. Having been such a staunch supporter of the French Revolution, she decided to experience it for herself, and landed in France just in time to witness the extremes of the Reign of Terror and to see Louis XVI being taken off to prison. While there she fell in love with an American, Gilbert Imlay, and became pregnant with her first child. Although she did not believe in marriage, when war broke out between France and England and she was in danger of being arrested as a British subject, she and Imlay went together to the American consulate and declared that they were husband and wife. This gave her the protection of American citizenship until the birth of her child. Unfortunately Imlay soon grew tired of her and left them both to "look after business." Although he offered to support her and the child, Wollstonecraft refused, saying she could do that herself. Twice she attempted suicide over his rejection of her, but after the second attempt, her friends convinced her to get on with her life for the sake of her daughter, Fanny.

Wollstonecraft returned to her writing and to the friendship of the circle of dissenters that surrounded her publisher Joseph Johnson (all of whom suffered civil penalties of one sort or another for their support of the French Revolution during the war), including Thomas Paine, William Blake, Joseph Priestly, and William Godwin. Eventually she fell in love again, this time with Godwin, who didn't believe in marriage either, for reasons similar to her own. Nevertheless, when she was three

months pregnant with her second child, they did marry, but they continued to keep separate apartments and to maintain their independent life-styles, until she gave birth on 30 August 1797. Ten days later Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin died of puerperal fever at the age of thirty-eight. Her daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, the second wife of the poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, went on to achieve fame in her own right, as the author of *Frankenstein*, a tale that, according to some feminist critics, depicts what happens when a man attempts to create life without the partnership of a woman.

Unfortunately, William Godwin's frank depiction of his wife's life and her relationship with Gilbert Imlay in his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* resulted in an almost universal condemnation of Wollstonecraft personally, and a deliberate avoidance of her work by several generations of feminists and scholars. The often scurrilous denunciations and gross misinterpretations of her ideas over the years prevented her from being fully appreciated as a "founding mother" of feminism almost until the post–World War II period, even though some of her major arguments had been resurrected by John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor, and Virginia Woolf (see Poston 1988, for excerpts of representative commentaries contributing to this "controversy").

What is it about Mary Wollstonecraft that elicits such controversy, that resonates so deeply with so many modern women? Through her words and her life, Wollstonecraft reminds us of who we are, of where we have come from, and of how far we have yet to go. Many of her hopes have come true; we have even gone beyond what she thought was achievable. She would doubtless be thrilled to see women participating in the Olympics (she was a great proponent of fresh air and physical exercise for women), and being part of the armed forces and of the legislative and executive branches of so many modern nations. But we have yet to achieve true equality with men, as the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1981, the continued attacks on the personal autonomy of women in the domestic and legal arenas, and the low proportion of women among the top ranks of leadership in business, politics, medicine, and the law so clearly demonstrates. Perhaps when it comes time to celebrate the tricentennial of Wollstonecraft's birth in 2059, we (or you) may have greater cause to celebrate. With Wollstonecraft's writings to inspire us, we can work toward such a goal.

Over the years one of the most remarkable things about the reactions of critics to the works of Mary Wollstonecraft has been the incredible

degree of passion exhibited, both positive and negative. No one who has read her works or about her life, it seems, can remain neutral. The way in which she continually confronted her times and the situations in which she found herself, taking on forces and individuals considerably more powerful than herself, has made her either a hero to be emulated or a madwoman to be repulsed. She lived life on the edge and flouted society's norms at a time when those norms were being challenged everywhere—for men. That she should have extended the scope of those challenges to include the condition of women made her a pariah in the eyes of many.

Ever since the Renaissance, women have been in the forefront of revolutionary movements. Vittoria Colonna in Italy and Marguerite de Navarre in France were typical of the women who nurtured and contributed to the incredible intellectual, artistic, and religious upheavals that occurred throughout sixteenth-century Europe, for example, but they did so as part of the revolutionary mainstream, not as advocates for their gender or for "womankind." What Wollstonecraft did in the eighteenth century was to absorb the ethic of humanism and individualism launched by the Renaissance and expanded by the Enlightenment and ask, What about me?

After her impassioned defense of the rights of men in her first *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft was impelled to take the next logical step. It would have been amazing had she not done so. Olympe de Gouges in France had come to the same conclusion the year before the publication of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* and asked, in effect, Where is my revolution? When do I get to be a charter participant in the "rights of man"? (*The Rights of Woman*, 1791). The French Revolution's answer to Olympe was the guillotine, and the English reaction to Mary was disgrace. One comes to the conclusion that the details of Wollstonecraft's life as revealed by Godwin were the excuse for, not the cause of, the repression and ridicule of her work for so many years.

Until recently most women who asked, Where is my revolution? were greeted by society with ridicule and humiliation. The women who participated in the abolitionist movement in this country before the Civil War are a case in point. The obvious connection between the condition of slaves and that of women in marriage had already been made by Mary Wollstonecraft and others. But they and their successors, the suffragettes, had to wait seventy years to achieve the right to vote. When women joined the civil rights movement in the 1960s and worked

to reopen the case for political rights for blacks and, by extension, for themselves, they were put down once again, this time with the notorious response by a leader of the Black Power movement: "The only position for women in this movement is prone." Lest anyone think that such reactions are no longer in fashion, one need only to recall the Senate Judiciary Committee's reaction to Anita Hill when she testified to her sexual harassment by Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas in 1991.

Whenever women have spoken out on behalf of their own needs for social, economic, political, and psychological freedom, they have been ridiculed, maligned, and harassed. But while Wollstonecraft's message was effectively silenced after her death, her spiritual descendants in this century have clearly continued the struggle. This collection of essays is one indication of the way in which that battle is now being waged. Mary Wollstonecraft was above all a philosopher, that is, a "lover of wisdom and reason." She was as much an original thinker as any of her more prominent male contemporaries, and two hundred years after her death women in academia are determined to make that point.

In "Wollstonecraft and Rousseau: The Gendered Fate of Political Theorists" (Chapter 2), Penny Weiss asks why Wollstonecraft is not part of the "canon" of political theorists. Comparing her with Rousseau and female theorists with male theorists generally, Weiss argues that the exclusion of females is indefensible, and in the case of Wollstonecraft, egregious. Her essay offers responses to a number of possible explanations for Wollstonecraft's fate: her reputed "narrowness," her "lack of originality," the "insufficiently political nature" of her writings, her "peculiar" personal life, etc., and disproves every one through a comparative analysis of the works and lives of others, especially Rousseau. The public/private dichotomy so prevalent in traditional political thought, which relegated the condition of women to the margins and made such topics as the education and political participation of women irrelevant and inappropriate matters for political discussion (see especially how Plato's treatment of the subject has been considered a joke by such contemporary commentators as Allan Bloom), becomes the most plausible explanation. That Wollstonecraft *did* cast the spotlight on women, *did* ask the important political questions about the nonparticipation in political life of one half of the human race, makes her writing, according to Weiss, not bad or inconsequential political theory but excellent theory—far more valuable, in fact, than that of many of those included in the

canon. For Wollstonecraft and others like her provide the only corrective to the blindness of the past, to the invisibility of women as living, breathing, contributing, "participating" members of the political community. "The fate of Mary Wollstonecraft, like that of the long list of women philosophers, is best understood as a political phenomenon, rather than as the 'natural' consequence of the character of her work," says Weiss. It is the consequence of an ideology so pervasive in Western political thought as to be itself invisible to the naked mind. It is time that this mind-set be challenged and that justice be done to the likes of Mary Wollstonecraft, now and for all time.

Virginia Sapiro's essay "Wollstonecraft, Feminism, and Democracy: 'Being Bastilled' " (Chapter 3) argues that Wollstonecraft was as much a "civic humanist" as an Enlightenment liberal, and more important, was a "visionary political thinker." That is, she attempted to "think (her) way out of a current problem or dilemma, . . . trying to identify and name the problem in the first place, then locating the place or position where (she) would rather be, . . . [and] find[ing] a path to get there." As a protofeminist and a democrat before either concept had been fully articulated or a movement of either sort had even existed—before, in fact, the term *feminism* had been invented—Wollstonecraft struggled to resolve the issue of women's place in the political community by utilizing, not only the doctrines of Enlightenment liberalism but such concepts as virtue and friendship, as well as reason and equality, to provide the foundation for her vision of politics. The fact that she did so in a vacuum, without the dialogue or shared thoughts of other similarly situated women, without the "consciousness-raising" function of a feminist movement, makes the product of her efforts truly remarkable. With full realization that the condition of women was a social construct—the result of "your constitution" as she put it when addressing men—she was aware that a solution to the problem would have to be social as well. Unfortunately, she did not understand how such a solution could be achieved, how "this enlightenment might be translated into political action." The result is a life and a theory without closure, so to speak, while the "walls" of her own political and social ideas were instead, "closing in on her." She never resolved the issue, either in her thought or in her life, and remained "bastilled" to the end.

Virginia Muller's essay (Chapter 4) does not ask what Mary Wollstonecraft learned from classical liberalism but rather what liberals can learn from Mary Wollstonecraft. Taking the position that Wollstonecraft was

not the "naive" liberal that some critics portray, Muller argues that while using liberalism as a foundation Wollstonecraft nevertheless "dramatically confronts" and challenges many of the premises of "narrow Lockean liberalism." Not only did she widen the boundaries of liberalism to include women; she also changed the social and economic structure of liberalism by "reject(ing) property rights as the core of democracy." Male primogeniture as the principal support for political rights was for Wollstonecraft an inherent source of injustice for both men and women. While agreeing with liberalism that reason was the primary source of natural rights, its defense of property (or "crude commercialism") as the chief determinant of political rights seemed to her the major barrier to political equality and liberty for all. Thus Wollstonecraft linked the condition of women not only to their inferior education and to cultural stereotypes about their "lack of reason" and personal and civic virtue, but to the economic handicaps placed upon them and others in society. That her analysis of the condition of women was both gender- and class-based became clearer as her work progressed from the *Vindication of the Rights of Men* to her final fragmentary novel, *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria.* In the former she proclaimed: "Security of Property! Behold in a few words the definition of English Liberty." In the latter she demonstrated how similarly lacking in personal autonomy and dignity were the situation of Maria, the middle-class protagonist of the piece whose husband had placed her in an insane asylum in order to have greater control over her fortune, and that of Jemima, her working-class warden or "jailor."

In Chapter 5, Wendy Gunther-Canada explores the transition between the first and second *Vindications,* and concentrates on Wollstonecraft's "wild wish" to "see the distinction of sex confounded in society." Although the first edition of the *Vindication of the Rights of Men* was written anonymously in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* Gunther-Canada argues that Wollstonecraft was not simply a woman "writing behind the mask of anonymity"; she took on "the gendered mask of political authority" and became the "voice of reason, confounding Burke's construction of female subservience and silence by loudly addressing her reading audience as a man." Gunther-Canada calls this "an important departure for feminist political theory." By writing about the "demon of property," Wollstonecraft "crossed the boundaries of both gender and genre," provoking reactions of denial or dismissal, especially after her authorship of the piece was revealed in the

second edition. (Since women can't write, she didn't write it; a man disguising himself as a woman did—such was the essence of some of the reactions to this first *Vindication.*) The second *Vindication,* on the rights of woman, provoked an even greater reaction by developing what Gunther-Canada calls "the political theory of the thinking woman, . . . (moving) women from silent objects to speaking subjects." Wollstonecraft claims that "except for physical strength all distinctions between the sexes are socially constructed . . . traced to the self-interest of male writers in perpetuating a system of sexual subjugation." She refuses to concede reason and virtue of any kind exclusively to men, and thus "explodes eighteenth-century social constructions of authority and femininity."

Carol Poston's "Mary Wollstonecraft and 'The Body Politic' " (Chapter 6) examines the possibility that Wollstonecraft's voice, far from being that of a self-loathing male-identifying virago, is really that of an abused child striving to eliminate sex and the body altogether from political discourse. Asking, "Is there . . . a female body at all in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication?*" Poston observes that "people of both genders (are) easily put off by the tone of harshness against men, but (are) also struck by a stridency and lack of sympathy toward women." They also find it "hard to overlook Wollstonecraft's fastidiousness about (and perhaps disgust toward) female bodies." Mary Poovey in her critique thought Wollstonecraft was "a woman of such sexual passion that she denied it to herself and others." Poston's counter is that she believes "Wollstonecraft is speaking as the adult survivor of abuse—not necessarily sexual, although that is quite possible, but certainly emotional and physical. . . . [S]he is not denying sexuality and desire: she sees that sexuality is a completely male construct, and neither female desire nor the female body exists for her." Citing a number of recent psychological works on childhood abuse, Poston examines the implications of this attitude toward the body and phallocentrism for Wollstonecraft's political theory: "Tyranny, or the blind phallic usurpation of power, poisons every relationship, political and personal." So powerful is this male sexual force that "women can be destroyed, eaten up by it," and become physical and political "cyphers." Thus the "disembodied" woman becomes for her "the emblem . . . of a disengaged, disenfranchised, diseased body politic."

In Chapter 7, Miriam Brody takes this argument one step further. Locating Wollstonecraft's work in the rhetorical tradition of the Roman

orator Quintilian, whose work was widely interpreted in the Enlightenment as what Brody calls "manly writing" ("[positing] a masculine agon requiring masculine excellence"), Brody argues that Mary Wollstonecraft completely reverses the "iconography of manly writing as it had been represented in traditional rhetoric." In doing so she carved out an "alternative vision for women." "[T]he idea that a woman might engage herself in the masculine world of political debate was a double monstrosity—women not merely picking up the pen, but doing so to preach to men about the way the world should be run." With the second *Vindication*, "Wollstonecraft finds a subject position for her own sex in the discursive tradition of rhetoric, an authorial space that required she rewrite the idea of a woman's body." By distinguishing between the "weak woman of fashion" and the "exceptional woman writer," Wollstonecraft was employing a device similar to that of Quintilian's contrast between the *vir bonus* and the "unnatural" Eunuch. Using the "vitiated female body as an icon of linguistic insufficiency" similar to Quintilian's use of the Eunuch, the emasculated man, Wollstonecraft "deployed on the body of her own sex the same projection of illness, depletion, and infertility that had represented the failure to be sufficiently manly in the Enlightenment transmission of classical rhetoric. . . . Insisting on reason as a female provenance, [she] returned such notions as 'fertility' and 'production' to the material body from which traditional rhetoric had abstracted them as masculine virtues describing good writing. No disembodied productivity, writerly fecundity and bodily reproduction fuse in [Wollstonecraft's] insistence on rational motherhood." Thus, Brody claims, Wollstonecraft "turned canonical rhetoric on its head": "not the 'good man,' but the 'good' woman; not rhetorical evil as emasculation, but rhetorical evil as spoilage of the uterus. The outcome of vitiation is imagined still as a barren, corrupt body, but the body of a woman; the outcome of virtue is imagined as reproduction of the body, production of the mind."

In Chapter 8, Moira Ferguson concentrates upon the way in which the second *Vindication* characterizes the condition of "female subjugation" and subordination to men as slavery. Although "conservative and radical women writers alike" had formerly "railed against marriage, love and education as forms of slavery perpetrated upon women by men and by the conventions of society at large," the debate was now "recontextualized in terms of colonial slavery." Wollstonecraft was "the first writer to raise issues of colonial and gender relations so tellingly in

tandem" by indicating the parallels between the condition of black slaves, especially women, and that of women in general, and by stating the premise that all men enslave all women and that "sexual desire is the primary motivation." In doing so Wollstonecraft establishes a "group identity, a political position from which they can start organizing and agitating." Unfortunately, she is never able to overcome liberalism's bias toward individual action as a solution to social problems. Instead of urging the formation of a gender-based political movement, as feminism was to do later, Wollstonecraft concentrated upon the reform of individual behavior on the part of women: away from "coquetry" and "sexual wiles," "vanity and self-indulgence" if they are to break their "silken fetters." Not the "mob resistance" of slaves as in San Domingo, but self-education, economic independence, and sexual autonomy are the solutions she proffers. Nevertheless, the subtext of revolution, according to Ferguson, remains: "Faced with oppression women have simply made wrong choices." Wollstonecraft's "bourgeois individualism" makes it impossible for her to "posit collective rebellion . . . (except) by analogy." But the analogy of the rebellious slave also serves as a reminder to "male tyrants and predators" that resistance is ever a possibility and that subversion is an ongoing occurrence. What Wollstonecraft does, therefore, is to "fundamentally alter . . . the definition of rights and [pave] the way for a much wider cultural dialogue"—basically to a sociopolitical movement–oriented solution to women's condition.

The next two chapters, by Louise Byer Miller and Dorothy McBride Stetson, trace the evolution of women's rights since Mary Wollstonecraft's time, through changes in the legal definitions of those rights: first, in the U.S. Supreme Court's interpretation of American constitutional law, particularly under the Burger and Rehnquist Courts; and second, in the extension of the concept of human rights to include women's rights through and since the United Nations' 1947 "Declaration of Human Rights." Miller outlines the "second-class status of women" since Blackstone's *Commentaries* of 1765 to which Wollstonecraft herself reacted, and the ways in which women gradually attempted to change their status through group action—the very solution Wollstonecraft was unable to visualize. Miller traces this evolution from the time of the Abolitionists and suffragettes through to the women's movement following World War II and the post-Vietnam War period, but concentrates specifically upon the Supreme Court's alternating struggles against and on behalf of ever-widening demands for women's freedom and autonomy, in the home

and in the marketplace, economically, politically, and socially. While recognizing some of the liberalizing actions of the court prior to the 1970s, Miller concludes that the condition of women today owes much more to the actions of the "conservative" Burger Court and to its successor, the Rehnquist Court, than to their predecessor, the "liberal" Warren Court, thus illustrating how much of a mainstream movement the women's movement has become. That the battle is by no means over goes without saying. But Miller's essay shows us how far we have come (at least in the United States) in the law and through the existence of the women's movement.

Stetson's essay clearly demonstrates how the lack of group action in many of the underdeveloped countries of the world, especially, has hindered a similar evolution from occurring worldwide. Thus while the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states that "no man shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attack upon his honor and reputation," its primary purpose, according to Stetson, is to protect the "male dominant family and the honor of its paterfamilias. . . . The protection of privacy in the family translates to the state giving men protection from interference in their patriarchial control over women as mothers, wives and workers." Since the 1940s the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women has been continually exerting pressure on the United Nations to enact special guarantees for women, resulting finally in the 1980 adoption of the "Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women." Similarly, the European Convention on Human Rights currently prohibits discrimination regarding the enjoyment of rights on the basis of "sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin . . . or other status." Amnesty International, meanwhile, has stepped up its investigation and condemnation of the use of rape as a systematic instrument of war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Attempts are now being made to redraft the standard list of human rights guarantees from a feminist perspective, especially through the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Accords). Stetson concludes: "Labeling rape a crime against the dignity and rights of women makes Wollstonecraft a visionary. . . . In 1993 only one or two nation-states defined (it as such)."

The two essays that follow (Chapters 11 and 12) round out the survey of Mary Wollstonecraft's contribution to the debate on women's rights. The first is a fictitious dialogue composed exclusively of excerpts from

the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft, which illustrates how closely the two argued on behalf of human rights and how drastically they differed over the rights of women. The results are humorous, but painful. That such a fanatical democrat as Rousseau could be so ridiculously narrow and prejudiced in his attitude toward women is a revelation, and deplorable in the extreme. It is the incredible dichotomy between these two sides of his thought that makes Wollstonecraft's reaction to them so healthy and so disarmingly potent. If anyone could qualify as the female Rousseau, surely it is Mary Wollstonecraft.

The second piece is a bibliographical essay by Wendy Gunther-Canada delineating the variously changing reactions to Wollstonecraft that have occurred over the two centuries since her death. After reading this essay it would not be too much of a cliché to describe her as a "Woman of all Seasons" as well; two hundred years have not lessened Wollstonecraft's power to teach, to challenge, and to inspire.

Notes

1. See Georges Duby, Michele Perrot, and Pauline Scmitt Pantel, eds., *A History of Women*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), chap. 3.

2

Wollstonecraft and Rousseau: The Gendered Fate of Political Theorists

Penny A. Weiss

How can we understand the relative invisibility of Mary Wollstonecraft in the history of political thinkers? I argue here that Wollstonecraft's fate is the fate of virtually all female theorists, feminist or otherwise, though especially feminist. To show that the fate of political theorists is a gendered one, I consider a variety of other possible explanations for Wollstonecraft's invisibility. In responding to these justificatory stories I frequently compare Wollstonecraft with Rousseau, a figure who wrote on similar subjects, in the same historical period, and often in similar literary forms, as well as with other figures whose courses provide information useful to the investigation.

Before attempting to understand the relative invisibility of Wollstonecraft and other women theorists I should first document it.[1] I begin with my own experience. I am a Ph.D. in political theory, and in all my years of graduate school (which, I must admit, covers the late 1970s, the early 1980s and the mid-1980s) I never once read a treatise by a female theorist. Well, in all honesty, once a class of mine read an article *about*

Hannah Arendt, but that hardly counts, especially since she was not allowed to speak in her own voice and the article was dedicated to a demonstration of how very much like Aristotle Arendt was.[2] But I should pause. Maybe women weren't read in *my* graduate school, but they might have been half the curriculum at others. After all, I did go to graduate school at Notre Dame, a university that has never been mistaken for being a hotbed of feminism (though personally I think we should demand more of a school called "Our Lady").

Let us turn, then, to political theory textbooks. Pulling fairly randomly from my shelves, I first present Isaac Kramnick's *Essays in the History of Political Thought.* The table of contents includes essays on each of the following theorists: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Burke, Hegel, Marx, and Mill. All men. But this volume was published in 1969. Maybe two decades have changed things? Fair enough. I now pull down Robert Brown's *Classical Political Theories: From Plato to Marx,* published in 1990. His table of contents? Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes, Pufendorf, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Rousseau, Burke, Paine, Hegel, Mill, and Marx. So much for progress.

Perhaps if we look at books organized not by individual theorists but by general political ideas we might find reference to some women. Even if an author or editor does not want to deal with various women's thought in their entirety, in a thematically organized text parts could be selected out. Here then is Jean Faurot's *Problems of Political Philosophy,* a book framed by four issues: order, freedom, justice, and history. Under each issue the following names appear: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Dewey. That, I guess, is variety: Augustine versus Aquinas, or Dewey versus Mill. But Faurot's text was published in 1970. Maybe thematically structured books have improved over time? I turn to James Wiser's *Political Theory: A Thematic Inquiry,* published in 1986. It is organized into four parts: "Political Theory: Knowledge or Opinion?"; "Human Nature and Politics"; "Political Ruling: The Basis of Authority"; and "The Boundaries of Politics." Looking at the names considered under each section, I find Aristotle, Marx, Mannheim, Weber, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Plato, Lenin, Popper, Rousseau, Dahl, and Green. Not a single woman again.

But perhaps my own bookshelf is unrepresentative? I have the same hope. We move on now to the ever-growing pile of book catalogues in my office. Glancing through the political theory sections of political

science catalogues, I find editions of works by the now familiar theorists—Aristotle, Weber, Hobbes, Rousseau, Adam Smith, and so on—as well as many volumes on more "minor" male figures: Bacon, Sidgwick, Kalecki, and Bukharin. In addition, books focusing on a particular school of thought or theory within political philosophy include only males who have contributed to it. For example, books in these catalogues on liberalism exclude Wollstonecraft, ones on anarchism omit Emma Goldman,[3] some on existentialism exclude Simone de Beauvoir.[4]

Maybe the problem is that these presses do not specialize in political thought, so that their holdings in that area are not extensive, and thus fail to represent the full range of texts being published and marketed. Finally, then, I pick up the catalogue for Hackett Press, which advertises itself as specializing in "Philosophy, Political Theory, Classics, [and] Intellectual History." Not only does Hackett specialize, but their prices are among the most reasonable; as a result, their editions and translations are widely used in classrooms. As I flip the pages the all-too-familiar names run by again: Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Thucydides, Descartes, Kant, Paine, Burke, and so on. Not a single philosophical treatise by a woman!

Finally, I can document the invisibility of women in the history of political theory by asking you to consider whom *you* have heard of. Compare your familiarity of Aristotle, Plato, Hobbes, and Rousseau, with your knowledge of Christine de Pizan,[5] Mary Astell,[6] Charlotte Perkins Gilman,[7] and Josephine Butler.[8] How many of the latter names do you know at all? How many of them can you place in the century or the country in which they wrote? For how many of them can you name the title of something they wrote, or identify the philosophical schools with which they were associated?

I think it fair to conclude at this point that women can hardly be said to exist in the history of political theory as most of us know it, as we have been taught it, as it exists in standard textbooks. But, lest we needlessly resort to theories of patriarchy and charges of sexism, we need to consider whether the explanation for the invisibility of women could simply be that there *were* no women writing political theory for us to see, feminist or otherwise.

The next road brings us to books by women theorists. I have already mentioned Arendt, Goldman, de Beauvoir, de Pizan, Astell, Gilman, and Butler. Browsing here we might add dozens more names: Harriet Martineau,[9] Rosa Luxemburg,[10] Crystal Eastman,[11] Olive Schreiner,[12]

Jane Addams,[13] Margaret Fuller,[14] Harriet Taylor,[15] Virginia Woolf,[16] Ida B. Wells,[17] Simone Weil,[18] Matilda Joslyn Gage,[19] Mary Hays,[20] Alexandra Kollontai,[21] Mary Ritter Beard,[22] Maria W. Stewart,[23] and on and on. This list doesn't even touch on contemporary women theorists, of whom there are many, or women from countries, classes, races, and eras that have rendered their work relatively inaccessible, of whom there are many many more.

Okay, maybe there *have* been women writing political theory, political texts, philosophical treatises. But are they of the stature of men doing similar writing? Perhaps we should pay *some* more attention to them than we do, without it being necessary to reconceive the traditions to encompass women in any more distinctive or central way?

Who decides how stature is judged? By what criteria are someone's merits as a political thinker determined? Too often decisions about whom to include in a survey text or course syllabus are simply based upon who is included in other survey texts and course syllabi. Some supposed "consensus" about who is worthy is appealed to. But that begs the question.

Inclusion is often justified on grounds such as "influence," "insights," and "scope." To be an esteemed political thinker one would have to write on subjects that are part of the field, and to speak to questions of the day, but also beyond the day, so that the ideas of one can be put into dialogue with those of other important thinkers. Merit, it is often reasonably argued, has to do with pushing old ideas to new heights, or capturing new ideas. And one could rightly think that "real" theorists write in a certain spirit of philosophical openness and integrity. One would expect, finally, both depth and breadth in the great thinkers.

According to these standards, where would Mary Wollstonecraft fall? Does her failure to meet these criteria explain her supposed unimportance? Let us start with the issue of breadth.

Consider first the breadth of the "great" theorists. As most with some acquaintance with the history of political theory know, Plato wrote not only the *Republic,* which was on justice, but also a number of dialogues covering issues from beauty, law, and knowledge of friendship, virtue, and love. Aristotle wrote not only the *Politics* but also works on logic, rhetoric, poetry, and ethics. In addition to the *Social Contract,* Rousseau wrote a popular novel, an opera, an autobiography, and works on political economy, education, and the arts. The breadth of these thinkers is part of what makes them great, for they were able to cross

the boundaries of disciplines and to bring methods and insights from one to bear on inquiry into another. Breadth is testimony to an intellectual ability to grapple with diverse issues and ways of knowing. Perhaps Wollstonecraft, and women theorists in general, do not share in this breadth, thus explaining their continued absence in political theory? Perhaps the problem, after all, is that Wollstonecraft only wrote about women?

As it turns out, Wollstonecraft wrote much more than *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, whose two-hundredth anniversary we have recently celebrated. She was interested in the social and political and marital equality of the sexes; in education; the French Revolution; and issues of morality, freedom, and rationality in human nature and social life. In addition to the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she also wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1786), *Mary, a Fiction* (1788), *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794), and *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). She also translated from the French, Jacques Necker's *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions* (1788; Necker was the father of Madame de Staël) and, from the German, Christian Salzmann's *Elements of Morality* (1790), translations perhaps better characterized as "popularizations," as they contained considerable changes that made the works accessible to a wider range of readers. Looking further, there are Wollstonecraft's endless contributions to *Analytic Review*, and the unfinished and powerful *Maria*. (I'd like to add that all of this was written in a single decade, that Wollstonecraft was self-taught and self-supporting, and that it was new to have a woman writing on some of these topics, even including female education. But some might see such matters as irrelevant in judging her accomplishments.)

Wollstonecraft's breadth, it seems, has simply been ignored. That we know only her most obviously feminist work is neither unusual nor without consequences. To the extent that women have been allowed to speak they have been allowed to speak on women's issues, narrowly understood—generally as those issues have been defined by men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman is more famous for her utopian novel *Herland* and her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" than she is for her remarkable treatises on economics and religion. Simone de Beauvoir is better known for *The Second Sex* than for any of her numerous other works.

In contrast, whatever men have said about women is utterly ignored. Some translations of Rousseau's *Emile,* for example, simply drop book 5, the one that discusses women's education, despite all of the interesting problems it raises for most interpretations of the book as a whole. And rare indeed is the commentator who finds much of anything worth pondering in interpreting Rousseau's views on the sexes. His derogatory remarks about women are treated as unfortunate but understandable and ultimately irrelevant asides to his "real" political theory. Rousseau's fate here is as representative of his sex as Wollstonecraft's is of hers. When men have said negative things about women the most common responses have been to ignore it or, in passing, to call it an "unfortunate anomaly," and, in general, to blame it on the times. All such responses beg the reader to see that in no case do the male writer's views on women have any relevance to his politics or philosophy. And if men said something positive on women? Interestingly, there too the response has generally been to ignore such remarks, though when acknowledged they are often "blamed" on the female company such men kept. There are books about John Stuart Mill and lists of his writings that make no mention of his *Subjection of Women,* or that explain his feminism away as something Harriet Taylor somehow forced him to endorse. In general, whatever men say about women is irrelevant, and whatever women say about anything other than women is irrelevant. Both (what men define as) women's issues and women writers are ghettoized, forced into narrow quarters and largely ignored except when it is "convenient" to acknowledge them, often to ridicule or pigeonhole them, or to mask bias through token inclusion.

The consequences of this pattern are severe. When women are allowed to speak *only* about child care or abortion or women's rights, it allows those in power to say, falsely but usefully, "See how we are bringing women in?" The terms on which women are included are men's. And "permitting" women to address women's issues can be a way of justifying the exclusion of women everywhere else. When foreign policy, for example, is defined as outside the "proper" range of women's issues, that definition or location perpetuates the expectation and acceptance of attitudes and actions in that arena that disproportionately reflect the training received by men in patriarchal cultures: training in one-upmanship, physical violence, competitiveness, saving face, flexing muscles, drawing lines in desert sands. And, on the other hand, when child care, for example, is defined as the paradigmatic women's issue, we come to

expect and justify men's continued refusal to take responsibility for rearing children. Others are deciding when women may speak and on what subjects (also, of course, in what tone). That is silencing, not inclusion; it is a strategy for perpetuating, rather than challenging, women's subordination.

Wollstonecraft's fate is that of women theorists in general, as Rousseau's is that of men. We cannot say that the subjects her breadth covered are any less part of political thinking than those he covered, for the two overlap so greatly, and often use the same literary forms, as well. Like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft wrote on education (a topic considered politically central even by malestream theorists at least since Plato). Like Rousseau, she wrote a novel (discrimination against the novel as theory is not generally applied to male novelist-theorists including Rousseau, Sartre, and Camus; it is, however, a systematic guarantee of disproportionate exclusion of women, as it has historically been a literary form deemed relatively appropriate to them). Like Rousseau, she published her self-reflective letters. Like Rousseau, she wrote on political changes in France, on mores and morality, and on the political role of reason. It seems we cannot explain Wollstonecraft's absence from textbooks and catalogues and college curricula by any lack of breadth relative to that of men whose works are repackaged and reissued without apparent end.

Further, what does it mean to be broad or narrow, to have great or little breadth? If Wollstonecraft "only" wrote about the roles and relations of the sexes, would that somehow justify excluding her from the canon? Was Marx narrow for "only" writing on economics? Was Aquinas one-dimensional for bringing a Christian perspective to bear on everything he wrote? Stature is not merely a question of the number of subjects treated. Even if Wollstonecraft had "only" considered gender, it seems misguided to label her as narrow. In all of her writings she contributes something relatively rare: thoughts about the implications of various practices, social structures, and political changes on the status of and relationship between the sexes. In at least that regard, she is not narrower than others who have written on these subjects, but *more* comprehensive. In fact, her works show how narrowly many ideas and practices had been treated before; they thus contribute to a broadening of the scope of the discipline. That, it seems, is hardly an insignificant contribution.

Ignoring most of Wollstonecraft's work perpetuates a negative, dis-

torted version of feminism in general and of Wollstonecraft as a feminist political theorist. Assigning women to theorize on women in the ways the tradition of Western political theory has done diminishes our understanding of feminism by putting boundaries on the topics feminists may inquire into. It also diminishes our understanding of individual theorists who are, like Wollstonecraft, denied their depth and breadth, misrepresented and underestimated, through selective inattention. We cannot even find Wollstonecraft the feminist in the narrowest sense without looking beyond the *Vindication*, since, for example, part of her critique of the institution of marriage is found in *Maria*. Some of the interpretations of Wollstonecraft that treat her so critically might even arrive at different conclusions were they to gain an appreciation for the way her thought developed in her short life, the ways in which a range of issues come together in each work, the ways each work sheds light on the others. These are not unusual tenets of interpretation to insist upon.

Finally, the pattern of allowing only women to be heard on "women's issues" and allowing women to speak only about such matters distorts the history of political thought. When we ban Wollstonecraft and similar others from the canon, or ignore certain of their writings, we systematically misrepresent the history of political thinking. When we study the texts of men we are hearing part of the historical conversations. Many of these men spoke with and read women intellectuals, writers, and theorists, just as many of these women both built upon and refuted the ideas of male theorists. Reading only what the "great" men have said, on appropriately "masculine" topics, is like trying to put together a telephone conversation when you hear only one end of it. Further, men were not only responding to women, and not only refuting them, but using their ideas, spoken and written. For example, one can find in Rousseau sentences quite similar to those found in Mary Astell's writings decades earlier. In 1706 Astell wrote: "*If all Men are born free*, how is it that all Women are born slaves?"[24] In 1762 Rousseau wrote, to much greater fame: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (Rousseau 1988, 85). In 1706 Mary Astell wrote:

> And if mere Power gives a Right to Rule, there can be no such thing as Usurpation; but a Highway-Man so long as he has strength to force, has also a Right to require our Obedience. (Astell 1986, 76)

In 1762 Rousseau wrote:

> If a thief surprises me in a corner of the woods, I am forced to give him my purse, but am I, in conscience, obligated to give it to him when I could hide it? For, after all, the pistol in his hand is also a kind of power. (Rousseau 1988, 88)

I move next to the explanation that Wollstonecraft's nonexistence in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*[25] and elsewhere is due to the fact that she did not enter into the philosophical dialogues of her time or beyond her time; that is, that she spoke neither to the issues of her day nor to the more timeless ones central to political thinking. But Wollstonecraft *did* confront the issues of her day, which included women's education, the French Revolution, and sexual equality. In fact, men who did not deeply confront the issues surrounding gender could more rightly be said not to have dealt with pressing issues of their times or of continuous import. Further, Wollstonecraft addressed important political questions by engaging in debates with leading figures of her time and before her time, including Rousseau, Burke, Milton, Richard Price, John Gregory, Pope, Mary Hayes, Locke, Bacon, Hume, James Fordyce, de Staël, and Catharine Macaulay.

There is another response to the question of whether Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about truly political subjects. Who decides what are appropriate subjects? Families, sexuality, education, peace, and childrearing are intrinsically no less relevant to the well-being of individuals and political communities than are the structures of executive power or the competition for economic power. Women theorists have been fighting for the inclusion and relevance of their lives and their assigned duties to politics, while men have been fighting to keep the turf almost exclusively composed of issues relevant to their lives, their duties, their needs, and their desires. Sometimes, then, dismissing women thinkers on the ground that they are insufficiently political is less a commentary on the political nature of their work than on the political nature—meaning the prejudices—of the discipline.

Sometimes, of course, the opposite indictment is leveled against women, including Wollstonecraft. They are too political or, more commonly, ideological, rather than properly philosophically disinterested.

First, I am still waiting to see the philosophical disinterestedness of male thinkers in the canon. Plato endorsed aristocracy. Aristotle advocated slavery and the domestic confinement of so-called free women.

Hobbes deemed virtually absolute government power justifiable. What do we mean by calling *them* disinterested thinkers? They had preferences, and wrote in defense of them. That is exactly what Wollstonecraft did. She advocated sexual equality, and defended it against alternatives on the basis of biological, moral, social, and political arguments. Somehow when one writes in defense of women, especially if one is a woman, one's work is automatically, almost magically, marked and tossed aside as unobjective, unworthy polemic. Yet when men write in defense of male superiority we hardly see it or we declare it irrelevant to their worth as political thinkers. And somehow the other political preferences of nonfeminist theorists are distinguished from the political preferences of feminists.

Political thinking by its nature involves speaking from and to political life. To engage in political thinking is to draw out the consequences of certain ideas, institutions, and processes for our communal social life. It is inherently tied to the real world and is normative. According to that, Mary Wollstonecraft should be viewed not as partial in some negative sense, but as having written exemplary political theory.

It is also important to note that even if it were true that Wollstonecraft does not deserve the same exalted place in the records of political theory that Rousseau and his brothers inhabit (a point I am not ready to grant), there are other spots for which she and other women are still unconsidered. Returning to the books and catalogues I referred to earlier, surely Wollstonecraft contributed no less to the history of political ideas than did many of the "minor" male figures given treatment: Popper, Kalecki and, irony of ironies, Wollstonecraft's husband William Godwin, who *is* included in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

The next "explanation" for Wollstonecraft's erasure is that even if she wrote on the issues of her day and of the discipline, and even if she contributed something relatively novel in making gender relevant to politics the way she did, she has not really had enough "impact" to be considered a "major" political theorist. To the extent Wollstonecraft is treated as part of (or part of the opposition to) any of the major strands of political theory, she is linked with liberalism and with feminism. For Wollstonecraft, however, these linkages have been a curse rather than a blessing, ways of justifying ignoring her rather than of calling more attention to her.

Rousseau may be unusual. He is claimed by friends and opponents of virtually every strain in political theory. Called by some a social-contract

theorist, he is linked with its earlier figures, Hobbes and Locke, and claimed by later social-contract figures, such as Rawls, as their predecessor. He is called one of the figures of the Enlightenment, linked with the major philosophers of his time, including Voltaire and Diderot, and looked at today as the Enlightenment is recalled by postmodern theory. He links himself with an earlier communitarian theorist, Plato, and is used by communitarian theorists today, including Benjamin Barber. There are other connections, as well, including ones with romanticism, democratic theory, liberalism, Marxism, and totalitarianism.

Establishing such links is one way of establishing and expressing our understanding of someone's importance. Hegel is more important to our history because we trace back to him from Marx. Aquinas gets some of the attention he does because of the influence of Aristotle's writings on his own. Machiavelli stays important because of his influence on Hobbes, who is kept alive because of his influence on Locke, and then there's Hobbes's and Locke's influence on Rousseau, ad nauseum. A philosophical form of gaining access and esteem "not just by what you know but whom you know" exists. Thus, denying the contributions of women to each other and to men is a means of perpetuating gender inequality within and beyond the bounds of political theory. Failures to make connections are ways of erasing figures and ideas and traditions from the history of political theory.

When Wollstonecraft is treated as a liberal it has been a way of marking her as "unoriginal" and "derivative." By contrast, when Rousseau is called a social-contract theorist, his work is not thought of as a mere reaction to the writings of Hobbes or Locke, but as a contribution to an important body of thought. (I have a recurring fantasy of Rousseau approaching a publisher with his *Social Contract* in hand and being told, "Oh, honey, that's been done before!") Yet Wollstonecraft's was a positive and powerful contribution that radically challenged answers to questions central to political theorizing, and that pressed for the relevance of additional questions. She did not accept the liberal political theory of Hobbes or Locke, her most famous liberal predecessors. To the extent it is correct to label Wollstonecraft a liberal, she should be viewed as a founding theorist of liberalism, a contending voice, not a dissenter from the somehow "truer" liberalism of Hobbes, et al.

The tradition that Wollstonecraft is most associated with is feminist thought. She is, in fact, often called "the first feminist." Here again the way we place her is misleading. Wollstonecraft does belong to a tradition

of feminist theorizing, but she was neither the first nor the last, the most nor the least significant. To call her the first is utterly to wipe out the many women writing in favor of women's emancipation before her. It renders her contemporaries invisible as well.

Without this history we lose sight of the truth that wherever there has been male domination so has there been resistance by women, even in writing. Lax record-keeping deprives us of models of resistance, of responses to the arguments of supporters of male privilege. Losing these connections is also a way of making an oddity of any women who *do* write feminist political theory. They seem an aberration, and so, by association, do their ideas. When we ignore the other thinkers writing on behalf of women's equality we make those one or two (perhaps Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir?)[26] we do know seem somehow exceptional, unrepresentative. As Dale Spender writes, "overaccenting Wollstonecraft's iconoclasm obscures the degree to which her demands are typical of a wide spectrum of women writers."[27]

What's taken away when this history of influence is unnoted is the fact that there is a *tradition* of feminist theorizing, a tradition obvious to those who were and are part of it, one freely and graciously acknowledged. Feminist theory appears more venerable, more durable, and more legitimate in the context of its own history. As Adrienne Rich notes: "One serious cultural obstacle encountered by any feminist writer is that each feminist work has tended to be received as if it emerged from nowhere; as if each one of us had lived, thought, and worked without any historical past or contextual present. This is one of the ways in which women's work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own" (Rich 1980, 11).

We need to know, too, that many theorists and activists have been affected by Wollstonecraft, including early nineteenth-century feminists such as Frances Wright, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Emma Goldman and Virginia Woolf, in the twentieth century, wrote about her. She *was* influential.

Finally, there are traditions besides those of feminism and liberalism into which Wollstonecraft's writings can properly and profitably be placed. She was a passionate voice for Enlightenment radicalism, a forerunner of nineteenth-century socialist attacks on property and class domination, and an influential figure in the early development of romanticism.[28] Without doubt, her writings potentially have deep and lasting implications in social, intellectual, political, and literary arenas.

Those who deny Wollstonecraft's "impact" have blinders on that make "their" tradition(s) appear to be all there is.

What, finally, of the argument, that Wollstonecraft was such an immoral character, or so peculiar, as to render her an unfit model for feminism or anything else? She did, after all, attempt suicide twice, bear a child out of marriage, engage in premarital sex, and live in separate quarters from her husband.

It is so interesting that "accounts of her life have been by far the most common kind of writing about Wollstonecraft since 1950. She is, if anything, 'over-biographed' " (Poston 1988a, 226). There are an astounding number of ways by which to discount women's contribution to political thought (or anything else deemed "inappropriate" for her). Attacking her for unwomanly behavior is one of them. Questioning her sanity, checking her for "hysteria" is another. The list could go on and on: Xanthippe was a "shrew." Sappho was a lesbian. One was too promiscuous, another too asexual. Are these characterizations factual? Are they justifications for excluding these authors from our histories, from our canons, from our classes?

Wollstonecraft and others are written off for actions that were clearly related to the integrity of their writing. Their lives spoke to issues of gender, as did their written words. Many women thinkers led unconventional lives. They remained unmarried, or had broken marriages. They had many lovers, or lovers of the "wrong" sex. They wanted and needed not only a career, but lives of their own, independent of children and husband, defined by themselves, based on their own interests and talents. This, of course, is a very central theme in Virginia Woolf's writings: the struggle women writers have to portray their own visions of the truth, and not be trapped into male definitions and male goals.

In terms of the comparison of Wollstonecraft with Rousseau, it is interesting that for both stories of their personal lives receive an inordinate amount of attention and not infrequently dominate stories of their theorizing. It is also the case that Rousseau had more say in how his personal life and his work were interpreted than did Wollstonecraft. The major sources of information about his life are his autobiographical writings, *The Confessions* and *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker.* The major source of information about her, written shortly after her death, is a biography of her by her husband William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* in which *he* interprets her life and her writings. They had different control over their stories. Thus

Rousseau had a say in the way he was portrayed, and made choices about what to emphasize and eliminate in his life story, while Godwin made those choices for Wollstonecraft. Further, the two are criticized for very different kinds of behavior; for example, his extramarital relationships hardly bring upon him either the amount or type of disgrace hers brought upon her.

To accept dismissals of Wollstonecraft's work based on the character of her life is to do something other than commit the supposed crime of confusing the ideas and the author (for indeed the two are related). It is to accept antifeminist judgments of how women "should" act, in regard to what issues, in what tone, and so forth; that is, to accept the ideas against which Wollstonecraft wrote and lived.

Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin, not only minimized her accomplishments in attributing her successes to "intuition," rather than reason; he also agreed that "Many of the sentiments [she expressed in *Rights of Woman*] are undoubtedly of a rather masculine description. . . . [arising from her] rigid, and somewhat amazonian temper" (Godwin 1988, 233). Others took the question of her "temper" even further. Wollstonecraft's mental health was questionable simply on the grounds that she advocated equality between the sexes: Lundberg and Farnham, in 1947, wrote, "Out of her illness arose the ideology of feminism. . . . Underneath her aggressive writings, Mary [referred to throughout by her first name] was a masochist like her mother, as indeed all the leading feminist theorists were in fact" (Lundberg and Farnham 1988, 274–75).

Even those who praised her went to some pain to make clear that her book was "sympathetic," "moderate," "without exaggeration," free of "injudicious insistence on [woman's] fitness for this or that function hitherto engrossed by men," "a calm plea" (Eliot 1988, 244). They assume, that is to say, that unless stated otherwise feminism is immoderate, exaggerated, and hysterical. Praise so couched undermines the work it pretends to compliment. (Today we say, "Even though she's a feminist . . ." or "Despite her feminism . . .")

There has always been resistance to feminism, even its earliest forms, even its most "moderate" forms. The "backlash" we hear about today is expected. It is draining, but there is nothing new about it. It is not particularly creative or varied. Again and again we hear the same things. A healthy woman is defined as one adjusted to her subordination. A sick woman is one who stands up not only for herself but for her sex, who challenges those who prefer to control her.

"Why are there no great women philosophers?" some ask, as if it is uncontroversial that there *are* no great women philosophers, and that something definitive about "woman's nature" or proper role could be inferred, either way. Yes, Virginia, there *have* been great women political thinkers, and that is testimony to what women can do despite the obstacles they confront as women to theorizing. What women have written has done little to tear away at the notion that the "real" philosophers of "our" tradition are male. And yet that is not because of what women have written. More often, it is because of what has been written and what has not been written by men about what women have written. The fate of political theorists is strongly affected by gender, and specific practices that contribute to their erasure can be located and changed. The fate of Mary Wollstonecraft, like that of the long list of women philosophers, is best understood as a political phenomenon, rather than as the "natural" consequence of the character of her work. Her own words are her best defense:

> Men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they can scarcely trace how, rather than to root them out. The mind must be strong that resolutely forms its own principles; for a kind of intellectual cowardice prevails which makes many men shrink from the task, or only do it by halves. (Wollstonecraft 1988, 12)

Notes

1. What follows is something of a personal story, told in an informal style. My move later to a more standard academic argument is built upon this story. The two are connected, and while the shift in tone and style may be disconcerting to some readers, I have chosen to retain it. The shift represents the development of my own thought; it presents an accessible entry point for general readers; and it serves as a reminder that no single voice represents all facets of an argument.

2. Hannah Arendt (1906–75) is the author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), *On Violence* (1969), *On Revolution* (1963), *The Jew as Pariah* (1978), *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (1982), *Between Past and Future* (1954), *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), *Men in Dark Times* (1968), *Crises of the Republic* (1972), *The Life of the Mind* (1971), *Rahel Varnhagen*, and *The Human Condition* (1958). She is, however, not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

3. Emma Goldman (1869–1940) wrote *The Traffic in Women and Other Essays on Feminism*, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1910), *My Disillusionment in Russia* (1923), "The Psychology of Political Violence," "A Woman without a Country," *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama* (1914), and *Living My Life* (1930, 2 vols.). Her works are collected in Alix Kates

Shulman's *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches by Emma Goldman* (1979). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

4. Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) is the author of *The Second Sex* (1949), *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958), *The Prime of Life* (1962), *The Coming of Age* (1970), *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (1984), *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), *All Said and Done* (1975), and *The Mandarins* (1960). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

5. Christine de Pizan (1365?–1429?) wrote ten works in verse and another eleven in prose. Among the more obviously political and philosophical are *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), *Le Livre du chemin de long estude* (1402), *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune* (1400–1403), *Le Livre des fais et bonne meurs du sage Roy Charles V* (1404), *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* (1405), *Le Livre du corps de policie* (1406–1407), and *L'Epistre de la prison de vie humaine.* She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

6. Mary Astell (1666–1731) wrote *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1696, 1697), *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1706), *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695), *Moderation Truly Stated* (1704), *A Fair Way with the Disserters and their Patrons* (1704), *An Impartial Enquiry into the Causes of Rebellion and Civil War in this Kingdom* (1704), *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705), and *Bartlemy Fair* (1709). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

7. Gilman (1860–1935) is the author of *Women and Economics* (1898), *Concerning Children* (1900), *The Man-Made World* (1911), *His Religion and Hers* (1923), *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1935), and *Herland* (1915). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

8. Among the works of Butler (1828–1906) are *The Education and Employment of Women* (1868), *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture* (1869), *Memoir of John Grey of Dilston* (1869), *An Appeal to the People of England on the Recognition and Superintendence of Prostitution by Governments* (1870), *On the Moral Reclaimability of Prostitutes* (1870), *Vox Populi* (1871), *The Constitution Violated* (1871), *The New Era* (1872), *The Hour Before the Dawn: An Appeal to Men* (1876), *Social Purity* (1879), *A Woman's Appeal to the Electors* (1885), *The Principles of the Abolitionists* (1885), *Recollections of George Butler* (1892), *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1896), and *An Autobiographical Memoir.* She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

9. Martineau's (1802–76) works include *Society in America* (1837), *How to Observe Manners and Morals* (1838), *A History of the Thirty Years' Peace* (1849–50), *Household Education* (1853), *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (1851), numerous pamphlets on political economy, and children's stories. She is not included in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.* Her brother, James Martineau, is mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* though she is not.

10. Luxemburg (1871–1919) is the author of *The Accumulation of Capital, The Junius Pamphlet, Reform on Revolution, The Russian Revolution,* and *The Mass Strike.* Also see Mary-Alice Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks.* She is not mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* but she is included in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

11. Eastman (1881–1928) wrote *Work Accidents and the Law,* and coedited *The Liberator.* Many of her writings are collected in Blanche Wiesen Cook, ed., *Crystal Eastman: On Women and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Also see Blanche Wiesen Cook, ed., *Toward the Great Change: Crystal and Max Eastman on Feminism, Antimilitarism, and Revolution* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

12. Schreiner's (1855–1920) published works include *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), *Dreams* (1890), *Dream Life and Real Life* (1893), *The Political Situation* (1896), *An English South African's View of the Situation* (1899), *Woman and Labour* (1911), *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923), *Stories, Dreams and Allegories* (1923), *The Future of Woman* (1909), and *From Man to Man* (1926). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

13. Addams (1860–1935) is the author of *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907), *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909), *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), *The Excellent becomes the Permanent* (1932), *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (1922), *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* (1912), and *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910). She is not mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

14. Fuller (1810–50) wrote *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), *Summer on the Lakes* (1844), *Papers on Literature and Art* (1846), *Essays on American Life and Letters, Life without and Life within* (1860), and edited *The Dial,* a Transcendental literary quarterly. She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

15. Harriet Taylor (1807–58) wrote "The Enfranchisement of Women." See Alice Rossi, ed., *Essays on Sex Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). John Stuart Mill, despite publishing books under his name alone, called many of his works "joint productions" with Taylor, including *Principles of Political Economy* and *On Liberty.* She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

16. Woolf's (1882–1941) large body of writings includes *Three Guineas* (1938), *A Room of One's Own* (1928), *The Common Reader* (1925), *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942), *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), and *The Waves* (1931). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

17. Wells (1862–1931) wrote *Crusade for Justice* and *On Lynchings.* See Trudier Harris, ed., *Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

18. Weil (1909–43) wrote *Gravity and Grace, Letter to a Priest, The Need for Roots, Oppression and Liberty,* and *Waiting for God.* She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

19. Gage's (1826–98) work includes *Woman, Church and State* (1893), editing *The National Citizen and Ballot Box,* and the pamphlets *Woman as Inventor* (1870) and *Who Planned the Tennessee Campaign of 1861?* (1880). With Stanton and Anthony she produced *History of Woman Suffrage.* She is not included in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

20. Hays (1759?–1843) wrote *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), the six-volume *Female Biography,* and *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (1793). She is not mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

21. Kollontai (1872–1952) wrote *Communism and the Family* (1918), *Marxisme et revolution sexuelle, Red Love* (1927), and *Women Workers Struggle for their Rights.* She is not mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* or *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.*

22. Beard's (1876–1958) writings include *Women's Work in Municipalities* (1915), *A Short History of the American Labor Movement* (1924), *On Understanding Women* (1931), *America Through Women's Eyes* (1933), *Women as Force in History* (1946). With Charles Beard she wrote *American Citizenship, The History of the United States* (1925), and the multivolumed *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927). She is not listed in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Charles Beard is included in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences;* works he coauthored with Mary Beard are listed there, but she is not listed.

23. Stewart's (1803–79) works can be found in *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

24. Mary Astell, *Reflections Upon Marriage*, in *The First English Feminist: Reflections Upon Marriage and Other Writings by Mary Astell*, ed. Bridget Hall (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 76. Emphasis in original.

25. In showing how women have been omitted from *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, I do not mean to present those series as sorts of bibles. Rather, I use them to demonstrate that no matter how much women theorists wrote, no matter on what subjects, no matter from what perspectives, no matter how novel or interesting or exciting their ideas, what traditional academic disciplines use as their bibles will fail to acknowledge their contributions.

26. It is certainly no coincidence that these two women are white, and are from England and France, respectively. Exclusion is infinitely more difficult to break down the more "different" one is from those already included.

27. Dale Spender's *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them* (London: Pandora, 1982) is a remarkable study of the fate of women's ideas throughout history.

28. I thank Berenice Carroll for her notes on this point.

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3

Wollstonecraft, Feminism, and Democracy: "Being Bastilled"

Virginia Sapiro

It is all too common to disembody and depersonalize political theorists, rendering their existence down to the written texts they left us, and the conflicting interpretations of the words they wrote. The perspective of a political psychologist cannot help seeing something else in Wollstonecraft's texts:[1] the evidence that this singular human being came to act as a political theorist and visionary political thinker. By visionary political thinker I mean one who attempts to think one's way out of a current problem or dilemma, indeed trying to identify and name the problem in the first place, then locating the place or position where one would rather be, and find a path to get there. In other words, I understand political theorizing as a political act.

To understand the political act of political theorizing requires attend-

This essay is based on my *Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Further elaboration can be found there.

ing to the context of that act. Emphasizing the context is especially important if we want to understand Wollstonecraft's significance in the two intertwined traditions of democratic and feminist theory. Most students of Wollstonecraft locate her significance at the point where those traditions meet. But to understand her significance we must remember one thing: we are talking about a woman who wrote at a time in which neither democracy nor a feminist movement, nor a democratic mass movement existed. She approached theorizing feminism without benefit of the invention of that very term that manifests group or political consciousness by women on the basis of their gender; that is, before the term "feminist" or even "womanist" was invented.

There is more to say about the context in which we must understand her political writing. Thinking especially about her writings that followed the *Vindications*, we witness a political idealist watching the second major event of her lifetime that she had imagined could fulfill her political goals but which had degenerated into a bloody terror. (The first major political event was the American Revolution which, like many of the English Jacobins, she viewed as the first successful democratic—or at least republican—revolution.)

In this context, let us explore the question of what studying Mary Wollstonecraft as a feminist and democratic theorist has to teach us about politics. This essay begins with her vision of human relations, social organization, government, and citizenship. From there it turns to one of the most exciting aspects of Wollstonecraft's work: the dilemmas of theorizing our way out of what *is* into what *should be*.

The Vision

Everyone familiar with Wollstonecraft knows that she embraced much of the Enlightenment creed. Indeed, her *Rights of Woman* opens with an Enlightenment catechism: "In what does man's pre-eminence over brute creation consist? Reason. What acquirement exalts one being over another? Virtue. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That by struggling with them we might attain a degree of knowledge. Reason and the struggle with passion are the basis for virtue; these things should direct the laws that bind us, but these things are also the outcome of a properly run society. They are cause and effect in a good society" (*VW*

81). It is important to remember that by "reason" she meant not cold logic or calculation, as she explained to Burke, but thinking moved by virtuous sensibility.

Much of her work was devoted to showing how contemporary social relations and law were unvirtuous; that is, they flowed from and created unnatural distinctions including those based on sex. But she also devoted her sharp pen to those based on rank, property, religion, the clergy, the military, household organization, race, and age. The dynamics of corrupting unnatural distinctions were much the same in each of its institutional forms. She could not join most other democratic theorists in attacking one form of tyranny while explaining away another.

Part of her method was that of theoretical liberalism generally. As she charged in the *Rights of Woman*, "If women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first, that they want reason—else this flaw in your NEW CONSTITUTION will ever shew that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality" (*VW* 68). She assumed that the capacity for reason does not vary naturally among human beings. And reason *is* the capacity for self-government in its most basic and literal sense; that is, our capacity for engaging in principle-based action, controlling our baser hedonistic instincts as individuals. And if we have *capacity* for individual government, otherwise known as virtue, we may not be systematically denied our *rights* to participate in our self-government by governments as they are more commonly understood: the power relations within social institutions.

Wollstonecraft does not distinguish between public and private relationships, institutions, or virtue. To govern is to govern. She saw the current sociopolitical system as one in which the institutionalized self-interest of the powerful corrupts the society as a whole and all the relationships within it, just as sickness in any organ hurts the whole body. Current notions of morality—be they the desired manners of the gentleman, chastity of the woman or the deference and feigned modesty demanded of any subaltern, are merely reflections of the short-term interests of the powers that be—the kings, the aristocrats, the wealthy, the men.

Here we begin to see Wollstonecraft's notion of citizenship. Virtue is founded on sociability, an ever-expanding circle of esteem and compassion. As she wrote in her history of the French Revolution: "From the

social disposition of man [here a "generic" term], in proportion as he becomes civilized, he will mingle more and more with society. The first interest he takes in the business of his fellow-men is in that of his neighbour; next he contemplates the comfort, misery, and happiness of the nation to which he belongs, investigates the degree of wisdom and justice in the political system, under which he lives, and, striding into the regions of science, his researches embrace all human kind" (*FrRev* 223). She grounds her theory in day-to-day life. Civic virtue is learned in both the domestic and public arenas. People can probably not be virtuous if they are restricted only to one or the other arena as women and men both seem to be. Therefore men must attend more to the family and family duties. "If you wish to make good citizens, you must first exercise the affections of a son and a brother. This is the only way to expand the heart; for public affections, as well as public virtues, must ever grow out of the private character" (*VW* 231). Women must not be restricted to the family and domestic, particularistic concerns because public spirit is the foundation on which private affections become truly virtuous.

Wollstonecraft's social life, then, is not the utilitarian's view of private interests mutually pursued. Social life is the medium for developing self-respect and fellow feeling which improves individual and social character. "[Virtue] is only a nominal distinction when the duties of citizens, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and directors of families, become merely the selfish ties of convenience. Why then do philosophers look for public spirit? Public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue, or it will resemble the factitious sentiment which makes women careful to preserve their reputation, and men their honour" (*VW* 210).

For Wollstonecraft the problem was that in the real world all social relationships and institutions are governed by corrupt principles of selfishness and inequality. This is not surprising; virtuous sociability can only proceed under the currently nonexistent condition of equality. Like some of the Greeks she probably never read, Wollstonecraft defined the ideal social relationship as friendship, "the most sublime of all affections, because it is founded on principle, and cemented by time" (*VW* 142), and the "most holy band of society" (*VW* 98). Families should be based on friendship rather than patriarchy (and she hates both the subordinations of gender and age in the family), and a polity must be based on the same.[2]

That hers is a social order of individually and collectively self-

governing equals is underscored by her ringing line, "For till men learn mutually to assist without governing each other, little can be done by political associations toward perfecting the condition of mankind" (*FrRev* 46). This view of power in the polity calls to mind her reproof to Rousseau for warning women that they will lose their influence over men if they are similarly educated. "This is the very point I aim at," she wrote. "I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves" (*VW* 31).

But she is no radical anarchist denying the need for government. She saw the necessity of a civil existence for both women and men, and for the selection of legislators who "always endeavour to make it the interest of each individual to be virtuous" (*VW* 215). In government as in individuals, virtue is an active principle. "Nature having made men unequal, by giving stronger bodily and mental powers to one than to another, the end of government ought to be, to destroy this inequality by protecting the weak, instead of which, it has always leaned to the opposite side, wearing itself out by disregarding the first principle of its organization" (*FrRev* 17). Good government is not a neutral arbiter of interests, but a means to weigh in on the side of those whose weakness would leave them in danger of being governed by the strong.

Wollstonecraft did not segment away a portion of life ("private life") or its inhabitants (women), to lie beyond notions of justice. For her there was no such thing as submerging women in strictly private relationships and concerns for the benefit of the public. She saw no clear distinction between public and private. Active virtue in each is contingent on the other. She saw a tension and fragility in balancing notions of the autonomous individual, the social individual, and the collective, although she did not see individuals and the collective in constant opposition to each other. But having defined this ideal, there is a remaining difficulty. If our social structures and relationships are corrupting, how do we think our way into new ones? How do we negotiate together in a noncorrupting way? If our minds are shaped by our circumstances and our institutions, how do we engage in creative, visionary politics?

Let us turn to two major areas where Wollstonecraft best exemplifies these dilemmas of feminist democratic politics. I say "exemplifies" rather than "discusses" (or any similar word) because she demonstrates through incompleteness. The tale is told by two problems that bother her to the end but remain insoluble. The first instance is the enlightenment of

nations and the democratization of their politics. The second is the enlightenment of men and women and the democratization of their relationships.

Democratization and the French Revolution

Wollstonecraft was a member of the circle of British political thinkers for whom the French Revolution was a central and personal event, and one of the few who never turned their backs on it.[3] Godwin never disavowed the Revolution, but he never saw the blood either. Unlike many idealists among political theorists, Wollstonecraft experienced some dire consequences of radical actions. She witnessed and experienced both private and public violence. Holding the civic humanist view of the fulfillment of citizenship in active public life is one thing; putting it to the test of revolution is another.

Like Price and Priestley, Wollstonecraft defined the Revolution as the natural consequence of *some* enlightenment and as a preface to even more. Until she went to France in December 1792 all her references to the Revolution were favorable; many nearly breathless. She found "sense and benevolence" in a poem on "Gallic Liberty" that began, "Britannia join! join in glad acclaim" (*Revs* 1790, 202). But in Paris as she saw more blood and lost friends, she wrote, "Of the state of things here, I will not speak—The French will carry all before them—but, my God how many victims fall beneath the sword and the Guillotine! My blood runs cold, and I sicken at thoughts of a Revolution which costs so much blood and bitter tears" (*Letters* 1794, 256).

She posed a kind of developmental theory to explain some of the excesses of the Revolution, comparing nations to children who, when young and untutored show little aptitude for self-government. "If nations be educated by their governments it is vain to expect much reason till the system of education becomes more reasonable" (*Letters* 1792, 218).[4] The despotism and violence of the corrupt rule of the titled and landed had bred the Terror because under such a system the people could not have become self-governing in either the individual or collective sense; they had never learned to control their short-sighted passions with reason.

Just as individual minds uncontrolled by reason must be racked by

anarchy and madness, so must nations. "Every nation, deprived by the progress of its civilization of strength of character, in changing its government from absolute despotism to enlightened freedom, will, most probably, be plunged into anarchy, and have to struggle with various species of tyranny before it is able to consolidate its liberty" (*FrRev* 212). She predicted that "Europe will probably be, for some years to come, in a state of anarchy" (*FrRev* 46). Anarchy is a natural, immediate outcome of the overthrow of despotism, but in the longer term she thought it might "leave the disturbed water more clear for the fermentation" (*FrRev* 47).

The French Revolution, therefore, was part of the human destiny for improvement, but it proved to Wollstonecraft that although the end was certain—something we are considerably less likely to believe today—the path to it was treacherous. Even as she hailed the Revolution in often poetic terms, she worried about the outcome. As she thought about the now silent palace of Versailles she felt glad of its demise as a symbol of tyranny, but also detected

> the vestiges of thy former oppression; which, separating man from man with a fence of iron, sophisticated all, and made many completely wretched; I tremble, lest I should meet some unfortunate being, fleeing from the despotism of licentious freedom, hearing the snap of the *guillotine* at his heels; merely because he was once noble, or has afforded an asylum to those, whose only crime is their names—and, if my pen almost bound with eagerness to record the day that levelled the Bastille . . . , the recollection, that still the abbey is appropriated to hold the victims of revenge and suspicion, palsies the hand that would fain do justice to the assault. (*FrRev* 85)

Wollstonecraft had chosen her political side at risk to herself, and remained cautiously optimistic about the future of humanity and the ultimate good of the evil she saw. The problem, her writing suggested repeatedly, is that the solution must be found by the mutual enlightenment of equals who can imagine a virtue that can only come from the system not yet created. She explicitly denied that a specially enlightened vanguard could offer the solution.

This is modern political writing. Her democratic theory did not just speak to changing political structures, but began to consider individual

and collective political action seriously by facing the forces that lead people to act as they do and facing the consequences of people's choices. Her own defiance of moral, political, and nationalistic conventions must have kept these questions forcefully in her view. This is of course most true in her treatment of women, to which we now turn.

Democratization, Women, and the Family

When Wollstonecraft died she left on her desk the leaves of an unfinished novel, *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria.* Writing this work was more difficult and painful for her than any other. The text weaves together the life histories of three people who find themselves in an insane asylum, one woman born poor, one man born wealthy, and one woman born middle class. Each had been subjected to the special violences common to their class and gender in an oppressive patriarchal system. The main character, Maria, has been locked up by her husband, who also took her child from her. The text that is available to us was compiled and edited by Godwin, who found it as loose sheaves. Wollstonecraft's notes suggest at least five alternative plot courses for the unwritten conclusion.

The Wrongs of Woman offers unresolved problems. They are unresolved because the book was never finished, but the book was never finished partly because the problems were not resolved. I believe this lack of resolution was caused by Wollstonecraft's ever-increasing grasp of the systemic and enveloping nature of the structure of gender relations. The author of this book understands physical and psychological violence against women and children in the context of intimate relationships. She had not been able to find a satisfactory way out of tyranny in her history of the French Revolution, and she could not find one here.

The gothic convention of the insane asylum/prison from which one could conceivably escape is given life through the figurative and more inescapable prisons of marriage and property law and the corruptions of mind and heart. Here is perhaps the one instance in which a comparison of Wollstonecraft and Godwin is appropriate. Maria's observation that "Marriage had bastilled me for life"—this crucial political term for this private institution (*Wrongs* 146)—harkens back to Godwin's most fa-

mous passage in *Caleb Williams*, the fictional rendition of his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*:[5]

> "Thank God," exclaims the Englishman, "we have no Bastille! Thank God, with us no man can be punished without a crime!" Unthinking wretch! Is that a country of liberty, where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go, ignorant fool! and visit the scenes of our prisons! witness their unwholsomeness [*sic*], their filth, the tyranny of their governors, the misery of their inmates! After that, show me the man shameless enough to triumph, and say, "England has no Bastille!"

The dark scenes of Maria's vain attempts to escape from her husband are reminiscent of Caleb Williams's escape attempts. Wollstonecraft, in contrast, has extended her political analysis very clearly into the family, identifying it as an extension of the state and the husband as not just the patriarch in the little commonwealth, but as its police as well.

The incidents in the characters' lives are plausible under the law of the time. But Wollstonecraft also recognized that oppression worked through the mind and heart as well as law and material inequality. Oppression is not just a cage; it reaches deep into people's minds, destroying any simple notion of escape. Mary Poovey suggests a crucial aspect to the self-conscious and unresolved character of *The Wrongs of Woman* that makes it especially instructive as a theory text. Even while Wollstonecraft criticized the sex/gender system of her own society she was also a part of it. The narrator's job in this book is to point out and criticize the wrongs of woman, but as Poovey argued, "the theoretical wisdom of the narrator simply collapses into the longings of the character," possibly falling victim to the delusions she sets out to criticize.[6] We cannot tell whether Maria's use of the sentimental jargon Wollstonecraft claimed to dislike was ironic. Maria seems to try to save herself from the tyranny of one marriage by entering another as though that were the solution, but Wollstonecraft's notes for her unchosen conclusion suggest a strong likelihood that that "solution" would prove the wrong one. The narrator of *The Wrongs of Woman* struggled to understand the condition of her characters and to know what their choices should be. We know Wollstonecraft faced the same issues in her real life, often finding herself sliding back into states of psychological and emotional dependence she

detested, nevertheless punished by painful gossip and ostracism for her independence.

Some have correctly called *The Wrongs of Woman* her most radical book. But how "feminist" was it, especially if we define feminism as a political stance incorporating some argument for collective political consciousness or action? In places she came as close as she ever did to speaking a language of feminism. Listen to this passage, in which Maria addresses her daughter as she writes her memoirs.

> Addressing these memoirs to you, my child, uncertain whether I shall ever have an opportunity of instructing you, many observations will probably flow from my heart, which only a mother—a mother schooled in misery, could make. The tenderness of a father who knew the world, might be great; but could it equal that of a mother—of a mother, labouring under a portion of the misery, which the constitution of society seems to have entailed on all her kind? It is, my child, my dearest daughter, only such a mother, who will dare to break through all restraint to provide for your happiness—who will voluntarily brave censure herself, to ward off sorrow from your bosom. From my narrative, my dear girl, you may gather the instruction, the counsel, which is meant rather to exercise than influence your mind. (*Wrongs* 123)

A distinctly feminist voice may be discerned here. This passage may appear innocent of politics at first, perhaps a mere example of conventional sentimentalism. But Maria is telling her daughter that her misery is not random, unique or exclusively personal; rather, it falls systematically on the shoulders of women because of the "constitution of society."

Something else about Maria's statement of misery endows her words with a political significance that was rare before a woman's movement was available to foster gender-based political consciousness among women. It is "only such a mother, who will dare to break through all restraint to provide for your happiness—who will voluntarily brave censure herself, to ward off sorrow from your bosom." Maria will defy the restraints placed on her by law and social convention due to her sex and despite the punishments she knows she must receive because she hopes to relieve the burdens on the younger woman. Maria knows the limits of the counsel. Mere individual enlightenment is insufficient because the "state of society" will not have changed. And further, she

will *not* tell her how to live. But the "exercise" of the daughter's mind with respect to these restraints may give her the strength to make her own choices.

The narrator of *The Wrongs of Woman* did not play the role of authoritative reasoner as she did in the *Rights of Woman;* in the former she took the part of a woman speaking with love to her daughter. Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft instructed her readers to understand this story "as of woman, than of an individual" (*Wrongs* 83). We should not take the letter from mother to daughter at face value. Wollstonecraft seemed to be reaching toward the means to a shared political consciousness with her female readers. As Maria and Jemima, women from different classes, share their personal stories, they begin to realize the sources and possibly the solutions to their problems are not individual and personal. Perhaps the same might happen if Maria has a chance to share the personal narrative with her daughter that is, in truth, their shared story.

I emphasize that Wollstonecraft appeared in the *process* of finding the means to the leap from personal narrative to political consciousness. She was, literally, not in the position of the informed narrator unfolding an already known story. We, on the other hand, are readers informed by the passage of two centuries of feminist history since Wollstonecraft struggled with her manuscript. In the nineteenth century and, even more, in the late twentieth century, one of the most powerful means by which feminism as ideology and practice developed was through the process of women sharing their common personal stories. In the late 1960s this process was adopted and refined as a political strategy and given a name—consciousness-raising—but the process was not invented whole. It evolved out of the personal conversations among female friends and kin that, in particular historical contexts, became political. In Wollstonecraft's writing we see the glimmerings of the idea of a political practice that later became instrumental in the development of feminist politics.

Wollstonecraft's view of citizenship did not allow her to distinguish the individual as private person from the individual as citizen or member of society as clearly as has become common. For her, the meaning of virtue was indistinguishable between public and private life or among different kinds of lives. One cannot be a good person and bad citizen or a bad person and good citizen. By the same token, social conditions must either foster public and private virtue or public and private evil;

Wollstonecraft did not suggest the possibility that social conditions could foster virtue in one but not the other. She also argued consistently that it was nearly impossible for individuals to achieve virtue if the structure of society was not appropriately designed.

It would probably make sense to Wollstonecraft that discussion of "private" pains within a particular oppressed social group could lead to a special form of enlightenment: realization of the underlying principles that unify social and individual human life to foster or inhibit the development of virtue. And likewise would she have understood the political effects of conversations among friends not governing each other. What Wollstonecraft did not seem to imagine was how this enlightenment might be translated into political action. But then, of the women who eventually conceived of a gender-based political movement, only a couple were even born during Wollstonecraft's lifetime, and they were still babies when she died.

In this last manuscript the text suggests that Wollstonecraft did indeed feel bastilled. The development of her political and social ideas were closing her in, driving a wall between her own beliefs and the era of light. She had not yet found a way out of this story, just as she was not sure of a way out of the story of despotism and the Terror or, indeed, the story of her own life. We can learn from that. Political theory, including—especially—democratic feminist theory, is not written in hindsight. By definition, if one is willing at all to accept any terms of enlightenment, it is done partly in the dark. That is one of the things that makes it difficult for democratic theorists, especially of the feminist variety, to work together on our theorizing by mutually assisting but not governing each other, as Wollstonecraft would say.

Notes

1. This essay is based on a reading of all of Wollstonecraft's available writing, public and private. Specific references are noted in the text using the following abbreviations:

FrRev:	*An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*
Letters:	Wollstonecraft's private correspondence
Revs:	Wollstonecraft's review in the *Analytical Review.* Dictations include the date of the review
VM:	*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*
VW:	*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
Wrongs:	*The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria*

All page references are to Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, eds., *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1989), except in the case of letters, which refers to Ralph M. Wardle, ed., *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

2. She discusses friendship in the family especially in *VW* 98, 99, 119, 142, 189, 225, 265.

3. There is some debate about this, but although Wollstonecraft hated the Terror, she continued to value the spread of admiration for the Revolution and its ideas as she traveled in northern Europe, and in her last work she continued to use the dangerous language of the English Jacobin.

4. Here as elsewhere "education" does not mean mere schooling.

5. William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (New York: Norton, 1977), 1818; *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946).

6. 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, 1982), 119.

4

What Can Liberals Learn from Mary Wollstonecraft?

Virginia L. Muller

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is widely acknowledged as a pioneering work in the liberal feminist intellectual tradition. Yet while scholars recognize her call for women's rights as historically significant, liberal theorists are generally unfamiliar with her work and feminists often dismiss Wollstonecraft's contemporary relevance. Feminist scholars argue that her strong roots in the eighteenth-century liberal tradition taint her work with naive appeals to reason and natural rights doctrine. Indeed, the argument goes, her entire analysis of the condition of women and her call for women's rights are as misconceived as is liberalism itself (Eisenstein 1981, 90; Jacobus 1979, 10; Poovey 1984, 96). Unfortunately, thanks to these charges Wollstone-

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craft has received little close scholarly attention in the field of political theory.[1]

I shall argue that Wollstonecraft, while indeed operating from a foundation of eighteenth-century liberal thought, challenges many of its premises. As she propounds her arguments for women's rights, her work dramatically confronts the presuppositions and prescriptions of a narrow Lockean liberalism. Far from being an irrelevant curiosity, Wollstonecraft is a serious theorist whose perceptions as well as blind spots lend insight to the tradition of liberalism, to democratic theory, and to women's issues today.

Mary Wollstonecraft is, after all, an eighteenth-century liberal. She believed in reason, in the possibility of change and of progress, in education as the lever for change, and in modern democracy; most of all, she believed in individual liberty. Along with the other liberal theorists of her time her roots are Lockean, and her intellectual home is the English dissenting tradition. Nevertheless, in the process of articulating a feminist standpoint, she offers a thoroughgoing revision of key liberal tenets. Her view of liberty includes women; her understanding of rationality makes a place for the woman's standpoint; her assessment of progress rests on a belief that it requires not only the extension of suffrage and education, but structural change in the social, economic, and political arenas; and her analysis of rights rejects property rights as the core of democracy. As she celebrates individual rights, she insists that gender and class cannot be ignored, and she emphasizes the interconnectedness of public and private spheres. It is this widening of the boundaries of the liberalism of her day that makes her work so remarkable.

The Eighteenth-Century Liberal Canon

For eighteenth-century political thinkers, reason entails freedom. What makes us human, they argue, is reason. Enlightenment theorists are able to discard the theological category of a soul as distinguishing us from animals, and to point to a this-worldly, human faculty: our reasoning ability, our power to discriminate and to choose among alternatives, as defining human traits. Taking their inspiration from Locke, these theo-

rists argue that because human beings can understand the relationship between cause and effect, they can act on the basis of reasoned judgment rather than blind instinct, institutional religious imperatives, or the suffocating habits of tradition.[2]

The revolutionary implications of this position are obvious. From Tom Paine to Thomas Jefferson, from Mary Wollstonecraft to William Godwin, the point is clear: democracy is that form of government most compatible with human nature and hence, most natural. Democracy of all the different regimes most allows individual human beings to *choose*, to be rational agents. The heady enthusiasm of these eighteenth-century radical figures for the French Revolution in its pre-Terror phase is akin to the exuberance of free-market economists today for the victory of the Solidarity movement in Poland or the falling of the Berlin Wall. If Wollstonecraft's euphoria about the French Revolutionary experiment was premature, it was hardly unique.

Our contemporary critique of eighteenth-century liberalism begins with the most obvious deficiency of its Lockean heritage: restrictions on participation. The franchise in England in Wollstonecraft's time was limited to men of property. The aim of eighteenth-century liberals was to widen the franchise to include all men. This goal was quite radical, because only men of property were thought to have an adequate—and literal—stake in society to make reasoned judgments about social policy. When Wollstonecraft produced *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in 1790, she defended the French Revolutionary agenda against Burke's condemnation of it in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. At least part of that agenda was to widen the franchise beyond the boundaries of the aristocratic and middle classes. In England, Wollstonecraft attacked property as the main criterion of citizenship and argued the evolving eighteenth-century liberal view that rationality could be the only natural and appropriate criterion for enfranchising individuals. It is significant that her *Rights of Men* was published months before Thomas Paine's celebrated *Rights of Man* (1791), which was also a response to Burke.[3] Wollstonecraft went beyond most of her contemporaries in liberal theorizing, however, when she argued not only for the rights of men, but for women's rights in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).[4]

An obvious criticism of eighteenth-century liberalism is that it presupposes human rationality. We are not so confident about resting our hopes in reason today as were eighteenth-century thinkers. Indeed, we often view appeals to reason as naive. Freud's insights about the destructive

power of the unconscious, like the persistence of personal violence and war, seem to belie human rationality. The enormity of the horror of the Holocaust and our fear of a Dr. Strangelove in our future also color our worldview. As if that were not enough, recent developments in the "hard" sciences and in philosophy suggest that the certainty of eighteenth-century rationality is an outmoded construct. Moreover, feminist theorists have shown that sterile, rational calculation is a poor model for any worthwhile epistemology (Chodorow 1983; Gilligan 1982; Hartsock 1984; Hirshman 1989).

These criticisms force us to examine two questions. First, were the eighteenth-century liberal thinkers as naive as we portray them? Second, did Wollstonecraft also propound a naive social calculus of reason? My own view is that we tend to caricature eighteenth-century liberal thought's paramount assumption of rationality. Our interpretation of eighteenth-century rationality sees principles of certainty, an almost childish belief in progress, and an either/or logical framework as characterizing the whole period. The limits of our canon make us largely unfamiliar not only with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, but also with that of her acquaintance, Condorcet, who relied on probability rather than certainty as the basis for rational action and decision-making.[5] We also generally ignore the work of Wollstonecraft's companion and husband, William Godwin, the philosophical anarchist, who recognized that no generalizations can perfectly reflect all particulars and that we must engage in ceaseless revision to approximate truth.[6] These ideas dispel the myth of certainty we too readily ascribe to the eighteenth century's theory of rationality.

Contemporary attacks on rationality themselves depend on the very rationality we doubt; in attacking rationality we thus pay tribute to the same concept we seek to undermine.[7] And if we recognize reason's limitations, so did Locke: even he in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* recognized reason's limits when he compared it with a simple candle, but one adequate to his task.[8] Voltaire showed us human irrationality in *Candide*, and Condorcet saw history as punctuated with the darkness of the irrational.[9] At the least, the liberal thinkers were not monolithic in their views. If we cannot read fuzzy logic or Foucault back into the liberal project, neither can we dismiss liberalism so casually. Our stereotype of eighteenth-century liberals as jejune optimists serves our own opinion of the Enlightenment more than it accurately reflects their nuanced thought.

Even if we were to accept the popular view of the liberals on rationality, we would quickly discover that Wollstonecraft does not fit the mold. Despite her criticism of false sentimentality, she defends "woman's nature" and tries to find room for feelings in the empire of reason. If we come to Wollstonecraft by way of Godwin's *Memoirs*, her emotion, her impetuousness, her passion come into high relief and we would quickly categorize her as a romantic rather than as a rationalist.[10] Yet she soundly criticizes Rousseau for his views on women and at once defies labeling (*WW* 5:147–62). When Wollstonecraft is dismissed for her association with the rational tradition of the eighteenth century, critics make two cardinal and related mistakes: they simplify her argument while stereotyping the project of the eighteenth century.

Reconstructing the Liberal Canon

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is the fullest expression of Mary Wollstonecraft's call for women's rights. Her earlier writings, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) preach the value of reason and responsibility in women's lives and point to the tyranny of family life and marriage. These themes are derived from impressions and are autobiographical as well as theoretical. They thus introduce a woman's narrative standpoint into political theory. In her later *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft successfully constructs a general theory about the status of women in society more than in the earlier works.

Rights of Woman was written as a response to Talleyrand (the volume is dedicated to him), who in the fall of 1791 had presented to the Constituent Assembly of France a plan for public education—but only for males. Whereas her *Rights of Men* challenges Burke's equation of family life (and, by extension, the Bourbon dynasty) with civilization, laments his emphasis on property rights, and decries the conservative educational values of the past, *Rights of Woman* carries her criticism of the traditional social order to a new level of thoroughness.

Wollstonecraft argues that mainstream champions of Enlightenment principles of reason and natural rights, like Talleyrand, operate from a male perspective and hence fail to see the full implications of Enlightenment doctrines: (1) that women as well as men should be schooled in

reason, and (2) that women should be accorded full political and economic rights. But Wollstonecraft does more than merely assert that women, as persons, should enjoy natural rights; she sharply sketches the dynamics of patriarchal society to show how the degraded condition of women *supports* that system. It is this insight that gives theoretical coherence to *Rights of Woman* and that makes the work a serious piece of political theory.

Wollstonecraft's first contention, that women be fully educated, is based on her belief that all women, not only exceptionally intelligent ones, could be, and ought to be, educated. She insists that our natural entitlement to liberty and equality rests on the developed-reasoning faculty in all persons. The unspoken assumption here is the Lockean doctrine of natural rights (to life, limb, liberty, and estate) and duties (to respect others' rights), which reason discovers and upholds. Now, Wollstonecraft could have argued, quite simply, that women, as persons, enjoy a natural endowment of reason sufficient to perceive natural law, and that reasonable men are obliged to grant those same natural rights to women that they themselves enjoy and that they are bound by reason to enforce.[11] However, her argument is not quite so straightforward.

To construct a compelling case for women's rights, Wollstonecraft adopts what is essentially a utilitarian argument: the education of women and their enjoyment of full rights as equal citizens will ensure the progress of civilization, while their denial, she insists, will imperil the future.[12] Her faith in the progressive impulse of civilization is typical of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, and her reference to the Enlightenment project of analyzing the historical progress of human society was surely invoked to appeal to like-minded liberals.

Wollstonecraft's work is brimming with references to progress, so this argument is hardly devised solely to win a greater audience for her views on women's rights. For example, her contention in *Rights of Woman* that reason is "the simple power of improvement; or more properly speaking, of discerning truth. Every individual is in this respect, a world in itself" (*WW* 5:122) is supported by passages in *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794). There, she writes that "when society was first regulated, the laws could not be adjusted so as to take in the future conduct of its members, because the faculties of man are unfolded and perfected by the improvements made by society" (*WW* 6:20). And again, "though bad morals, and worse laws, have

helped to deprave the passions of men . . . still it [society] has been in a state of gradual improvement" (*WW* 6:109).

However, Wollstonecraft's argument for women's rights from a principle of utility does not necessarily depend upon a doctrine of progress such as that embraced by her contemporaries Godwin, Paine, and Condorcet, and periodically asserted by Wollstonecraft herself. She occasionally fell into moods of pessimism, as in 1793, when she wrote in her "Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation" that "the perspective of a golden age, fading before the attentive eye of observation, almost eludes my sight. . . . I begin to fear that vice, or if you will, evil, is the grand mobile of action" (*WW* 6:444–45). So, rather than rely entirely on a theory of progress to justify her claims for women, she devised so flexible an argument that it could withstand assaults on the tenet of progress: even a relatively static society would decay and suffer a loss of virtue among the citizenry if women were not properly educated.

For Wollstonecraft, virtue, like rights, rests upon reason, and a society of educated women with activated rational faculties is the sine qua non of a virtuous society. It is difficult to unpack Wollstonecraft's use of the term *virtue,* but she does make it independent of religious beliefs; she states in *The French Revolution* that "one principle of action is sufficient—Respect thyself—whether it be termed fear of God—religion; love of justice—morality; or, self-love—the desire of happiness" (*WW* 6:22). If virtue is tied to self-respect, the prerequisite for virtue among women would have to be a new process of self-definition. And education is a crucial component in her plan for women's self-discovery. Progress and education are linked, as for all liberal thinkers, but Wollstonecraft broadens their scope to insist that all citizens be educated. It is significant that she does not exclude the lower classes from this argument, either.

Wollstonecraft recognizes that an appeal to men to grant women their rights could fail; she sees that noblesse oblige is unreliable and is beside the point; women themselves must claim their rights. *Rights of Woman* thus is not so much addressed to the Talleyrands of her day as it is to her oppressed sisters: its purpose is to awaken women's awareness of their true condition of servility. While she exhorts men in that work to be more than harem-keepers, women themselves must "resign the arbitrary power of beauty" (*WW* 5:91) and ally themselves with their sex rather than compete for the favors of men. She argues that we must relinquish the affectation of sentimentality for the power of reason. That we as

women have an obligation to our gender is clear from both the theory and practice of Wollstonecraft's life. She stingingly depicts false sentimentality when—in *Mary, A Fiction*—she portrays a mother who loves her dogs more than her children. Wollstonecraft begins her *Vindication* with the claim that "I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt" (*WW* 5:75).

Critic Mary Poovey accuses Wollstonecraft of adopting a gender-neutral voice in *Rights of Woman* that projects a tone of condescension toward women readers and that masks her own womanhood in an asexual mantle of "writer" that will appeal to her male audience (Poovey 1984, 80). Her charge echoes that of Anca Vlasopolos, who argues that Wollstonecraft was so concerned about alienating the male liberals of her circle that she adopted a "mask" of reason. Vlasopolos claims that Wollstonecraft's tone when she discusses women is "condescending, even insulting" (Vlasopolos 1980, 463), and that Wollstonecraft refers to women as "they" and not "we" in *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Vlasopolos 1980, 463). The point appears to be that Wollstonecraft's embrace of reason is not philosophical but is merely a rhetorical device to win rights for women she disparages. This clever charge hardly diminishes the force of Wollstonecraft's argument. Even Vlasopolos is forced by the strength of the text of *Rights of Woman* to acknowledge that Wollstonecraft "drops the mask to speak freely of women's oppression" (Vlasopolos 1980, 470). It simply is not readily apparent that Wollstonecraft's writing is addressed primarily to men. It is true that the circle of her publisher, Joseph Johnson, was male, with the sole exception of Mary Wollstonecraft herself. However, her undeniable identification with women is manifest in passages throughout *Rights of Woman.* For example, "Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong passions and groveling vices.—Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance!" (*WW* 5:88). And Poovey's criticism ignores the largely autobiographical nature of much of Wollstonecraft's other writing, which constantly and consistently depicts women as trapped in degrading roles.

Nevertheless, *Rights of Woman* does have its occasional blind spots. Wollstonecraft states that because of a lack of meaningful education for women, life's goal becomes marriage, which is "the only way women can rise in the world" (*WW* 5:76). However, she continues, this path makes "mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act. . . . Can they [be expected to] govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?" (*WW* 5:76). While she laments the lack of a liberating education, Wollstonecraft implies that an improved, rational system of education would better prepare women for the very role in family governance and childrearing that traditionally oppressed women. Is this a contradiction in her thought or a grim (or perhaps contented) recognition of the social role of women as caretakers? Wollstonecraft does go on to advocate the opening of the professions and business to women. Wollstonecraft may be constrained, as all of us are, by the values of her own age: immediately upon exhorting her female readers to "become more masculine" (*WW* 5:76), she assures her male audience that "there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude" (*WW* 5:76), since the inferiority of their physical strength would "render them, in some degree, dependent on men" (*WW* 5:76–77).

However, it can be argued that despite such apparent contradictions in her position, Wollstonecraft's arguments remain compelling. She accurately describes women in their social role as caretakers and identifies (with indefatigable zeal) the structure of the family and the institution of marriage as the linchpins of women's problems. If she criticizes a popularized false sentimentality, she never undervalues the work women do in the home. When she asks for a better education for women, she does not merely wish to see a reformed version of traditional family life. Indeed, she recognizes that men and women are educated by "the opinions and manners of the society they live in" (*WW* 5:90) and she judges that "till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education" (*WW* 5:90). So a change in women's status rests upon a transformation of the entire social structure. Such a requirement does not daunt Wollstonecraft, and she is finally optimistic in her contention that social change can be rooted in self-transformation: "every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its reason" (*WW* 5:90). Independence, then, and a self-determined urge toward virtue, are the only sort of "education" that can reliably produce

Wollstonecraft's desired results. As she puts it, "it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason" (*WW* 5:90).

Wollstonecraft links the liberation of women with the larger political realm in two ways. First, she suggests that a prerequisite for women's enjoyment of their natural equality is the rejection by kings and nobles of their hereditary "trappings." She sees that the despotism of men who at home "tyrannize over their sisters, wives, and daughters" (*WW* 5:93) mirrors the larger despotism of politics. Without universal political equality and democracy, women's prospects will be dim: therefore, society in general needs the example of leaders renouncing false distinctions and embracing equality as inspiration and encouragement. She does not go so far as Godwin, who advocates an extreme version of anarchy to reflect and to be compatible with individual liberty. Instead, she recognizes the state as a potentially rational construction for ordering political life: her version of political liberty demands representative democracy with political membership for all people.

However, Wollstonecraft realizes that the mere example of the spread of political democracy will not be sufficient to meet her goal. In her second linking of women's liberation with political society she likens women to economically oppressed people. Hence, the economic dependence of women and the "poorer classes" conspires with custom to produce social degradation. In her *History and Moral View of the Progress of the French Revolution*, Wollstonecraft depicts the travails of the French working class. Hers is no idealized view of working conditions. In this book she recognizes that the life of the mind is not the primary social reality for most people, and she acknowledges, too, that physical labor is required in social life. The key note she sounds is the revolutionary call to arms for the French working class.

Wollstonecraft pushes her class analysis further in *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (published posthumously by Godwin in 1798). Here, she directly links class and gender in her treatment of marriage as legalized prostitution. Her depiction of Jemima, a poor woman, as a major character is a watershed in the development of the English novel. This is not the work of an ordinary bourgeois liberal. Yet her calls for full economic rights for women and for concomitant political rights (to be governed by elected representatives rather than by hereditary monarchs and aristocrats) certainly do reflect reformist eighteenth-century

Enlightenment views. Although she detested the men of the commercial middle class, parodied the aristocracy, and elevated the plight of the Jemimas of the world to our attention, she never articulated a program to redistribute wealth. Still, she was sage enough to see that "if the aristocracy of birth is levelled with the ground, only to make room for that of riches . . . the morals of the people will not be much improved by the change, or the government rendered less venal" (*WW* 6:444). Even a cursory reading of *Rights of Woman* shows a provocative recognition of class interests as one component of a revolutionary social theory. However, class warfare was not Wollstonecraft's goal; her self-chosen task was to encourage the emancipation of women. Hence, her analysis of the impact of economic forces on the status of women is more explicit than her treatment of class. In the end, she remains a classical liberal who championed and trusted individuals and individual virtue, not governments.

In our contemporary urge to define feminism (liberal, socialist, or radical?), to isolate authentic from spurious feminist theory and practice (How do we treat female violence? Should feminists take Foucault seriously? What *is* the woman's standpoint?), and to identify reactionary feminist ideology (Can women who celebrate motherhood or who oppose abortion be feminists?) far more questions are raised than resolved (Jaggar 1983). It would be unrealistic to assume that Wollstonecraft's pathbreaking work can answer every question that concerns us now. But her work does show how many of the doctrines we take most seriously are foreshadowed in her formulations of liberal feminism.

Undoubtedly, Wollstonecraft's work provides a rich resource for feminist theory that links the condition of women to major social and economic institutions. She does not argue for a neutered "person" for liberal democracy; rather, she insists on a liberalism that respects and welcomes women with all their differences. Her analysis does not rest solely on a fanciful appeal to natural rights, on a naive belief in progress, or on a blind faith in reason and education as a source of female dignity. Rather, Wollstonecraft unites reason and knowledge with self-understanding, and liberty with the ongoing project of self-definition. A close reading of her work shows that Wollstonecraft grapples with the complex network of issues underlying the status of women in social life in a precise, powerful, and sophisticated way. Her work reflects and enlarges the liberal tradition.

Notes

1. The major exception is Virginia Sapiro's expert *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Another fine piece of scholarship is Jennifer Lorch's *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). Eisenstein's work, cited above, also offers a thorough treatment of Wollstonecraft's political theory.

2. Condorcet clearly falls into this category, as do Voltaire, Helvétius, and the other French philosophers, as well as the English radicals of the Dissenting tradition. See Kingsley Martin's *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of Political Ideas from Bayle to Condorcet* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

3. Paine was tried for treason and fled England. He went to France where he served in the National Convention, until he was imprisoned by Robespierre. Wollstonecraft was not tried, but she, too, took refuge in France to observe the revolution at close hand. For biographical information, see Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd's *Mary Wollstonecraft* (Boston: Twayne, 1984); Eleanor Flexner's *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Biography* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1972); Jennifer Lorch's *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist;* William St Clair's *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (New York: Norton, 1989); and Claire Tomalin's *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

4. Her acquaintance, Condorcet, argued for the inclusion of women in the granting of citizenship rights in France in his little known *On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship* (1790). See Keith Michael Baker's *Condorcet: Selected Writing* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 97–104. All references to Wollstonecraft's writings are from Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, eds., *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft,* vols. 1–7 (New York: New York University Press, 1989); hereafter cited as *WW,* followed by volume and page number.

5. See Charles Coulston Gillespie's "Probability and Politics: Laplace, Condorcet, and Turgot," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 116, no. 1 (February 1972): 1–20 for a full discussion of Condorcet's application of probability to social life.

6. See, for example, William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice,* abridged and edited by K. Codell Carter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 59–60. Godwin's theory of perfectibility rests on this analysis.

7. This argument is made by Aristotle in his exhortation to philosophy, *The Protrepticus,* a lost dialogue praised by Cicero in which Aristotle takes on the nihilists. See *Aristotle's Protrepticus,* ed. Anton-Hermann Chroust (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1961).

8. See, for example, Locke's discussion of the failures of reason, which follows a sublime description of reason's power in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* book 4, chap. 17, para. 9, and pp. 377–95 in *Great Books of the Western World,* vol. 35, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

9. Leibniz might be an exception to this list; Voltaire parodied him as Pangloss in *Candide.* See Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind,* trans. June Barraclough, with an introduction by Stuart Hampshire (New York: Noonday Press, 1955).

10. William Godwin, ed., *Memoirs and Posthumous Works of the Author of "The Vindication of the Rights of Woman"* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798). See also Meena Alexander, *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley* (Savage, Md.: Barnes and Noble, 1989); and Mitzi Myers, "Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft: The Shaping of Self and Subject," *Studies in Romanticism* 20 (fall 1981): 316. In a cruel twist, a new "novelized" biography by Frances Sherwood, *Vindication* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993) portrays Wollstonecraft more as a lurid libertine than as an intellectual. It is

difficult to imagine that anyone reading this novel would be even slightly moved to pick up Wollstonecraft's writings.

11. That was one of Condorcet's arguments for granting full citizenship rights to women.

12. The problem with the argument from utility arises whenever we imagine a scenario in which the oppression of women is socially useful. Wollstonecraft's argument from a principle of utility prefigures J. S. Mill's in his *Subjection of Women* (1869) in *John Stuart Mill: Three Essays*, with an introduction by Richard Wollheim (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

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5

Mary Wollstonecraft's "Wild Wish": Confounding Sex in the Discourse on Political Rights

Wendy Gunther-Canada

> A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it though it may excite a horse-laugh. —I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behavior.
>
> —Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Mary Wollstonecraft's "wild wish" to confound the distinction of sex in society required challenging the whole tradition of political writing and transforming the entire discourse of political rights to include women. I suggest that Wollstonecraft would never have written the celebrated *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* had she not first authored the little-known *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1989d). The *Rights of Men*, her bold reply to Edmund Burke's attack on the humanist ideals of the French Revolution, underscored the profound exclusion of women from both the discourse and the practice of Enlightenment philosophy. Wollstonecraft's earlier defense of the rights of men proved the necessity of her most recognized work, the *Rights of Woman* (1989e).

This essay will examine how Mary Wollstonecraft disputes the distinctions of sex in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.[1] It is important to consider the connection between the *Rights of Men* and the *Rights of Woman* in order to understand the radical challenge each work posed to the discourse on rights in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Both *Vindications* are significant for contemporary feminist theorists

because they highlight the problem of entering a discourse in which the basic terms of the debate are constructed through the exclusion of women.[2] Wollstonecraft's theoretical analysis of the meaning of political rights and her exploration of the practice of political writing offer critical insights into the complex relationship of women to politics.

Wollstonecraft confuses and complicates the mark of gender in each of her polemics on rights. Her writing displays an acute understanding of the constraints of gender on political discourse as well as the restraints placed upon women in political communities. The late eighteenth-century woman author is limited by the fundamental assumption that woman's sexual nature is inconsistent with rationality.[3] She is also bound by the conventions of female propriety that honor silence. To write is to invite public censure.[4] For a woman to author a political tract, she must trespass upon a traditionally forbidden discursive space.[5]

In this historical context Wollstonecraft penned the *Rights of Men.* Her text was the first of many replies to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France.* It was published anonymously, and is particularly noteworthy in that the anonymous female author uses the "manly" language of reason to rebuke the "effeminate" rhetoric of the famous male orator.[6] This subterfuge is important because it allows her to subvert the privileged position of the masculine in language politics. But her philosophical inquiry on rights disputes more than discursive terrain. She takes on the "gothic pile" of hereditary property and honor which, handed from father to son amid the heraldry of patriarchy and primogeniture, drowns out the voices of mother and daughter (1989d, 58). Wollstonecraft's appropriation of the manly authority of Enlightenment reason, added to her analysis of the tensions between property and equality, provides an immanent critique of the sexual politics of late eighteenth-century political theory.

In the subsequent *Rights of Woman,* Wollstonecraft confounds the rhetorical distinctions of sex in political writing by opposing the fragile "flowery diction" of sentiment to the intellectual strength of rational argument.[7] Most significant, she challenges the ideology that women are naturally less rational than men by exposing the social prejudices and historical conditions that stunt the growth of reason in women.

Wollstonecraft's literary strategy indicates that her second *Vindication* is built upon the lessons she learned in her first: specifically that authority in rights discourse is opposed to femininity; and, second, that to champion the rights of women one must battle the issue of sexual

difference in order to claim that women are rational subjects. Her analysis exposes the inherent contradiction in the philosophical calls for the revolutionary rights of mankind that rebel against granting these rights to women. The *Rights of Woman* links the textual representation of women as sexual beings devoid of reason to the silence of women in the discourses that shape their lives. Wollstonecraft thus skillfully unites philosophical argument with discursive strategy to articulate a theory of women's rights.

The *Rights of Men* represents Wollstonecraft's introduction to the "conversation" of political theory. This initial confrontation of the anonymous woman with the patriarchy of canonical thought sets the stage for her analysis of women's rights in her second *Vindication.* In the *Rights of Woman,* Wollstonecraft challenges the humanist discourse on rights by critically analyzing the construction of femininity in the writings of male authors who claim to derive their portrait of women from nature. Wollstonecraft, the woman author, seeks to deny men the authority of defining womanhood as difference by denaturalizing sex distinctions. She attacks the "boasted prerogative of man," revealed in the writings on female manners, which subjects women to the tyranny of male prejudice in their own homes and in the Houses of Parliament (1989e, 170). Wollstonecraft creates a political theory that calls for a "revolution in female manners," a revolution that will provide the educational, economical, and political means to allow women to create their own complex identities.[8]

Mary Wollstonecraft wrote both of her *Vindications* in response to the French Revolution, which marked the explosive end to the century of Enlightenment. The Revolution indicated a break with the past, a rupture in normal time and space that formed an environment vibrating with conflict and experimentation. In the *Rights of Men,* Wollstonecraft articulates her understanding of the meaning of the Revolution. This text ultimately seeks to ground political authority in the democratic reason of ordinary men and women instead of the divine right of kings. In arguing for the "sovereignty of reason," Wollstonecraft calls for the creation of a government founded on rational discourse to replace coercive monarchical rule (1989d, 27). To this end, she begins her reply to Burke with the admonishment, "Quitting now the flowers of rhetoric, let us, Sir, reason together" (1989d, 9). Wollstonecraft constructs her defense of natural rights from "the cold arguments of reason, that give

no sex to virtue" (1989d, 46). In making this claim her words find an artery that runs directly to the Platonic heart of political theory. Wollstonecraft extends rationality to women, undermining the foundation of the theoretically separate spheres that restrict the independent movement of women in the political cosmos.

This first *Vindication* celebrates the innovation of Enlightenment reason and the emancipation of the French Revolution. It is here that the mind of Mary Wollstonecraft, the "mind of a woman with thinking powers," was first displayed to the readers of contemporary political thought (1989b, 5). Wollstonecraft transposes the humanist tradition of Enlightenment political discourse to Burke's evocation of British tradition. Burke argues that political legitimacy arises from a people's reverence for their ancient constitution. Wollstonecraft contends that just rule is the product of a government's respect for the rights of the living community. This text is truly radical because Wollstonecraft, a propertyless woman, pits property rights against individual liberties, in an analysis that attacks the differentiation of sex and status through primogeniture and rank. She tries to universalize what she has previously labeled woman's "situation," as the position of all rational individuals denied political rights by an atavistic constitution that protects aristocratic property and privilege.[9]

However, Wollstonecraft's own attempt to create a universal subject who transcends class and gender, is itself confounded by her recognition that Enlightenment philosophy reflects a reified masculine model of subjectivity. The *Rights of Men* reveals a tension between Wollstonecraft's belief in the theoretical universality of Enlightenment rationality, and her practical experience of the prejudices that deny English women political subjectivity. The revolutionary power of democratic reason is the promise that each man can be his own legislator; but by denying that women possess reason, the rebellion stopped far short of allowing individual women to govern themselves. In eighteenth-century England, the male head of the household exercised full legal control over the lives of his wife and their children. Undoubtedly, this unenlightened philosophy limited the subjective expression of the female author. It is a telling commentary on the centrality of gender to political discourse and the marginality of women in political practice, that Wollstonecraft refuses to identify herself as a woman in a text in which she refutes Burke's representation of women as passive, private, and, most important, silent. Wollstonecraft's own claim of the universality of rights is

challenged and fragmented by her historical experience of outsidership, as well as by the misogynistic content and highly stylized form of late eighteenth-century political writing.

Thus, it is of great significance that Mary Wollstonecraft's defense of political rights is addressed to Edmund Burke. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* aims at denying a voice to those individuals who would revolt against the patriarchal standards of generation and gender. A central theme of the *Reflections* is the importance of the dual spirits of chivalry and religion in maintaining the distinctions among men and women that are the foundation of social order. Burke draws his gender framework from his earlier work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.* In this text, he creates an epistemology grounded in the traditional binary opposition of an active, or sublime, masculinity, and a passive, or beautiful, femininity. Vivien Jones (1990) claims that Burke's categorization of the sexes had a critical impact on the construction of femininity at the end of the eighteenth century. More important, she argues that Burke's "apparently complementary oppositions" between the masculine and feminine reveal "social and moral inequalities" among men and women. She asserts that in this manner, the " 'softer virtues' become the 'subordinate virtues'; complementarity gives way to hierarchy" (4).[10]

For Burke the French Revolution represents an open assault on sexual hierarchy, as well as upon monarchical politics. He squarely places the blame for democratic rebellion upon Enlightenment philosophers who preach the rights of men to a mob composed of both men and women. Certainly, the volatile mix of individuals, ideas, and poverty that had erupted in France threatened to produce a bloody conflict in England. In these tumultuous times, Burke was outraged by the support the Revolution was receiving in London. He reserved a special contempt for Dr. Richard Price, of the Revolution Society, whose sermon "Discourse on the Love of our Country" inspired Mary Wollstonecraft to expound upon the rights of men.[11]

In the *Reflections,* Burke angrily purports that the Revolution in France threatens to turn the European world upside down. He describes the Revolution as revelry, as saturnalia; men and women moving in a bloody masquerade in which gender and class boundaries are transgressed and subverted.[12] In the National Assembly, the legislators and the people become one; joining forces to attack the very foundations of religion and chivalry by dividing among themselves church lands and feudal estates.

He describes this revolutionary Congress as a "profane burlesque." The government becomes the site of violence and sexual perversion. Burke (1984) accuses the legislators of responding only to the cries of a "mixed mob of ferocious men, and women lost to shame, who, according to their insolent fancies, direct, control, applaud, explode them; and sometimes mix and take their seats with them; domineering over them with a strange mixture of servile petulance and proud presumptuous authority" (161).[13] This passage demonstrates that for Burke gender uncertainty is the true horror of revolution.[14] Women, once the servile subjects mastered by men, can become sublime actors themselves. When women renounce feminine passivity and loveliness, they explode the religious and chivalric structure and symbols of the French nation.[15]

It is this spectacle of gender parody and class mockery that heralds the destruction of Burke's golden age of order and honor. He powerfully describes the capture of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette at Versailles, the queen awakened from her sleep by the murderous screams of a throng outside her bedchamber. The "celestial dauphiness," the intimate symbol of the French nation, is defiled by the public procession from Versailles to Paris, jeered by a crowd composed of the "furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest women" (1984, 165). Monarchy and patriarchy are trampled underfoot; even the gates between heaven and hell cannot hold back the rebellious energy that had been released when the drawbridges that secured the Bastille were forced open.

Indeed, in the few months that elapsed from the fall of the Bastille on 14 July, to the capture of Louis XVI, on 6 October, the sovereignty of the French nation had passed from the monarch to the people.[16] The Declaration of the Rights of Men proclaimed all men equal and free. It was this proclamation that Dr. Richard Price celebrated from the pulpit of the Old Jewry in London, and to which Edmund Burke responded vociferously in the *Reflections*. But in condemning the rights of men, and in taking aim at Dr. Price in particular, Burke had provoked a powerful reply from a person who strongly supported the rights of the democratic masses, as well as those of the specific individual. Dr. Price had befriended Wollstonecraft years earlier when she was a schoolmistress in the Dissenting corner of London known as Newington Green. In this radical community, women like Mary Wollstonecraft and Anna Barbauld were educated and encouraged to take part in the broad discussion of political rights because many of these rights were denied to Nonconformist men by the Test and Corporation Acts.[17] Soon however, Wollstone-

craft's contribution to this public debate would move beyond the radical positions advocated by the Reverend Price to include the revolutionary call for a civil existence for women.

Mary Wollstonecraft's analysis of the *Reflections* begins by "attacking the foundation of [Burke's] opinions" (1989d, 9). She refutes his arguments about liberty and property, undermining the patriarchal principles that structure the relationship between men and women. For Wollstonecraft, the French Revolution signifies more than the fall of a crown. It represents a displacement of authority and a reassessment of the meaning of political rights for all citizens. She claims that liberty is the God-given right of all rational beings, a natural right that distinguishes human beings from beasts (1989d, 14). Wollstonecraft defines the "birthright of man" as "such a degree of liberty, civil and religious, as is compatible with the liberty of every other individual with whom he is united in a social compact, and the continued existence of that compact." Unlike Locke, however, she claims that the protection of individual freedoms, not the protection of property, is the primary function of government. Wollstonecraft powerfully asserts that the two functions are largely incompatible in a democratic community. 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" (1989d, 9). Through the redistribution of church lands and aristocratic wealth, the French government had heralded a new day of equality and equity for the citizens of the Republic. Merit not money would distinguish citizens, and ability not nobility would characterize the leaders of the French nation.

It is in the spirit of these radical democratic changes, that Wollstonecraft offers her own reading of the march from Versailles. She, too, notes both monarch and mob; but she frames a different portrait of liberty, property, and gender politics. Burke's hellish furies become "women who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never had the advantages of education; or their vices might have lost part of their abominable deformity, by losing part of their grossness."[18] Wollstonecraft repositions herself within Burke's text and reflects upon a new vision of a queen deformed by luxury. She contends that the "sentimental jargon" with which Burke adorns Marie Antoinette does not bear the "regal stamp of reason." She democratically argues that "The queen of France—the great and small vulgar, claim our pity . . . still I have such a plain downright understanding that I do not like to make a distinction without a difference" (1989d, 30). It is these "distinctions without

differences" that are at the center of her disagreement with Burke, and are the core of her argument for political rights for both men and women. Wollstonecraft simply cannot understand how the contrivances of hereditary wealth, or the chance determination of biological sex, can be asserted as providing a natural framework for economic, social, and political difference. She chastises Burke for differentiating Marie Antoinette from the chandlers and fishmongers who share as women "almost insuperable obstacles to surmount in their progress towards true dignity of character" (1989d, 30). It is the critical consideration of the man-made obstacles to women's rational improvement and political empowerment that are the subject of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication.*

The French Revolution was fought over just these sorts of class distinctions among men; but Wollstonecraft repeatedly points to the distinctions between the sexes and among women of different rank. Burke (1984) laments the democratic leveling in France. "On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman, a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order" (171). Wollstonecraft confirms this new order by writing, "All true, Sir; if she is not more attentive to the duties of humanity than queens and fashionable ladies in general are," but suggests that this leveling has important civic consequences for women that will raise them above brute creation (1989d, 25).[19] She takes aim at the outmoded code of chivalry, and redefines the masculine and feminine by duty to country and responsibility to self. Kings and queens, farmers and chambermaids, simply become men and women, to be judged by their humanity and reason like everyone else.

Yet, in this revolutionary age, could a woman expect that her polemic on political rights would be judged by the rational and humane standards that her work espoused? Wollstonecraft begins the *Rights of Men* with the challenge "I war not with an individual when I contend for the rights of men and the liberty of reason" (1989d, 7). Indeed, she is engaged in a battle of meaning, from which women have been excluded too long. It is surprising, given the gendered structure of rights discourse, that so few scholars have commented on the fact that the first answer to Burke's polemic was from a woman.[20] The anonymous Wollstonecraft subverts Burke's gender categories by giving a "manly definition" to her words in the *Rights of Men* (1989d, 7). This text can be interpreted as a radical struggle for power in language. Her literary strategy confuses gender identities and thus transcends the literary boundaries that exclude

women from political writing. She is not simply a woman writing behind the mask of anonymity. Wollstonecraft takes on the gendered mantle of political authority, becoming the voice of reason, and thereby confounding Burke's construction of female subservience and silence by loudly addressing her reading audience as a man.[21]

The anonymous publication of the *Rights of Men* requires us to recognize the troubled relationship between sex and significance in the history of political discourse and becomes an important departure for feminist political theory. Ultimately, the fundamental problem of political discourse is a politics that denies women a language to express visions of self. Historically, women have not been represented in the stories of the democratic struggle for power, or represented in the institutional seats of democratic governments. Misrepresentation and underrepresentation are inherently related, interacting to create a political discourse that materially and spiritually limits women's lives.

I suggest that the *Rights of Men* is a product of double vision. Wollstonecraft masters the illusion of masculine authority through anonymity and thus enters the patriarchal discourse of political thought. Yet she fractures the philosophical looking-glass by consciously turning gendered language upon itself, distorting the terms and markers of sexual difference. Her appeals to manly authority are used to legitimate an argument that calls into question the meaning of human rights. Her discursive strategy plays on gender uncertainty: Who is the author of the *Rights of Men?* Certainly within the discursive context of the late eighteenth century, the gender identity of this anonymous author would prove to be of enormous importance to the debate about political rights. For the anonymous defender of the rights of men became the public spokesperson for the rights of women.

In Wollstonecraft's own lifetime, her work opened up a debate about the social expectations and political exclusions that restrict women's public participation. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* represents a first and necessary step in the development of a political theory that could encompass new and diverse models of female citizenship.

A Vindication of the Rights of Men was so successful that merely a month after the publication of the first anonymous edition, a second edition was issued revealing the author to be Mary Wollstonecraft. Immediately following the publication of the second edition of this controversial text, a reviewer for the conservative monthly the *Gentlemen's Magazine* wrote,

"We should be sorry to raise a horse-laugh against a fair lady; but we were always taught to suppose that the rights of women were the proper theme of the female sex" ("A Vindication" 1791, 151).[22] The reviewer raises the critical question of how a woman could write a defense of the rights of man? Women simply do not write about rights. If a woman should be rash enough to pen a treatise about the rights of mankind, she must restrict herself to the rights of women, which are mockingly referred to as the "proper theme of the female sex."

Ironically, the reviewer goes further to suggest that the strongly worded text is the product of a man masquerading as a woman, given that the author attempts to defend the rights of men against the "demon of property." By writing about property and class, Wollstonecraft had certainly crossed the boundaries of both gender and genre. Joanna Russ (1983) comments in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, that these transgressions by a woman author often provoke reactions of denial or dismissal. "What to do when a woman has written something? The first line of defense is to deny that she wrote it. Since women cannot write, someone else (a man) must have written it" (20). Thus, the reviewer for the *Gentlemen's Magazine* asserts in the concluding paragraph of his lengthy analysis of the *Rights of Men:*

> Mrs. W., if she be a real and not a fictitious lady, is engaged in a service wherein the great leaders have run themselves aground. Malcontents, who have nothing to lose, may lend their names, and offer their hands, for any mischief. But reflecting minds will see through their stale and shameful tricks and not involve themselves in the ruin of their country. Why will not these devotees of reason give an example of the dispossession of the demon of Property, by dividing their property (if they have any) into aliquot parts between their children and the first beggars who present themselves to ask alms of them? Every experimental philosopher should first try the experiments on himself before he electrifies a whole kingdom. ("A Vindication" 1791, 154)

This review is significant because it demonstrates a key assumption about the relationship of women to political writing in the late eighteenth century: that the analysis and debate of political rights is restricted to men.

Wollstonecraft argues in the *Rights of Woman* that "[T]he rights of

humanity have been thus confined to the male line from Adam downwards" (1989e, 157). Political writing and political rights have been the precious patrimony of the sons of liberty. The importance of this hereditary connection cannot be overestimated. The poverty of philosophy, in this case meaning women's absence from the eighteenth-century discourse on human rights, is inherently related to the material conditions of women's lives. The political consequence for women in primogeniture and patriarchy is a form of powerlessness in which women are often treated as property themselves. In the *Rights of Men* Wollstonecraft asserts "Security of Property! Behold, in a few words, the definition of English Liberty" (1989d, 14). She is well aware that at the end of the eighteenth century, English women were among the least secure and the least free of the king's subjects. The real Mrs. W., as an unmarried woman in George III's England, had property only in her name, her hand, and her reflecting mind. Indeed, as a woman without property, it is questionable whether she is at liberty to comment about the political rights of her countrymen. Mary Wollstonecraft is simply one of the many disinherited daughters of freedom's founding fathers.[23]

It is evident from the confusion of the gentleman reviewer of the *Gentlemen's Magazine* that the *Rights of Men* did much to confound the distinction of sex in political writing.[24] But Wollstonecraft's subsequent text, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, did even more to electrify a whole kingdom of political rights. As a philosopher, Mary Wollstonecraft was certainly the subject of her own experimentation, and her theory reflects the development of a new form of political subjectivity. Most important, the citizen who emerges from her texts is the embodiment of another woman's political thought and experience. She is not a "Clarissa or Sophie" (1989b, 5). She is a citizen in her own right, not merely a reflection of her father or husband. Wollstonecraft claims a radical subjectivity for women by arguing against the patriarchal code created by Blackstone in the seventeenth century—which categorized women as dead in a civil sense upon marriage. She explores the terrain between the public and private, declaring that the designated spheres cannot contain the historical experience of women's lives. The publication in 1792 of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* signals a pivotal moment in the creation of Wollstonecraft's political theory.

Mary Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* contests the discourse of sexual difference, and creates a political theory that moves women from silent

objects to speaking subjects. She disputes the natural origin as well as the social significance of sex differences among men and women in the *Rights of Woman.* Her analysis confronts the textualization of woman's nature within eighteenth-century writing ranging from polemics to novels. Her task has largely been dictated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who ambiguously states in *Emile; or, On Education* that "woman is man" in all things but sex (1979, 357).[25] He uses the category of sex to determine both the physical and behavioral traits of the individual. Gender becomes the demarcation by which the political community is divided and ruled according to sex rules. Wollstonecraft argues that Rousseau's complex theorizing about sexual difference in *Emile,* and in his earlier work, *Julie; or, the New Héloïse,* belies his simple reductionism, which conflates the minor physical differences between anatomically similar beings, with the major social differences that structure our understanding of both our common bodies and different destinies.

No philosopher did more to reinvent the nature of both sexes than Rousseau. If the *Rights of Men* is Wollstonecraft's reply to Burke's attempt to locate sexual distinctions in the ancient constitution, the *Rights of Woman* is Wollstonecraft's response to the tutor Jean-Jacques's claim to draw the image of Sophie from nature. Rousseau advocates sexually differentiated education on the basis that men and women have opposing but complementary natures. Wollstonecraft argues that Emile and Sophie share the same rational nature and thus transposes the founding principles of Rousseau's pedagogy to create a model of female education that empowers women. She asserts that Sophie is the product of lust rather than logic. "He did not go back to nature, or his ruling appetite disturbed the operations of reason, else he would not have drawn these crude inferences" (1989e, 151).

In the *Rights of Woman,* Wollstonecraft attempts to disentangle the female body from the restrictive clothing of a political system of subjection and a culture of control. Her effort is much the same as Rousseau's attempt to free the infant Emile from the swaddling fabric that deforms the body over time. She removes layer after layer of social cloth and studies the texture of this weave that throughout history has so tightly bound and restricted women's physical and psychic independence. Wollstonecraft argues that the textual representations of female nature binds femininity to difference. Woman born free, is everywhere enchained by a discourse that posits the equality of all men in reason while prescribing the slavery of all women to exploitation.[26]

Wollstonecraft begins her analysis with the thesis that men and women share a rational nature derived from God. She claims that except for physical strength, all distinctions between the sexes are socially constructed. Wollstonecraft's project entails the critical and comparative examination of the construction of sexual difference in treatises by Rousseau, the conduct books of Dr. Fordyce and Dr. Gregory, and in various eighteenth-century novels. "As these volumes are so frequently put into the hands of young people . . . and enervate the understanding of many of my fellow creatures . . . I could not pass them silently over" (1989e, 166). She protests that these books provide females with an education that is "worse than Egyptian bondage" (1989e, 187).[27] Wollstonecraft is particularly troubled that these texts reward female servility in the guise of feminine sensibility, and that the male authors of these tracts reify the opposition of female sensibility to human rationality.

Wollstonecraft attacks the argument that women's biology essentially limits women's capacity for reason and moral judgment, contending that differences ascribed to sex, can often be traced to the self-interests of male writers in perpetuating a system of sexual subjugation.

> Hapless woman! what can be expected from thee when the beings on whom thou art said to depend for reason and support, have all an interest in deceiving thee? This is the root of the evil that has shed a corroding mildew on all thy virtues; and blighting in the bud thy opening faculties, has rendered thee the weak thing thou art! It is this separate interest—this insidious state of warfare, that undermines morality, and divides mankind! (1989e, 166)

Wollstonecraft argues that woman's access to universal truth must not be mediated by man. Male authors have perpetuated the myth that women's rationality is dependent upon male desire. Wollstonecraft returns to the story of Abelard and Héloïse to suggest that male desire will always interfere with the transfer of reason. She seeks to break the dependence of women on men by arguing that reason common to both sexes should be the guide for female behavior. "[I] throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty. For man and woman, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same" (1989e, 120). For each sex, truth must be the foundation of

judgment. She asserts, " 'Educate women like men', says Rousseau, 'and the more they resemble our sex the less power they will have over us.' This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves" (1989e, 131). Wollstonecraft argues that rational women have the power to govern themselves. She offers women the promise of democratic revolution; that as reasonable beings they can be their own legislators, answering to no laws except the ones they create for themselves through reason. Thus, women can take part in the grand Enlightenment project of human perfectibility, benefiting their families and their fellow citizens. When women are educated to become the rational companions of men, the society of the sexes will enter a new harmonious era of equality.

Mary Wollstonecraft's analysis within the *Rights of Woman*, much as her earlier reply to Burke, confounds the distinctions of sex by contesting the discourse of natural difference. She complicates the multiple readings of "nature" that have represented women as irrational and dependent beings. She thoroughly dismisses the "fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists" (1989e, 120). Angered by these images of fragile femininity, she remarks, "I must relieve myself by drawing a different picture" (1989e, 119). Wollstonecraft turns the rhetoric of natural attribute and aptitude upon the male authors themselves to emasculate their arguments about sexual difference and blur the boundaries between nature and art. She comments on Dr. Gregory's *Legacy to Daughters*, "Fondness of dress, he asserts, is natural to them. I am unable to comprehend what either he or Rousseau mean, when they frequently use this indefinite term" (1989e, 97). It is Wollstonecraft's failure to comprehend definite differences between men and women that allows her to succeed in introducing the ambiguity necessary to undermine the naturalness of difference claims. She notes that aristocratic gentlemen often display an inordinate attention to finery and personal costume. Wollstonecraft herself often labeled these actions "effeminate," but certainly if men of rank can dress the dandy they are following the dictates of custom not nature. Wollstonecraft's intellectual cross-dressing disrupts political discourse, and enables her to create and champion a new understanding of political rights and citizenship.

Mary Wollstonecraft grounds her political theory in the claim that women, like men, are gifted by God with the power of reason, and as rational beings their first duty is to themselves. She defends her sex, claiming that barred from the institutions of learning, they have been

subjected to a "slavery which chains the very soul of woman, keeping her forever under the bondage of ignorance" (1989e, 215).[28] In the struggle for mastery she claims that men have been motivated by their own desire to bind women ever tighter to the body, forsaking the mind. "Man, taking her body, the mind is left to rust; so that while physical love enervates man, as being his favorite recreation, he will endeavour to enslave women" (1989e, 145). But Wollstonecraft's political theory aims at creating autonomous women who can act as helpmates by choice, not playmates by chance. She boldly asserts that the primary goal of a woman's education is to enable her to fulfill the duties she has to herself. "[T]he most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits as will render it independent" (1989e, 90). It is this independence and strength that transforms the sensual and silent objects of male desire into thinking and speaking subjects of feminist politics.

Wollstonecraft demands autonomy and independent thought for women. She radically challenges the discourse of political theory by uniting femininity and rationality, creating what I would call the political theory of the thinking woman. The perfect education for women is an education that allows the woman to provide for herself intellectually and spiritually. "The being who discharges the duties of its station is independent; and, speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother" (1989e, 216).[29] She extends the claims of Enlightenment humanism to women and begins a debate about the relationship of sex to citizenship that challenges male authors' representations of women in writing and male representatives of women in political and economic life. Wollstonecraft's "wild wish," to confound the "distinction of sex in society," gives rise to the even more ambitious call for women to represent themselves in government (1989e, 217).

Mary Wollstonecraft's theory and discursive strategy in both *Vindications* are founded on a humanist appeal to reason that denies sexual difference. Most important, she refuses to concede reason to men. In doing so her own femininity was openly questioned.[30] This thinking woman answers the "exclamations against masculine women" by arguing that if the virtues that make us human are defined as manly, she would wish that

woman "may every day grow more and more masculine" (1989e, 74). Recently, Joan Landes has accused Wollstonecraft of male identification and mimicry in the *Rights of Woman* (1988, 131): "She shares the implicitly masculine values of the bourgeois public sphere, worrying over woman's willful, artificial, and unnatural control over language. Repudiating the female position, she orients herself almost exclusively toward the male logos" (135).[31] The only position that Wollstonecraft repudiates is that of woman as silent victim. I would argue that a comparison of the *Rights of Men* and the *Rights of Woman* complicates the relationship of women to language. Landes comments on the "active textualization of life" in the late eighteenth century, an era in which both sexes modeled their behavior upon the suggestions of a treatise or novel (1988, 65). Wollstonecraft's efforts to confound the distinctions of sex within writing makes problematic Landes's characterization of Wollstonecraft as a female writer seduced and co-opted by the gendered categories of eighteenth century discourse. A study of Wollstonecraft's writings indicates that the textualization of life, which Landes evokes, was not totalizing. The author of the *Rights of Woman* did not reflect the graces of Rousseau's Sophie, securing a space to exist by acquiescing to the will of the stronger. Wollstonecraft struggled to distance herself far enough outside of republican discourse to assert that her life was not reflected in these texts.

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* provide the basis for a radical examination of the relationship between theory and practice, revealing the contradictions between gender and authority. The woman author argues that reason is not gendered, yet she continually returns to gendered language to support her argument. These texts demonstrate the constraints of gender and genre that Wollstonecraft encountered upon entering the conversation of eighteenth-century political theory. Very significant, they also highlight possible strategies for subverting gender categories through a critical examination of the central role that gender plays in political thought. Wollstonecraft at once opposes and participates in a debate in which women have been absent as authors as well as citizens. She attempts to create a literary space to expound her theory of political rights by confounding the distinctions of sex in discourse. Her need to transcend the limitations of gender speaks to the genre boundaries that have silenced women writers. Wollstonecraft transforms the discourse of political theory as a woman writing about the political rights of women.

Ultimately, her *Vindications* explode eighteenth-century social constructions of authority and femininity. Mary Wollstonecraft's "wild wish" and the intellectual efforts it provoked, continue to have enormous implications for women's political writing as well as women's political rights.

Notes

1. Wollstonecraft distinguishes biological sex from the system of gender representation and practice of the late eighteenth century. She "confounds" the social distinctions of sex in two ways. First, she uses gendered language and the guise of anonymity to conceal her sex as an author. Second, she deconstructs the textual representations of women in selected polemics and conduct books to reveal the gender biases behind the portraits of femininity created by male authors. Thus she disputes the natural origin of sexual difference.

2. Linda Zerilli (1991) recently discussed the implications of the exclusion of women from the discourse of political theory. Wollstonecraft's writings suggest that women were not entirely absent from the debates of their age. What is problematic is that the contributions of these "sisters" have not been included by the "brothers" in forming the canon that educates future generations.

3. Wollstonecraft writes that the power of reason "has not only been denied to women, but writers have insisted that it is inconsistent, with a few exceptions, with their sexual character" (1989e, 123).

4. William Godwin (1987) claims that Wollstonecraft did not want to be known as an author. "At the commencement of her literary career, she is said to have conceived a vehement aversion to being regarded, by her ordinary acquaintance in the character of an author, and to have employed some precautions to prevent its occurrence" (226). Mary Poovey (1984) examines the constraint of public opinion on women's writing in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, her daughter, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen.

5. Wollstonecraft scholar and biographer Ralph Wardle viewed the *Rights of Men* as a trespass. He repeatedly remarks on the shortcomings of the text, arguing that these failures arise from Wollstonecraft's unsuitability as a woman for the task of writing political theory. Wardle criticizes Wollstonecraft for "abusing Burke," but apologetically explains away her rhetorical attacks as the result of her limited knowledge of politics. "Probably Mary resorted to such tactics when she was unsure of herself. She must have realized that she had, after all, nothing new to say about the theories on which governments are based" (1966, 117). I strongly disagree with Wardle's assessment that Wollstonecraft "had probably not studied the authorities on the subject," and his characterization of her text as the product of "scraps" of overheard conversations (1966, 118). The anonymous Wollstonecraft draws her analysis from the works of Plato, Machiavelli, Locke, and Rousseau in a systematic manner that belies Wardle's thesis about the random nature of her thoughts. Wollstonecraft's innovative attempt to use these philosophical fathers to dispute patriarchal politics truly displays her intellectual engagement with political theory. Mary Poovey (1984) notes that the *Rights of Men*, as a "political disquisition," represents a radical departure for a woman author. "Wollstonecraft's choice of a project, then, signals her determination to transcend the limitations she felt her sex had already imposed on her. In this first expression of her professional self, Wollstonecraft actually aspires to be a man, for she suspects that the shortest way to success and equality is to join the cultural myth-makers, to hide what seemed to her a fatal female flaw beneath the

mask of male discourse" (57). My reading of the text is not that Wollstonecraft wants to be a man, but that she desires a form of authority that has been historically opposed to femininity.

6. For many eighteenth-century authors, both men and women, anonymity provided the opportunity for publication without public knowledge of the author's identity. It has been frequently noted that anonymity was of greater importance for women authors because it protected them and their work from the ridicule that popularly greeted women writers. In the early part of her career, Mary Wollstonecraft often wrote anonymously. Moira Ferguson (1983) investigates the mystery man "Mr. Cresswick" whose name appears on the title page of Wollstonecraft's work *The Female Reader*.

7. Cora Kaplan (1986) argues that Wollstonecraft's literary strategy in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* opposes reason to sentiment and thus represses female sexuality (37). Mary Jacobus also offers a provocative discussion of the implications of Wollstonecraft's desire to ground the argument in the *Rights of Woman* upon "things" and not "words" (1986, 34).

8. Wollstonecraft's call to rebellion incites women to reform themselves and to resist the dogma of paternalism. "It is time to effect a revolution in female manners—time to restore their lost dignity—and make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world. It is time to separate morals from local manners. —If men be demi-gods why let us serve them!" (1989e, 114).

9. In her first text, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1989c), Wollstonecraft devotes a chapter to the "Unfortunate Situation of Girls Fashionably Educated and Left Without a Fortune." It is here that she first confronts the irrationality of the exclusion of reasonable beings from everyday interaction with the world because of their sex and class.

10. These lessons were not lost on Wollstonecraft. She chastised Burke's valorizing of beauty in the place of moral virtue arguing that his message masks his method of securing female subservience. She suggests that the female readers of Burke's *Sublime and Beautiful* may have been "convinced . . . that *littleness* and *weakness* are the very essense [*sic*] of beauty; and that the Supreme Being, in giving women beauty in the most supereminent degree, seemed to command them, by the powerful voice of Nature, not to cultivate the moral virtues that might chance to excite respect, and interefere [*sic*] with the pleasing sensations they were created to inspire" (1989e, 45). Wollstonecraft clearly articulates a vision of rational women formed for futurity in opposition to Burke's "lisping creatures" made only for love.

11. Wollstonecraft favorably reviewed Dr. Price's "Discourse on the Love of Our Country" in the December 1789 volume of the *Analytical Review*. Here, eleven months before she penned her reply to Burke, Wollstonecraft already opposes the "unequivocal language" of the heart that champions the rights of men to the vain, "sophistical arguments" that deny these "obvious truths" (*Analytical Review* 7 [1989]: 185). In the *Rights of Men*, she would accuse Burke of no more.

12. Terry Castle (1986) writes in her study of the masquerade that "at the deepest level the masquerade's work was that of deinstitutionalization. Eighteenth century English culture was founded on a set of institutionalized oppositions: European and Oriental, masculine and feminine, human and animal, natural and supernatural. . . . At the masquerade, however, counterposed institutions everywhere collapsed into one another, as did ideological categories: masculinity into femininity, 'Englishness' into exoticism, humanity into bestiality. Without the principle of opposition, the ordering principle of civilization itself, the classification of entities became impossible" (78).

13. Burke (1984) continues, "As they have inverted the order of all things, the gallery, [*sic*] is in the place of the house" (161).

14. Virginia Sapiro (1992) argues that Burke effectively employs the language of the sublime to evoke his powerful reaction to the class-mixing and gender-bending of the French Revolution. "Burke relayed his moral and political message as a nightmare teller would: not

merely through a chronological story or a logical argument but by invoking the horror of it all through tone and imagery" (189).

15. For Burke (1984), democratic philosophy threatens to disembody the institutions of French society by overturning the relationships between the sexes. Marie Antoinette is more than a monarch; she is the symbol of patriarchal order and patriotic loyalty. Burke states, "To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely" (172). Wollstonecraft throws Burke's argument off its ideological axis by portraying the queen as vulgar. Gary Kelly (1992) correctly argues that both authors use gender as a template by which to measure the progress of a nation. "In both Burke and Wollstonecraft the condition of women represents the values of an entire society and culture" (95). In the later *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft reveals the full extent of her philosophical differences with Burke, by breaking the gender template in order to create new forms of citizenship that can embody women as political subjects.

16. Wollstonecraft would later chronicle the events surrounding the revolution as a witness to the Terror in Robespierre's Paris in 1794. She wrote of the meaning of the fall of the Bastille. "This was a nation saved by the almost incredible exertion of an indignant people; who felt, for the first time, that they were sovereign, and that their power was commensurate with their will. This was certainly a splendid example, to prove, that nothing can resist a people determined to live free; and then it appeared clear, that the freedom of France did not depend on a few men, whatever might be their virtues or abilities, but alone in the will of the nation" (1989a, 100).

17. Isaac Kramnick (1990) details the critical importance of dissenting communities such as Newington Green to the struggle for political rights (209–10).

18. Sapiro (1992) claims that Wollstonecraft plays with Burke's representation of women and suggests in the above quote that "She contrasted his nightmare women with his dream women: the queen, whom he envisioned as immaculate beauty and domesticity. Wollstonecraft noted that this woman, too, had a real existence different from his portrayal" (203).

19. Wollstonecraft (1989d) denounces the romantic valorization of women noting that "such homage vitiates them, prevents them from endeavouring to obtain solid personal merit; and in short, makes those beings vain inconsiderate dolls, who ought to be prudent mothers and useful members of society" (25). Wollstonecraft's analysis provides a vivid contrast to Rousseau's (1979) commentary on girls and their toys, in which he states that the little girl "awaits the moment when she will be her own doll" (367). Thus we see the beginnings of the theoretical argument of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication*. Rational women should be the helpmeets not the playthings of men.

20. Virginia Woolf (1957) claims, "Anon . . . was a woman" (51). For many Wollstonecraft scholars the anonymous first edition of the *Rights of Men* has gone with little or no notice. Ralph Wardle (1966) comments in passing that several contemporary reviews of the controversial text remarked on the fact that the author was a female when Wollstonecraft's identity was revealed with the publication of the second edition. Virginia Sapiro (1992) echoes the suggestion of the reviewer from the *Critical Review* that Wollstonecraft had "disguised herself as a man" within her work. Sapiro claims that the "disguise" is not a matter of anonymity but of a woman authoring political theory (24). Gary Kelly's (1992) skillful rhetorical analysis of Wollstonecraft's text, curiously discounts her anonymity. He remarks that for "tactical reasons" Wollstonecraft "uses masculine pronouns throughout, nowhere indicating that she is a woman or that the masculine gender assumed for humanity by such language is an issue for her" (90). But this logic seems to refute Kelly's own discussion of the limitations of gender and genre in political discourse. Indeed, Kelly notes that Wollstonecraft's name was not her only addition to the second edition of the *Rights of Men*. Wollstonecraft revised her concluding paragraph to include a sentence in which she again credits the rights

of men to a benevolent God. Kelly (1992) writes, "As a 'mere' woman author writing on politics she had need to invoke divine validation" (99–100).

21. Wollstonecraft wrote to her sister Everina that she had attended a masquerade ball in Dublin while she was a governess within the household of Lord and Lady Kingsborough. She accompanied Lady Kingsborough and an acquaintance to the ball dressed in a domino. Terry Castle (1986) notes that the domino was a full body covering that, when worn with a mask, entirely disguised the sex of the partygoer (59). This incident is especially intriguing because Wollstonecraft (1979) claimed to act as an "interpreter" for the other young woman of the party, who in taking on the garb of a woodland sprite, could not converse with others outside of the state of nature (Letter to Everina Wollstonecraft, dated 1788).

22. I am fascinated by the threat of the "horse laugh." Wollstonecraft (1989e) asserts in the opening paragraph of the *Rights of Men*, "Reverencing the rights of humanity, I shall dare to assert them; not intimidated by the horse laugh that you have raised" (7). The reviewer apologizes for laughing at a lady but is overcome by the joke of a woman claiming to defend the rights of gentlemen like himself. It appears that laughter has often ended discussions about women's role within the political community. Plato tells us in Book V of the *Republic* that Socrates heard the roar of laughter when he proposed that both women and men be educated for leadership of the just republic. Allan Bloom, who dismissed feminist teachings within academe as a farce in his best-selling book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, wrote in his interpretive essay of *The Republic of Plato* that "Book V is preposterous, and Socrates expects it to be ridiculed. It provokes both laughter and rage in its contempt for convention and nature, in its wounding of all the dearest sensibilities of masculine pride and shame, the family, and statesmanship and the city" (1968, 380). Bloom's linkage of laughter and rage suggests that for women to share in the good society men will have to sacrifice much of what they value of the well-lived life. Feminist scholars know only too well that there is nothing funny about the historical struggle of women for an independent and equitable civil existence.

23. Abigail Adams (1972) echoed Wollstonecraft when she too denounced the "stale and shameful" tricks of Revolutionary men who denied women their individual freedoms in the newly constituted American democracy.

24. It is interesting to note that once the question of whether Mrs. W. was a "real or fictitious lady" was resolved, perhaps by the publication the following year of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's work was no longer critically examined within the pages of the *Gentlemen's Magazine*. Godwin (1987) tells us that the "applause" she received for the *Rights of Men* encouraged her to write her second *Vindication* (230). In celebrating the bicentennial of the *Rights of Woman* we should also question why her earlier *Vindication* has been forgotten. Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* predated Thomas Paine's famous polemic, the *Rights of Man*. It had a significant impact on the radical community of which they were both controversial members.

25. "In everything not connected with sex, woman is man. She has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed in the same way; its parts are the same; the one functions as does the other; the form is similar; and in whatever respect one considers them, the difference between them is only one of more or less. In everything connected with sex, woman and man are in every respect related and in every respect different" (Rousseau 1979, 357). Ultimately the political project for Rousseau in forming his social contract was to assert that sexual difference was a matter of *more* not less. Sexual difference became the foundation for completely distinct social and political roles for men and women within the polity. As the tale of Rousseau's Sophie attests, even if a woman has the same needs and faculties as man, her position as woman within the political community will greatly proscribe her ability to use her faculties to meet her needs.

26. Carole Pateman powerfully exposes this contradiction within social contract theory in *The Sexual Contract* (1988).

27. Wollstonecraft decried the weak and foolish representations of femininity in the novels that often provided the poor substitute for education in the life of the eighteenth-century female reader. The political consequences these representations have had upon the relationship of women to the state as well as to philosophy were discussed by another feminist theorist, Simone de Beauvoir (1988): "Women are conditioned, let me repeat it, not only by the education which they receive directly from their parents and teachers, but also by what they read, by the myths communicated to them through the books they read—including those written by women—they are conditioned by the traditional image of women, and to break from this mould is something which they find very difficult indeed" (29).

28. In a subsequent paragraph, Wollstonecraft (1989e) links the slavery of women to notions of female propriety. "[F]or Rousseau, and a numerous list of male writers, insist that she should all her life be subjected to a severe restraint, that of propriety. Why subject her to propriety—blind propriety, if she be capable of acting from a nobler spring, if she be an heir of immortality? Is sugar to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man? Is not this indirectly to deny women reason? for a gift is a mockery, if it is unfit for use" (215).

29. I believe that it is important to stress the radical nature of Wollstonecraft's ordering of a woman's civic duties. Many readings of the *Rights of Woman* collapse the primary duties that Wollstonecraft leaves undefined as the duties a woman has to herself as a rational adult with the duties a woman has to her children as a mother. Thus Wollstonecraft the advocate of woman's independence becomes the champion of "Republican Motherhood." Wollstonecraft challenged functionalist arguments that conflate all women with mothers in order to claim a new form of political subjectivity for women. She understood the need for a political theory that could encompass the many relationships that women have with family and community while privileging individual autonomy in relation to the state.

30. In the late eighteenth century, femininity was so opposed to rationality that a woman who argued from reason risked losing her humanity entirely. Wollstonecraft became for Horace Walpole a ferocious beast; he famously described her as a "Hyena in petticoats." The Reverend Richard Polwhele went so far as to claim that Wollstonecraft represented a new being, the "unsex'd woman." It is interesting to note that after two centuries of commentary, the distinctions of sex, which she so fervently wished to confound, are still the basis on which her work is often evaluated. Wollstonecraft's radical approach to sexual difference in discourse has led one writer to claim that the *Rights of Woman* was written for men; see Anca Vlasopolos (1980: 462–71).

31. I have argued in this essay that Wollstonecraft was fundamentally concerned with, in Landes's (1988) terms, the "willful, artificial and unnatural control" of *men*, not *women*, over language and political discourse (135). Wollstonecraft repeatedly condemns the self-interested claims of male poets and philosophers, who in representing the artificial mannerism of femininity as natural, render women irrational weaklings. Indeed, it is Wollstonecraft's subject position as a woman that leads her to repudiate the male logos (male discourse) and is at the heart of her reply to Burke as well as at the center of her analysis of Rousseau.

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6

Mary Wollstonecraft and "The Body Politic"

Carol H. Poston

Almost any reader of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* would agree that its language about sexuality is problematic. When I teach the text to students new to the study of Wollstonecraft, I find people of both genders easily put off by the tone of harshness against men, but also struck by a stridency and lack of sympathy toward women. In addition they often puzzle over the insistent voice that limits the time span of sexual passion within marriage. Finally, they find it hard to overlook Wollstonecraft's fastidiousness about (and perhaps disgust toward) female bodies.

I thank the many people who have given me advice about this project, especially Maire Mullins, Wendy Gunther-Canada, and Kathleen Alaimo who read early drafts of this manuscript. I also benefited enormously by reading versions of it before the Humanities Forum at Saint Xavier University and at the Mary Wollstonecraft Symposium sponsored by DePauw University in 1993, after which Virginia Sapiro, Penny Weiss, Nancy Stetson and I sat in my bed-and-breakfast turret, eating cookies, sipping Scotch, and talking over all these issues into the night. I thank Maria Falco for organizing that conference and her untiring efforts on behalf of Wollstonecraft scholarship. Finally, I thank Larry Poston for his patience in listening to me obsess about Wollstonecraft all these years and for being the best critic of my prose.

My students are not alone. There is widespread opinion that Mary Wollstonecraft's attitudes toward sexuality were demeaning to other women and dishonest to herself. Nina Auerbach (1978) says that Wollstonecraft's use of animalian terms to describe women shows a disgust for female bodies. According to Cora Kaplan (1983) in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft "turned against feeling, which is seen as reactionary and regressive, almost counter-revolutionary" and wants to deny sexuality and pleasure to women because they are "narcotic inducements to a life of lubricious slavery" (18). Mary Poovey (1984) theorizes that it was because Wollstonecraft was a woman of such sexual passion that she denied it to herself and others: because of the constraints of the time, she was unable to write openly about her sexuality and must, instead, "disarm desire." Internalizing "the proper lady" constructed by a culture that repressed female sexuality, Wollstonecraft used language to veil her own desire; her rhetoric served as much to calm her own emotions as to sway any external audience (Poovey 1984, 66).

In the past when my students noted Wollstonecraft's language, often with amazement and alarm, I have cited Poovey's elegant reasoning, for I think it does least violence to Wollstonecraft. But I have not completely persuaded myself. My unease comes from an inexplicable place. I only know that when I first picked up the *Vindication* nearly twenty-five years ago I heard a voice that I recognized: it was a voice of a survivor of pain and hurt who refused to be victimized any longer. It was, in fact, a voice very like my own. Although I did not completely realize it at the time, it was my own experience of an abusive childhood that had led me also to speak out in the women's movement of the sixties and seventies. I decided to become politically active to work for the abolition of the structures of authority that could permit such abuse. I had located myself inside what Theresa de Lauretis (1986) calls "a political-personal strategy of survival and resistance that is also, at the same time, a critical practice *and* a mode of knowledge" (9). It is for that reason I have always felt such a keen appreciation for Wollstonecraft: her ability to translate the personal into the political, of course, but also her very survival in the face of abuse and hurt. In Ruth Benedict's words, Wollstonecraft was a woman who "*had* saved her soul alive" and she served me—and generations of women before me—as a pioneer and a guide (Wexler 1988, 519).

It was only when I wrote a book about adult survivors of childhood

sexual abuse (Poston and Lison 1989) that I began to understand this shared voice. Because of a whole new attitude in America toward domestic violence and abuse, the last decade has provided several new discourses from fields such as psychology, sociology, and women's studies to explain adult behaviors that are likely to result from early childhood abuse. Here at last was terminology and explanation for the anger and contradiction that lie deep in the text of not just *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* but her other works as well.

I believe that Wollstonecraft is speaking as the adult survival of abuse, not necessarily sexual (although that is quite possible) but certainly emotional and physical. Childhood abuse is the text underlying the language that can seem so confusing or critical to readers who perhaps have not themselves been abused as children. Unlike Mary Poovey, I see in Mary Wollstonecraft's rhetoric what we now know to be the adult effects of that abuse. Wollstonecraft is not denying sexuality and desire: she sees that sexuality is a completely male construct, and neither female desire nor the female body exists for her.

The last dozen years or so have given us both new awareness of and new models to describe the effect of childhood violence upon the mature adult. Formerly hidden topics such as incest are coming slowly out of the shadows. It had been taught as an article of faith for decades in the academic establishment, for example, that incest is a universal taboo. Recent studies show no such thing. In pioneering studies in the 1980s Judith Herman and Diana Russell found a startling prevalence of intra-familial abuse (Herman 1981 and Russell 1986) protected by a shield of shame and secrecy. More recently Christine Courtois (1988) cites the striking numbers that possibly as many as one out of five women (and one out of ten boys) has had an experience of sexual abuse before the age of eighteen, and that "the bulk of child sexual abuse is perpetrated either by a family member or by someone known to the child. Females are more likely to be abused within the family" (5). The best estimates now are that the average age for such abuse is age eight, that the abuse lasts on the average two years, and that abusive acts occur at least weekly (Poston and Lison 1989, 36).

Furthermore, although most professional research on incest reflects studies of white middle-class women, the statistical data seems to be collected from public welfare data—a contradiction not lost on Janet Liebman Jacobs, who, along with others, has begun to examine different

sample populations carefully to see whether the numbers are consistent across the board (Jacobs 1993). All available literature at this time, however, seems to indicate that a high rate of incest is common to all human groups: all that is taboo about incest is *talking* about incest. And we have no reason to believe that what we now consider to be violence against children—emotional, physical, and sexual violence—is a recent development. If in our own time in twentieth-century America one in four or five women has experienced incest before age eighteen, we should not have difficulty envisioning comparable numbers in eighteenth-century England where knowledge of the effects of alcohol abuse, of the sexual danger in crowded living conditions, and social and legal prohibitions against abusing women were significantly less advanced than in our own time.

Recent feminist scholarship investigating the development of the female self has refocused attention on the family, more specifically on the relationship of the mother to the female child. Nancy Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) has toppled the primacy of the Freudian notions of the self. "Object-relations" psychology says that because the female child is closer to the nurturing mother, she has less differentiation to accomplish than the male infant and consequently grows up empathically and relationally different than the male. Work by Carol Gilligan and others brings up new questions about the development of the female self in relation to others (Gilligan, Rogers, and Tolman 1991). The cutting edge of this work is surely the exploration of the lifelong effect of a violent childhood upon the developing female child. Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) examines clinically the lifelong effect of trauma, whether of war or the long-term violence of childhood abuse. Janet Liebman Jacobs is beginning to construct a paradigm that locates the developing female self inside the family structure of a violent father and nonempathic mother; the mother-daughter relationship in such a setting will probably not manifest itself as Chodorow has described it. The "empathic female self"—that giving and self-abnegating personality so well known to clinicians who treat incest survivors—will likely prove to be the product of the family paradigm of perpetrating father and passive mother (Jacobs 1993).

Quite aside from the specific long-term trauma symptoms perhaps caused by an abusive childhood, feminist critics have been theorizing the "absence" of a female body and asserting that the reign of phallic sexuality has robbed women of their own female desire and sexuality.

The French writers and critics Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray claim that because there is no female sexuality, we must learn "to write the female body" in order to reclaim our sexual selves. The symbolic order is phallologocentric and woman cannot speak for herself in that language: "Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. . . . Woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's; woman's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks" (Irigaray 1985, 25).

This phallocentrism was well known to Wollstonecraft: in the law of coverture a married woman had no legal self once she married; there was only one legal person, and that was the husband. Nor, according to Rousseau, did woman have a moral self, for a married couple form one moral unit, and that unit is the husband. Surely a mind such as Wollstonecraft's could perceive that there was but one sexual body, that of the male. I believe that Mary Wollstonecraft did just that: she presciently perceived that in this male-lettered world women were sexual objects, not sexual subjects. The female self as she experienced it and saw it lived was constructed by males for the use of males. And we can read this text understanding that female desire and female bodies did not exist for her. Finally, Wollstonecraft's subsequent views of political power or of "political virtue," were shaped by her own childhood where issues of power, authority, and control were distorted beyond measure (Sapiro 1992). While her radical politics as an adult surely shaped her thinking, they were at least in part a product of having been a "female resister" in childhood. I hope to trace the development of the female resister here, beginning with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* tracing some of the adult effects of her childhood trauma in the letters, then watching the voice come to consciousness in the margins of *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria.* Finally, her triumph came in finding a voice that resisted that political reality, even though her own political reality is located in the margins of the text.

Sexuality, the acting out of sexual passion and the behavior associated with the sexualized body, is, I believe, gendered male in the entire *Vindication.* By the time of *Maria,* Wollstonecraft had begun to perceive that women truly are cyphers. Women are the objects, men the actors or subjects in this exchange. The only safety a woman has is to refuse to engage in the relationship on the phallic terms it seems to require. If a

woman does co-operate with this phallic sexuality she is weak, delicate, and doomed to be destroyed: "I cannot discover why, unless they are mortal, females should always be degraded by being subservient to love or lust" (*VROW* 27).[1] The strong, educated woman who believes in God and immortality will not let herself be "degraded" by "love" (for which we can read "sex").

Nevertheless, most women are condemned to Rousseau's "night of sensual ignorance" (*VROW* 19) by the tyranny of phallic power under which their only option is "blind obedience":

> but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavor to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing. The sensualist, indeed, has been the most dangerous of tyrants, and women have been duped by their lovers, as princes by their ministers, whilst dreaming that they reigned over them. (*VROW* 24)

The conjunction of "tyrants and sensualists" makes sexuality a disruptive social force, disruptive if long carried out in marriage, disruptive to women of weak understanding who, however chaste they are, cannot long remain modest in its presence. Phallic sexuality is not only demeaning and unequal; it erases women entirely. It is a devouring force that quite literally consumes women. Many critics have noted that the language of food and eating is clearly allied with sexuality, whether by showing that women are to avoid certain kinds of foods to avoid the appearance of lust or by assigning a gender to food (Michie 1987). But in Wollstonecraft women actually *are* the food. It is men who are "depraved sensualists," intent on fulfilling their appetites. Women are often "literally standing dishes" to that gluttony; women in the sexual relationship disappear completely, eaten up by the powerful force of sexuality. To men "who find gratification in the satisfaction of their appetites," Wollstonecraft has "an obvious retort" that while men remain such imperfect beings, women who exert sexual power will be the most powerful. "I do not wish them to have power over men but over themselves" (*VROW* 62). "Power over men" means cooperating with male sexuality, its greed, its gluttony, its erasure of the female self.

Wollstonecraft of course knows that the phallic sexuality that seems so asymmetrical is also necessary for procreation. Children are of high

value to her, and the passion that produces them seems allowable. Early in her writing career, in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *Original Stories from Real Life*, she had pondered the optimal age of marriage, in a meditation on how early and how long a young woman can safely be under the shadow of the sexual necessity for having offspring. In the first of these, written in 1786, she thought of marriage as "a stop to improvement" and had wanted to delay it so that women could have time to develop their understandings. In the latter work, written two years later, she endorses early marriage because it channels and directs the sexual passion. She seems to recognize the need for sexual passion in its procreative aspect, but she falls back for the moment on the institutional way to legitimize it.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman addresses the problem at a deeper level. Here we see that in marriage, the institution designed to channel this power, sexuality can still be a disruptive social force. Institutionalizing sexual passion does not get rid of it, and so Wollstonecraft focuses on how sexual passion should cool or be curbed once marriage has taken place. She speaks of "the natural death of love" and notes that "domestic peace is not destroyed by struggles to prevent its extinction," as if it were a wild animal to be chased from the domestic hearth (*VROW* 50). In the mature and virtuous marriage, passion will be of short duration—no more than six months—and it will be succeeded by its far more dependable and virtuous cousin, friendship. Repeatedly Wollstonecraft speaks of how the husband should cease to be the lover and addresses the way that the entire character of sex inside marriage should change:

> But one grand truth women have yet to learn, though it much imports them to act accordingly. In the choice of a husband, they should not be led astray by the qualities of a lover—for a lover the husband, even supposing him to be wise and virtuous, cannot long remain.
>
> Were women more rationally educated, could they take a more comprehensive view of things, they would be contented to love but once in their lives; and after marriage calmly let passion subside into friendship—into that tender intimacy, which is the best refuge from care. (*VROW* 119)

I read this passage as the expression of relief, not as the suppression of desire.

In fact Wollstonecraft goes to some lengths in at least one case to obliterate male desire, once the procreative purpose has been served, by erasing the husband from the scene entirely: She speaks of a woman who is "left a widow, perhaps, without a sufficient provision; but she is not desolate! The pang of nature is felt; but after time has softened sorrow into melancholy resignation, she turns to her children with redoubled fondness" and to her "maternal duties" which now have "a sacred heroic cast" (*VROW* 50). Just as children sometimes wish that violent parents would divorce, Wollstonecraft seems to wish for the death or departure of the tyrant and the nurturance of a good mother. Sexual passion is a necessary but brief phenomenon when it leads to "the security of marriage" with a man who is not a tyrant. But it is a disruptive, even sinister, force if continued; and women are better off with dead husbands so that they can turn to their sacred duties, their children.

Finally, if not allowed to cool, phallic sexuality inside marriage becomes prostitution without pay, or perhaps what we would call today marital rape. Wollstonecraft argues against sexuality played out on male terms inside the so-called safety of the marriage bed: "To such lengths, indeed, does an intemperate love of pleasure carry some prudent men, or worn out libertines, who marry to have a safe bedfellow, that they seduce their own wives.—Hymen banishes modesty, and chaste love takes its flight" (*VROW* 73). In the virtuous or "chaste" marriage, a woman would not have to be subject to this devouring sexuality for very long; should she have the misfortune to link up with a "depraved sensualist," she will have to continue to deal with male sexual passion, and the marriage then becomes "unchaste" and "immodest." In fact, although Wollstonecraft never exactly says so, it looks as though married sexuality is solely for the procreation of children.

There is some indication that this sexuality—male-gendered as it is—is not controllable. Wollstonecraft does not suggest that the man's sexual desire disappears; it is extinguished only in a virtuous marriage. She expects male desire to be suppressed if it does not indeed die, and the virtuous pair to supplant love with friendship. Presumably in the not-so-virtuous marriage the male will find other outlets. We know what Wollstonecraft thinks of married coquettes; silly women have long found ways to give themselves to the gluttony of men other than their husbands, and such "French" behavior meets with her scorn.

Much of the language of sexuality in Wollstonecraft is characterized by fear and rejection, fear of sexual acting-out, which she sees as male and violent, and rejection of any sexual passion that might be resident in girls and women. Her language about sexuality and the self conforms to what we now know about the profile of the abused woman who, once damage has been done to her in childhood, carries into her adult life a whole complex of issues arising from fear and rejection; these are most often encountered as problems of control, trust, and intimacy and have the power to bind the survivor of abuse into a prison of self-doubt, self-loathing, and spiritual despair (Poston and Lison 1989; Courtois 1988; Herman 1992). A particularly poignant letter to Godwin in 1796 shows the misery that Wollstonecraft suffers after lovemaking: "I have not lately passed so painful a night as the last. I feel that I cannot speak clearly on the subject to you, let me then briefly explain myself now I am alone. Yet, struggling as I have been a long time to attain peace of mind (or apathy) I am afraid to trace emotions to their source, which border on agony" (*Letters* 336–37). She then adds that "my imagination is forever betraying me into fresh misery, and I perceive that I shall be a child to the end of the chapter. You talk of the roses which grow profusely in every path of life—I catch at them; but only encounter the thorns" (*Letters* 337). Ralph Wardle's editorial gloss states that the night in question here occurs in Godwin's journal marked "chez moi," which was code for their sexual relations at his house. Wollstonecraft's sorrow is more than next-morning regrets, however, and suggests a history, a "source . . . border[ing] on agony." And the reference to herself as a child is especially telling. Reduced to her early powerlessness and entrapped by sexual demand, she feels misery, self-abnegation, and humiliation.

A lack of power and control in Wollstonecraft's early life give birth, I believe, to her later conception of tyranny where she "reframes resistance" as an adult (Gilligan, Rogers, and Tolman, 1991). Is there a politically less powerful place than the body of a female child? That voice of the adult woman who has not forgotten domestic tyranny pervades the *Vindication*: Examples are frequent that link childhood abuse and adult political tyranny: "In this style, argue tyrants of every denomination, from the weak king to the weak father of a family" (*VROW* 5). Tyranny, or the blind phallic usurpation of power, poisons every relationship, political and personal: "All power inebriates weak

man; and its abuse proves that the more equality there is established among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society" (*VROW* 16). It is telling here that Wollstonecraft uses the word "inebriates." We know from Godwin's *Memoirs* that Edward John Wollstonecraft was an alcoholic, a wife-batterer and a domestic tyrant, so the association of inebriation with power has a double edge.

But we also see here the domestic power struggle that informs her politics. In later life she revealed what we now understand to be a typical triad of domestic abuse: abusing father, passive mother, and a child who becomes a "little mother" in a role reversal that causes the child to lose her childhood. The young Wollstonecraft, Godwin related, often slept in front of her mother's bedroom door to protect her from the drunken assaults of the father. But Wollstonecraft also wrote to her friend Jane Arden in 1779 about "his ungovernable temper." In this letter she silences herself even as she tries to reveal her torment by beginning the sentence, "I will not say much of his ungovernable temper," then adding, "tho' that has been the source of much uneasiness misery to me;—his passions were seldom directed at me, yet I suffered more than any of them" (*Letters* 66).[2] "Passions" in this context means overt physical violence, while "I suffered more than any" suggests an unspeakable injury not of an overt nature, possibly the secret of sexual abuse.

Even though Wollstonecraft says that power inebriates *weak* man, she speaks of power only in terms of men. Any power that women have is indirect or sexual power, which means accepting the phallic tyranny she so despises: "Women, deluded by these sentiments, sometimes boast of their weakness, cunningly obtaining power by playing on the *weakness* of men; and they may well glory in their illicit sway, for, like Turkish bashaws, they have more real power than their masters: but virtue is sacrificed to temporary gratifications, and the respectability of life to the triumph of an hour" (*VROW* 40).

Wollstonecraft's political translation of domestic tyranny into power has another component, however: the passivity of the woman. The typical abuse triad, we now know, is the abusing father whose actions are overlooked by—or sometimes consciously allowed to occur because of—a passive mother. The child in the triad has no escape in such a situation, leading to what has been called "the child abuse accommodation syndrome" (Summit 1983).

The personality effect of such betrayal and entrapment in childhood occurs around the issue of trust: in adulthood, the formerly deprived and

abused child will distrust men, if they have been the abusers, but that failure to trust is augmented significantly if the child perceives that the mother has failed to protect the child from the abuser. The passivity of the mother usually results in a lack of trust, of both women and men, on the part of the adult daughter. The distrust of women comes not from violence but from fear of abandonment, of being left to the mercy of the abuser.

However we may sympathize with a woman who had little choice but to live with a drunken tyrant in the eighteenth century, we must also acknowledge that Mary Wollstonecraft's mother fits into the abuse triad. Practiced readers of Wollstonecraft could surely point out a host of phrases and words that recur from work to work, but the prize must surely go to the phrase Wollstonecraft said that her mother uttered on her deathbed: "Yet a little while and all will be over." It is the phrase of a long-suffering victim. Wollstonecraft seems mesmerized by it; she repeats it several times in her published work and, quite tellingly, in a letter to Imlay when she says "Have but a little patience, and I will remove myself where it will not be necessary for you to talk—of course, not to think of me" (*Letters* 319).

The lack of trust becomes an even more telling part of her narrative if it is put together with the "power that inebriates weak man": the drunken, unchecked tyranny of a father yoked with the doormat docility of a mother is a combination that most adult survivors of child abuse can attest is lethal in the building of trust. This paradigm recalls the times Wollstonecraft speaks of the dead father and the heroic widow devoting her life to her children; the only check to the tyrant is a scenario that rewrites the situation so that the father dies and the mother then is permitted to nurture and care for her children.

For Wollstonecraft, as for many survivors of abuse, the adult consequence of tyranny yoked with docility is not only a frightening lack in trust of men or women, but also a distrust of the self. Adults abused in childhood need love and attention, but they also fear getting it: the so-called go-away-closer phenomenon, where victims seek attention and love, yet cannot accept intimacy when offered for fear of being hurt again. We see this same kind of yearning uncertainty often in Wollstonecraft, who asserts her independence even as she is asking for shelter and love. That need for love and constancy is not limited to her frenzied pursuit of Gilbert Imlay. Understanding her as a woman whose body was taken from her as a child helps us understand, for example, her proposal

to live in the Fuseli household having only a platonic relationship with Henry Fuseli. Nearly all her biographers find the proposal disingenuous, even laughable, but the offer makes perfect sense for a woman denying her sexuality while at the same time seeking out protection and love. She preferred to present herself as the intellectual she was, and not at all as a sexual being.

Her early letters show that Wollstonecraft resolved never to be dependent; most important, the mature woman recalls this feeling to Godwin in the midst of one of her depressions: "at fifteen I resolved never to marry for interested motives, or to endure a life of dependence" (*Letters* 345). This "independence" reads more like a failure to trust. Again and again she tells correspondents that she has a mighty reserve of love to give but, as she puts it to Godwin, is fearful of "being pierced to the heart by every one on whom I rest my mighty stock of affection" (*Letters* 356). In another sequence she tells a parable of "a poor sycamore" tree that, growing up among evergreens, finds consolation only in the possibility of a future spring when she will have leaves. The sun comes and her leaves burst forth, but the next day "a hoar frost covered the trees, and shrivelled up [her] unfolding leaves" (*Letters* 339).

The final and most disturbing effect of childhood abuse is the need to rebuild—or even build completely anew—not only sexuality and intimacy but a whole relationship to the physical body. Most abused people as children mentally dissociate during the abuse; the body floats away so that it cannot be hurt. This habit, or skill, extends into adulthood: desensitization practiced long enough results in numbness or even total absence of physical sensation. The Wollstonecraft we see here has little in the way of a sexual self; even later she had serious issues with trust, control, and sexual intimacy.

Throughout the *Vindication* the sexual force is gendered male, and so powerful is it that women can be destroyed, eaten up by it. But do women have any sexuality themselves? Is there a female body of desire? Does Wollstonecraft posit anything that might counter this phallic sexuality and provide women some physical self? Or does she participate in the ideology that perpetuates this phallic tyranny?

This question brings us to the chapter that my students most puzzle over: "On Modesty." Rhetorically, chapter 7 is a surprising break even in a book noted for its unpredictability. Note the beginning: "Modesty! Sacred offspring of sensibility and reason!—true delicacy of mind!—may I unblamed presume to investigate thy nature and trace to its covert the

mild charm, that mellowing each harsh feature of a character, renders what would otherwise only inspire cold admiration—lovely!" (*VROW* 121). Wollstonecraft's tone here is rhapsodic and elevated, and becomes an almost religious encomium to an abstract quality. And so we would expect Wollstonecraft to tell us solemnly here that in the face of this rampant phallic sexuality, woman can find a refuge in modesty or in a distancing of the self from the sexual power located in the male. But what we get instead is more discussion of phallic sexuality. While she does not hesitate to say that "as a sex, women are more chaste than men," she then goes on to say that since "understanding" is what turns chastity into modesty, she would expect men as a group to be more modest than women. In fact, men who resist this truth and insist that women should have more modesty than men "are the men of fancy, the favourites of the sex, who outwardly respect and inwardly despise the weak creatures whom they thus sport with. They cannot submit to resign the highest sensual gratification, nor even to relish the epicurism of virtue—self-denial" (*VROW* 126).

The problem is that women and girls from the earliest age have been told stories that "inflame their imaginations" and "set their little minds to work" thinking about themselves as sexual objects. As a further incentive to become sexual playthings, they are sent away to "pig together" in same-sex boarding schools, where they learn "nasty, or immodest habits," some of which girls have picked up from "ignorant servants" at home. One can assume that these "habits" have to do with masturbation or sexual self-stroking of some kind. To avoid any self-intimacy, Wollstonecraft would ask that little girls wash and dress alone, that they not "obtrude or notice that part of the animal oeconomy which is so very disgusting," and that they refrain from "bodily wit," for "that decent personal reserve which is the foundation of dignity of character, must be kept up between woman and woman, or their minds will never gain strength or modesty" (*VROW* 128). Girls' bodies are objects, not subjects; even when they are alone they need to act as if they are being beheld, and self-intimacy is forbidden because the audience will be offended. All parts of the "animal oeconomy" seem to be "disgusting." We are left to wonder whether the body that yields these products could have any worth at all.

Just as Wollstonecraft expects moral and modest men to suppress sexual desire in marriage, so does she burden them with the modesty of both sexes: "Till men are more chaste women will be immodest. Where, indeed, could modest women find husbands from whom they would not

continually turn with disgust? Modesty must be equally cultivated by both sexes, or it will ever remain a sickly hothouse plant, whilst the affectation of it, the fig leaf borrowed by wantonness, may give a zest to voluptuous enjoyments" (*VROW* 126). The telling words here are "disgust," "affectation," "fig leaf," "wantonness," and "zest to voluptuous enjoyments." Pretending to be modest is an added spice to erotic play, and Wollstonecraft condemns such "wantonness." But more important, men hold the phallic power over the woman; they and their "understanding" bear the heavier responsibility for the maintenance of modesty. Again, this male gendering of terms would suggest that the female body and its own subjective desire count for little or nothing.

Interestingly enough, just as Wollstonecraft scolds women who "huddle on" their clothes and neglect "that reserve and cleanliness which indolent women too often neglect" (129), she also manifests an enlightened grasp of how "the facts of life" can be told to children. To inform children about how reproduction occurs in a matter-of-fact way so as not to "heat the imagination" is the commonsense Wollstonecraft who downplays the importance of sex for anything but procreation. "Truth may always be told to children, if it be told gravely; but it is the immodesty of affected modesty, that does all the mischief; and this smoke heats the imagination by vainly endeavouring to obscure certain objects" (*VROW* 127). Central biological facts have little to do with the political issue of sex and the reign of phallic sexuality.

Whether women possess anything like sexual desire is highly problematic. They are not to touch themselves or each other, and they are to avoid thoughts about sexual commerce because it is the male paradigm of sexual or phallic desire. Young girls who are above average in understanding, and who have worked hard to obtain virtue, will get to be modest. Men, however, will have more opportunity to embrace modesty because they have a body of sexual power to deny and control. In Wollstonecraft's athletic view of virtue, women are shut out entirely, because what passes for women's virtue is not virtue at all but rather what the world sees as respectability. Men have more passions to contend with and therefore can achieve something like real virtue in the struggle. Women, having no desire of their own, cannot enter the struggle; it is as if half of a possible equation has been erased from the page. Wollstonecraft expands on this idea in chapter 9: "Virtue likewise can only be acquired by the discharge of relative duties but the importance of these sacred duties will scarcely be felt by the being who is cajoled out of his

humanity by the flattery of sycophants. There must be more equality established in society, or morality will never gain ground, and this virtuous equality will not rest firmly even when founded on a rock, if one half of mankind be chained to its bottom by fate, for they will be continually undermining it through ignorance or pride" (*VROW* 141).

If Wollstonecraft perceives the erasure of the woman's body in the sexual act and if, for her, women's desire has no meaning, how can she "plead for (her) sex"? (*VROW* 3). Her victory, as I see it, is that she succeeds against all odds in representing a selfhood for women somewhere on the margins of other issues. Wollstonecraft recognized social and political differences between women without ever really acknowledging a female subject and she interrogated the system without having been given a voice. After all, everyone understood the "rights of man" as generic. It took Wollstonecraft to point out that women were not included in this formulaic phrase. From a political point of view this work on the margins can be empowering. When Wollstonecraft examines class in the margins, she may sound harsh, but she is talking as much as she can about how different women have had to absorb the reigning phallic ethos and which class has had to capitulate the most. Speaking about class and race differences and their political uses in our own time, Jana Sawicki (1991) says that the concept of *différance* itself can "disarm" the power of "the white middle-class norm which we have all internalized to varying degrees" (218). But even as Wollstonecraft recognizes and discusses class differences, *différance* never shines through; her discussions do not result in individual self-consciousness or the creation of a female subject:

> Addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state. Perhaps the seeds of false-refinement, immorality, and vanity, have ever been shed by the great. Weak, artificial beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society! (*VROW* 9)

When she calls the upper-class *ladies* "artificial" and "unnatural," she is noting the absence of any duty or work, which at least gives poorer

women some identity. But for these duties they would have no selves at all:

> Many poor women maintain their children by the sweat of their brow, and keep together families that the vices of the fathers would have scattered abroad. . . . Indeed, the good sense which I have met with, among the poor women who have had few advantages of education, and yet have acted heroically, strongly confirmed me in the opinion that trifling employments have rendered woman a trifler. (*VROW* 76)

Even when Wollstonecraft asserts that duty can provide meaning and identity, that duty is defined by the mother's body, with the production of citizens dominating over the development of self-awareness. In a discussion of the appearance of the body during the French Revolution, Dorinda Outram (1989) speaks of the male body/figure as heroic. This bodily heroism, however, is denied women who could only achieve a heroic identity in roles they play for others:

> It was certainly the case that physicality operated as a reservoir of authority for men, but of potential humiliation and certain restriction for women. The roles allotted to women in virtue of their physical attributes were, moreover, different from male roles and incompatible with many aspects of the Stoic persona. As mothers and wives, women played roles which involved them in orienting both the shape of their lives and the use of their bodies outwards, on to the needs and demands of others, rather than inwards, on to the self. (150)

Thus the one value that Wollstonecraft recognizes as emerging from sexuality—the production of children—is a duty-bound and far from self-centering activity. As she ponders that picture of duty, she is led to a reflection that many readers find politically naive and embarrassing:

> I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and discharging the duties of her station with, perhaps, merely a servant maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business. I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who

> returning weary home in the evening found smiling babes and a clean hearth. My heart has loitered in the midst of the group, and has even throbbed with sympathetic emotion, when the scraping of the well known foot has raised a pleasing tumult. (*VROW* 143–44)

The "servant maid" is a painful reminder that Wollstonecraft acknowledges social differences among women and ignores the political distances in classes as a political fact. Her conception of differences among women is subordinated to a far greater idea: there is but a tiny margin and space of political playing ground given to her sex. The foregoing scene is idyllic for her precisely because the man is brought to the political margins with the woman. Only the duty of parenthood compels each actor here and the father is—perhaps uncharacteristically—discharging that duty. For woman, however, motherhood is the central if not the sole duty.

It is not easy for women to escape from this political margin. Perhaps Wollstonecraft spends so much time talking about education because she hoped it could equip women to exploit their differences in order to achieve political power.

Only at the end of her life and in her final work did much of this become clear to Wollstonecraft. When she was in the midst of writing *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1975) five years later, she stated her intentions in a letter to George Dyson, a friend who had read the manuscript for her, that "this is what I have in view . . . to shew the wrongs of different classes of women equally oppressive, though from the difference of education, necessarily various" (*Letters* 392). It is in this final work, left uncompleted at her death, that we see Wollstonecraft begin to understand herself and at last to honor what she sees as the true position of women. She systematically searches her world for a place of consequence for women and ultimately finds none.

She acknowledges that woman is a cypher in the eyes of the law, a discussion which she had promised as far back as the 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Maria, determined to leave her scoundrelly (though legal) husband, has had her child snatched from her when, fleeing England and her marriage, she is drugged, then imprisoned. When "the dogs of law were let loose upon her" (145), the heroine gives a dissertation on the wrongs of marriage. The discussion—and the book—end with the judge's decision that "the sanctity of marriage" must be

permitted, and the abused woman is to have no being in civil law: "Was not the world a vast prison," Maria laments, "and women born slaves?" (27).

It is not only in the area of law that woman comes up a cypher. The novel's heroine is a model of sensibility and feeling, and she begins to have some semblance of sexuality and pleasure (though the two are not necessarily linked in the novel). Her child, though absent, is her mental and physical pleasure; she addresses memoirs to her and fancies the baby at breast "twinkling" to her. This is Wollstonecraft who has now known the sexual pleasures of breast-feeding.

Likewise, there is a brief escape from the phallic tyranny so pervasive in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Maria's husband personifies every evil of the genre: corrupt, commercial (even to the point of attempting to sell Maria's body in exchange for a gambling debt), debauched, greedy, physically repellent. But Wollstonecraft in this novel also creates a potentially benevolent man, Henry Darnford. She discovers his presence quite literally on the margins: also a prisoner, he has lent her some books, which have been transported by her keeper, Jemima. Maria falls in love with the writer who has left such sensitive marginalia in the texts. They begin to meet secretly until finally she "receive(d) him as her husband. . . . He was then plastic in her impassioned hand—and reflected all the sentiments which animated and warmed her" (138–39). But the pleasure is brief and even the sensitive man equally marginalized as woman proves to be feckless. The epilogue outlines several trial endings, none of which sheds a favorable light on Darnford. "He returns. . . . Mysterious behavior," says one of the endings, and even more emphatically another of them says, "Her lover unfaithful" (152).

In this last novel Wollstonecraft expands her exploration of the condition of women sympathetically to the lower class. The character of Jemima epitomizes every wrong a woman of that class can suffer: illegitimacy, abandonment, rape, prostitution, penurious hard labor. The best treatment Jemima receives is at the hands of a crippled and dying former rake who at least gives her food, housing, and respectable companionship. At the end Jemima and Maria unite as sisters in a true womanly paradigm of community: to Jemima, Maria gives respect and dignity, while Jemima, her erstwhile jailer, gives Maria access to Darnford, to the outside world, and in one of the trial conclusions already mentioned, she searches for and finds Maria's daughter, long thought dead.

Finally, however, the novel, the author's search for woman's place in the world, and the questions she had so busily posed all her life end up unfinished—as perhaps they are to our own day. However incisively Wollstonecraft discussed such differences, she nonetheless had to reckon rhetorically with the fact that there was no female subject. The female body is a site, a place where narratives occur. But it cannot be owned by the owner. It is at best run by an absentee landlord. There were no philosophical or political tools with which Wollstonecraft could interrogate this issue, although at one time in her life she had given herself and her readers a vague promise to try to do so: "The laws respecting woman, which I mean to discuss in a future part, make an absurd unit of a man and his wife; and then, by the easy transition of only considering him as responsible, she is reduced to a mere cypher" (*VROW* 145). As we have seen, only in *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* did she fulfill that "future part," and there she sees that woman is a "cypher" in the system as she knows it.

The freedom that she does have is the voice to say "no." This is the political voice that resists: "I love man as my fellow; but his scepter, real, or usurped, extends not to me, unless the reason of an individual demands my homage; and even then the submission is to reason, and not to man" (*VROW* 37). This is the voice at the end of *Maria* when the narrator realizes that political tyranny has not allowed women a voice at all. Thus, the voice of the formerly abused child becomes in adulthood the political voice that resists patriarchal oppression, loathes power that comes from sheer authority, resists male dominance in just about any form, and, finally and most tellingly, is furious at female passivity that refuses to resist patriarchal power. But, as Outram (1989) further notes, "The plain fact is that it is impossible to write about the body without also writing about power" (25). Mary Wollstonecraft has to grapple with finding a political voice from a self—and a sex—that has no body of its own and therefore no power either. The disembodied woman is the emblem for her of a disengaged, disenfranchised, diseased body politic.

Notes

1. Throughout this essay, the following abbreviations will be used:

VROW Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1988)
Letters Mary Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, ed. Ralph M. Wardle (1979)

2. In this passage of the *Letters* the word "uneasiness" is overstruck with the word "misery." The distinction is telling, as it shows Wollstonecraft re-casting the state of her feelings about her father.

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7

The Vindication of the Writes of Women: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Rhetoric

Miriam Brody

Mary Wollstonecraft intrigues us all. Consigned to oblivion after her death (her relationship with Gilbert Imlay had embarrassed many of her friends and the times were uncongenial to political rebels), at her two-hundredth birthday she has been richly re-read. Her life has been turned into a novel, her childhood has been examined for trauma, and her writings, finished and unfinished, have been made available for close scrutiny and scholarly debate.[1] She has been generous to us after her death. We can all find what we are looking for. One reader may argue that Wollstonecraft is a reformer, advocating the limited advances of education for women, but reserving sexual spheres of work that consigned them to the domestic or private half of human labor. Another may claim that Wollstonecraft is a revolutionary, more radically undermining prevailing codes and masculine genres in the apostrophes, expostulations, and digressions that mark her texts.

Perhaps most intriguingly, whether as Enlightenment reformer, French Revolutionary radical or commonwealth speaker, Wollstone-

craft's representation of women as sexual beings has invited interpretation by readers. Such readings have discovered a sexual puritanism in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* at odds with the claims Wollstonecraft made in her own personal life for sexual freedom. I follow up on this interest readers have in Wollstonecraft's treatment of the woman's body, but I depart from a literary or political analysis of Wollstonecraft's rendering of the body in order to locate her participation in the tradition of rhetoric and its long-standing project of discovering probable truths with the tools of human language. As philosophers of rhetoric have argued that language must be more than meaningless babble, that it must have properties to describe probable truths about our world, these writers have used bodily imagery to describe linguistic excellences and failures. Wollstonecraft joins this tradition and changes it.

In the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft challenged and transformed the prevailing rhetorical metaphor about sound and virtuous writing. At the same time Wollstonecraft set the stage for a new woman on the scene of writing, a woman mighty like herself. Wollstonecraft was, as she said, "the first of a new genus," a woman making her way on her merits as a professional writer, out to make money (Paul 1876, 191). She was certainly as well the first of another kind of "new genus," a woman writing political argument. For while the later eighteenth century was giving birth to the novel (and a mighty feminine birth it was), the idea that a woman might engage herself in the masculine world of political debate was a double monstrosity: women not merely picking up the pen, but doing so to preach to men about the way the world should be run.

The *Vindication*, as it asserts the rights of women, dramatically vindicates that a woman may write polemically. With this vindication, Wollstonecraft finds a subject position for her own sex in the discursive tradition of rhetoric, an authorial space that required she rewrite the idea of a woman's body. To the eighteenth-century mind, such a preoccupation with the idea of writing would be less surprising than it strikes us. During the British Enlightenment, rhetoricians debated the constitution of the English language, fixing its spelling and grammar and subordinating its various dialects to the speech and writing of the university-educated elite. As part of this debate, and of even longer standing than the British Enlightenment, the merits of a plain or ornate style of writing meant more to writers than simply taste. Writing style, the choice between plain or ornate language, and moral agendas seeking perfectable societies were interwoven in the discourse of rhetoric. As I

shall suggest, when Wollstonecraft entered the debate about writing style, she appropriated its gendered and embodied terms for her argument about women's rights. An argument about writing style in the rhetorical tradition is entangled in body imagery, charged and eroticized as soon as plain and ornate language are imagined as a writer's choices. When Mary Wollstonecraft made space for women-authored arguments, she confronted the problem of the body imagery with which rhetoricians had long described good and bad writing. This reading of the *Vindication* searches for the transformations we may anticipate in rhetoric's traditional misogynist imagery when a woman, writing a politically emancipatory argument on behalf of her own sex, turns to describe her own prose.

Certainly Mary Wollstonecraft appropriated masculinized values for the description of language to assist her argument that women may participate in the political debate in public life. In so doing, the *Vindication* bears a relationship to a network of texts I have elsewhere called "advice to writers," texts in which the British Enlightenment adapted Roman rhetoric to its own purposes.[2] In this rhetorical tradition, writing had been sanctified as a masculine endeavor, no less so in Wollstonecraft's time, in spite of the increasing number of women who would not only read but write in the emerging genre of the novel. Rhetoric texts, however, having engaged in the training of the public orator, claimed the oldest lineage in idealizing and masculinizing verbal excellence. As described in the classical literature in which all educated men were well versed, Cicero gave muscular imagery to the widespread notion of the virile speaker; persuasive writing literally must move one's auditor, as if the speaker is employing physical strength. "Eloquence," explained Cicero, "is one of the most eminent virtues," "more beautiful and noble" because "it can impel the audience withersoever it inclines its force" (1963, 207). Often called the agon tradition of rhetoric, the inculcation of linguistic skills trained the young rhetorician to "impel" his force in the manly engagement of verbal battle. The virtuous quest for truth in language was rendered in the Enlightenment reception of classical rhetoric as a masculine excellence, a blend of muscular and intellectual power. If one worried that such muscularity might be destructive of the commonweal, Quintilian (1856) added that the "art of which we are speaking [oratory] can be conceded only to good men," fusing muscular strength to a virtuous intention and naming the *vir bonus* tradition of rhetoric (2.15.1).

Such manly excellence was, however, held in place by its resistance

to an insidious and pervasive Other. Implied in every reference to manliness or its opposite, effeminacy, the failure to apprehend such truth was feared as a feminine invasion that both softens muscle and weakens resolve. When we accredit the act of writing the political essay as an agonistic endeavor that had always been interpreted as requiring manly courage, we apprehend the anomaly of a woman writing argument.

It follows that a woman must defend the act of her "writes" as more than simply "rights," when she enters the gendered discourse of public persuasive argument. She must put forth her persuasive argument within a structure of ideas that requires she write at the expense of her own sexual effacement or accept that her production is a monstrosity, an illness, a failure. Wollstonecraft's problems were legion, writing a persuasive argument to an audience she imagined often as male and certainly dedicated to a man.[3] Nor were her female readers sympathetic. Hannah More, bluestocking and writer of improving tracts for the poor, said of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that there was something so patently ridiculous in the title she would certainly not read it. A woman writing such a document must indeed be a mutant or monstrosity, part woman, part something else, the "hyena in petticoats" as Hannah More's friend, the Tory and sometime gothic romancer Horace Walpole (1905) imagined her (337–38). Walpole's suggestive imagery implied that Wollstonecraft was one of the rampaging viragoes of the French Revolution, demonized at the time of the *Vindication* as sharp-toothed hounds in lace. Wollstonecraft writing the *Vindication,* such metaphor would contend, is the archetypal demonic feminine who underlies the civil state and threatens continually its bloody eruption, challenging the very terms on which authorship was conceived as male.

Wollstonecraft's response to this paradoxical situation of the act of writing, a situation that commanded either her sexual obliteration or textual failure, overturned the masculinized terms of rhetorical discourse, although she left in place some of its gendered economy. Opening up new space in the conceptual domain of authorship, Wollstonecraft described a writer she called the "exceptional woman," a woman whom she idealized as "not masculine," a woman whose position depended on the naming of lesser women, called "mediocre" or "the woman of fashion." These rhetorical positions, at their extremes, argued that agencies of persuasive meaning-making belong to "exceptional" or unusual women who have triumphed over their gendered constraints, their

triumphs more spectacular because "mediocre" and "fashionable" women have variously succumbed to the traditional feminine roles the patriarchy had assigned. Claiming the "exceptional" woman is rational and productive while the "fashionable" woman is vicious and sterile, Wollstonecraft transposed traditional rhetoric's idealizations of writing styles as manly and effeminate into feminized states.

To understand the anomaly of a woman entering the public space of political writing, some exegesis of the deeply gendered imagery in the canonical texts of rhetoric is helpful. In these texts, the making of meaning is not only imagined as masculine, but also as consonant with larger societal agendas of building nations and conquering nature. The valorous truth-seeker and nation-builder came to language as a craftsman came to his tools.[4] Newly concerned with describing the English language, Enlightenment thinkers imagined the English speakers in a relationship to their language similar to their relationship in law to native liberty. The regulation and production of speech was to be as necessary to the well-being of a harmonious and productive community as the legislating of fundamental human freedoms. The intellectually generative community of political radicals and religious Dissenters who gathered in Newington Green around the Reverend Richard Price in the 1780s or at the hospitable tables of Joseph Johnson, publisher of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man,* would have been familiar with the works of the new rhetoricians of the Scottish Enlightenment published in the preceding decade. Included among them was Mary Wollstonecraft; reading Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* in 1783, she found them "an intellectual feast" (Kelly 1979, 276). Such rhetoricians as Blair and his fellow members of the Scottish Enlightenment George Campbell and Adam Smith had taken the rhetorical texts from the classical world and refashioned them for Britain undergoing the early stages of its industrial revolution. The agonistic struggle of argument contending with argument that had been described in the classical world as an inherently masculine enterprise still required muscular strength to bespeak the mental agility required in the law court, the senate, and the legislature.

The new rhetoricians, receiving such texts from the ancient world, rescued classical rhetoric from the ashbin of history to which the Royal Society, convened in 1665 to advance the new learning of science, had consigned its naive epistemology. Seeking new pathways between language and the natural world congenial to the empiricism of early industrialism, these rhetoricians left the gender of the truth-seeker as

masculine, productive, and healthy. Small wonder that this network of ideas survived the new learning. The masculinization of writerly excellence had a long history.

While the association between manliness and rhetorical excellence was widespread in classical rhetoric, its most graphic portraiture was given in a telling aside in a few pages on style in Quintilian's (1856) *Institutes of the Orator*, the longest text on rhetoric to survive antiquity. Quintilian, a Spanish-born rhetorician who plied his trade in Rome early in the Christian Era, had entered into a debate on the manner of declamation and described the ornamented body of a eunuch to metamorphize the assault on virtue and truth he imagined in the heavily nuanced and gestured school of Senecan oratory, against which he posited his own preference for a plain style. Such ornamentation of language, he explained, was like a eunuch:

> there being the same evil practice among declaimers, assuredly, as that which slave-dealers adopt, when they try to add to the beauty of young fellows by depriving them of their virility. For as slave-dealers regard strength and muscles, and more especially the beard and other distinctions which nature has appropriated to males, as at variance with grace, and soften down, as being harsh, whatever would be strong if it were allowed its full growth, so we cover the manly form of eloquence, and the ability of speaking closely and forcibly, with a certain delicate texture of language, and, if our words be but smooth and elegant, think it of little consequence what vigour they have. But to me, who look to nature, any man, with the full appearance of virility will be more pleasing than a eunuch; nor will divine providence ever be so unfavourable to its own work as to ordain that weakness be numbered among its excellences; nor shall I think that an animal is made beautiful by the knife, which would have been a monster if it had been born in the state to which the knife had reduced it. (5.12.17–20)

Quintilian's charged imagery of emasculation, vice, luxury, and illness became a commonplace in the British Enlightenment advice literature of rhetoric, surviving the scientific revolution that rendered obsolete syllogistic deductions as descriptions of the natural world. Newly concerned with productivity, now re-imagined as the ability to remake the

natural world along Bacon's gendered description of a phallic assault, the quest for rhetorical truth (such truth that must be made with human language) is expressed as a masculine endeavor requiring manly writing and fearing effeminacy.[5] Hugh Blair (1965), who avowed he found everything "instructive" and "useful" in Quintilian, reissued his maxims that good writing is "manly, noble, and chaste" and coined the highest literary tribute in the phallic excellence of the moral Sublime (2:244, 1:48–54). His teacher, Adam Smith, whose lectures on rhetoric Blair attended, while never renaming Quintilian's eunuch as such, found the feminine Shaftesbury as emasculated, effete, and unproductive, a writer of insufficient substance unqualified for the new agons of science (Smith 1963, 53, 54). In the condensed triumvirate of virtues that Quintilian recommended, the Enlightenment codified the excellence of independence or nobility, necessary to the disinterested pursuit of scientific truth, and the excellence of simplicity of style, imagined in the restraint and decency of chastity. Chaste and noble, the writer was also manly.

We may surmise, then, that the problem of a woman who intended to write an argument was that her body had already been defined as the agency that undermines rational discourse. As codified in Quintilian's eunuch and translated in Enlightenment rhetoric as the "unmanly" writer, the body of the woman having invaded the man suggested the capacity of language to fail to represent the world it claimed to describe. She, like language, might deceive. To take up the cudgels of argument and write about argument for the British Enlightenment, then, was to incorporate a tradition that imagined such an argument was empowered by a male body whose moral and physical health conduced a rhetorical truth. Inscribing an image of writing failure, excess of ornamentation, absence of meaning, Quintilian had offered the eunuch as that which is unnaturally made, a violation of nature, a deception in itself to conduce vice and lawless desire. The charged language of manliness and effeminacy, with which latter-day rhetoricians seasoned their discussions of style, occupied a site of meaning that was held in place by a void, the body of the castrated man. Rhetorically, the eunuch represented ornamented language covering over a lack; the eunuch was empty and vicious speech. At the same time the eunuch implied by his negation his ideal other, the full body of the full-speaking man, words attached to "things," full of their object, productive of seed, productive of meaning. Not only was public speech and writing masculinized in this tradition, failure to make meaning was graphically imagined as a feminized male;

if the agency of failure was feminine, to imagine a woman writing well required renaming the body with which good writing was associated. Perhaps nowhere is this problem of vocabulary more apparent than at the outset of the *Vindication* when Wollstonecraft (1992) must play with the name "masculine" as a description for women:

> From every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women, but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raises females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind, all those who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine. (80)

The masculine woman whom Wollstonecraft ironically names in defiance of her detractors becomes the exceptional woman of the *Vindication*, someone who, as I shall describe below in Wollstonecraft's description of Catherine Macaulay, is renamed "not masculine." Insisting on all manly virtues for this new genus who is "not masculine," Wollstonecraft has claimed the tradition of writing for women.

The Woman Writer as the Exceptional Woman

Wollstonecraft never names herself as the woman whose achievements might argue that women should be encouraged to excellence in public life. Yet she might have credibly imagined she was such a woman. In 1787, she had arrived penniless in London as a young woman to earn her own keep as a writer, and a few years later, barely thirty years old, she dared to answer Edmund Burke's rebuke of her mentor, the Reverend Richard Price, with her vitriolic *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Shortly after, writing her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft asks "When do we hear of women who, starting out of obscurity, boldly claim respect on account of their great abilities or

daring virtues?" (148). Certainly she must have entertained the notion that she was one such woman deserving of notice. While claiming she is interested only in the condition of her sex in general, Wollstonecraft makes plain that she has in mind exceptions to the general category "woman" whose vindication she was addressing. "I plead for my sex, not for myself," she insisted in her dedication to Talleyrand, adding that "independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath" (85). "I shall not lay any great stress on the example of a few women who, from having received a masculine education, have acquired courage and resolution," she argues, conserving their naming for a footnote: "Sappho, Eloisa, Mrs. Macaulay, the Empress of Russia, Madame d'Eon, etc. These and many more, may be reckoned exceptions" (172, 172n). In the unspecified "etc." Wollstonecraft located herself and named the "exceptional" woman someone whose status might argue for an extension of woman's sphere. Later, in asides qualifying her hopes for women's progress, in compliments paid to notable women, or describing the derision they must tolerate (for example, "a woman of more cultivated understanding" being eclipsed in conversation by a flirt [297]), the exceptional woman appears and reappears, legitimizing the very act of writing that names her.

Wollstonecraft reserves the most dramatic moment of baptism for Catherine Macaulay, the historian and essayist whose reformist social criticism had preceded and influenced her own. Describing Macaulay, Wollstonecraft names the ideal writer she means herself to be and compels such a *vir bonus* into a separate position from the traditional manly excellence such good rhetoric had always required:

> I will not call hers a masculine understanding [Macaulay's], because I admit not of such an arrogant assumption of reason; but I contend that it was a sound one, and that her judgement, the matured fruit of profound thinking, was a proof that a woman can acquire judgement in the full extent of the word. Possessing more penetration than sagacity, more understanding than fancy, she writes with sober energy and argumentative closeness; yet sympathy and benevolence give an interest to her sentiments, and that vital heat to arguments, which forces the reader to weigh them. (206–7)

This woman whose excellence is "not masculine" surfaces in the *Vindication*, with some suggestion of an anxiety attending the revolutionary

challenge of this new gendered position. "I speak of the improvement and emancipation of the whole sex," writes Wollstonecraft, "for I know that the behaviour of a few women, who, by accident, or following a strong bent of nature, have acquired a portion of knowledge superior to that of the rest of their sex, has often been overbearing" (296). She finds it important to add reassuringly, "there have been instances of women who, attaining knowledge, have not discarded modesty, nor have they always pedantically appeared to despise the ignorance which they laboured to disperse in their own minds" (296).

Such women, laboring to disperse ignorance in themselves, are fit, she goes so far as to argue in the *Vindication,* to govern others, permitting for this small number, these "exceptional" few the public stage of the agon and its project of social reform. "I cannot help lamenting," Wollstonecraft argues late in the *Vindication,* "that women of a superior cast have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence. I may excite laughter, by dropping a hint, which I mean to pursue, some future time, for I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government" (259–60).

If we wish to understand the prerogatives of the exceptional woman, we may locate them by understanding the more limited spheres of women who are not exceptional. Indeed, Wollstonecraft makes quite clear that she may be reserving a quite different status for most women. "I do not wish to invert the order of things," she claimed, allowing women to be less strong than men (109). Having laid out her argument for the education of all women so they may work to improve society, she describes how such a woman should conduct herself so as to be virtuous. In these fateful passages she exercised the repression of sexuality that has intrigued so many of her readers, claiming that a good marriage is one in which there is a "natural death of love," friendship replacing passion. A close reading of this passage, however, finds it preceded by an interesting qualification. "Let fancy now present a woman with a tolerable understanding," writes Wollstonecraft, "for I do not wish to leave the line of mediocrity" (138). It is the "mediocre" woman to whom Wollstonecraft recommends a cooler and less passionate relationship with her husband. It is not necessarily, then, the "exceptional" woman, distinguished by a more powerful exercise of reason, whose sexual repression is required of

an improved society. A reader may imagine a woman "not mediocre," the full vigor of whose body might tolerate desire without loss to virtue.

If the exceptional woman is given only slight reference, she is significant nonetheless in that she identifies Wollstonecraft herself. Like the *vir bonus*, the exceptional woman is more clearly articulated by what she is not. "Not masculine," nor "mediocre," the woman writer is defined dramatically by a despised "Other," whose failure to engender meaning establishes the boundaries of an identity against which both the mediocre and the exceptional stand in relief. Just as the idealized image of the full-bodied man required the emasculated body of the eunuch as the Other, so too the "not masculine" writer, the exceptional woman, the "cultivated woman" of sober judgment requires its Other, whose fundamental lack signals the fullness of meaning of virtuous speech. Mary Wollstonecraft finds this Other in the body of the "woman of fashion," and inscribes in this site the same mix of sterility, illness, and vice that Quintilian bequeathed to the British Enlightenment as a simulacrum for a failure to be meaning-full. She finds such a woman in the enervated aristocratic lady, the "lady of fashion."

The Weak Woman of Fashion

"I once knew a weak woman of fashion," wrote Wollstonecraft, "who was more than commonly proud of her delicacy and sensibility. She thought a distinguishing taste and puny appetite the height of all human perfection, and acted accordingly. I have seen this weak sophisticated being neglect all the duties of life, yet recline with self-complacency on a sofa, and boast of her want of appetite as a proof of delicacy that extended to, or perhaps, arose from, her exquisite sensibility; for it is difficult to render intelligible such ridiculous jargon" (130). As Wollstonecraft's biographers have pointed out, the model for the "woman of fashion" whom Wollstonecraft pillories in the pages of the *Vindication* was undoubtedly Lady Kingsborough, the chatelaine of the Irish house that employed young Mary Wollstonecraft as a governess for two daughters. A more theoretical influence, Adam Smith's description of the uselessness of the aristocracy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), provided Wollstonecraft with the argument by which she would con-

demn such ladies as Lady Kingsborough. Citing at great length Smith's essay, Wollstonecraft claims the same opprobrium for women of fashion that Smith had heaped upon the rich. The rich, argues Smith, have not risen "by knowledge, by industry, by patience, or by self-denial, or by virtue of any kind" (Wollstonecraft 1992, 149). "Women, in general," writes Wollstonecraft, "as well as the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization, and missed the useful fruit" (151). With the parenthetical "in general," Wollstonecraft has excluded "the exceptional woman."

Dissipated by vanity and admiration, the woman of fashion is unable to be virtuous because her body is weak. Wollstonecraft insists that "strength both of body and mind" are required in the virtuous work of regulating a family, educating children, certainly for the extraordinary work of public writing (155). "Shakespeare never grasped the airy dagger with a nerveless hand, nor did Milton tremble when he led Satan far from the confines of his dreary prison" (124). The woman of fashion has been made proud of her own delicacy, "though it be another fetter, that by calling the attention continually to the body, cramps the activity of the mind" (171). More specifically, these "false notions of beauty and delicacy stop the growth of their limbs and produce a sickly soreness," making it less likely that they can "find strength to recur to reason and rise superior to a system of oppression" (221). Like the eunuch, the woman of fashion is sterile. Figuratively sterile, she ignores the responsibilities of motherhood, abandoning her children to servants. Literally sterile, the "weak and enervated" woman produces only "half-formed beings" or, appropriated by the licentious men they seem to attract, are so riven with disease they become "barren" (249–50).

Women's Bodies/Writing Style

Unlike the woman of fashion who represents vice, illness, and failure to (re)produce, the exceptional woman represents the virtuous production of argumentative writing engaged in good work. No *vir bonus* nor hyena in petticoats, the exceptional woman is the standard-bearer of an enlightened feminized productivity for the age of reason perfecting itself. Since a new woman entering the scene of writing would inevitably cause tremors of anxiety, ease of reception is facilitated by anchoring

innovation within a reassuring and familiar conceptual topography. As Wollstonecraft located a new subject position, the woman who writes argument, she stabilized the revolutionary nature of an appropriation of masculine privilege by accepting the gendered terms of cosmetic disguise with which linguistic ornamentation was reviled as feminine excess. It is perhaps less apparent to an age not so interested in writing style as Wollstonecraft's how important to the Enlightenment was choosing words for argument. Societal and linguistic improvement were interrelated meliorative processes in the eighteenth-century mind. In a few opening remarks in "a rough sketch of [her] plan," Wollstonecraft assumed a fusion of bodily illness and language as she described a style of writing she intended to make her own, continuing canonical rhetoric's obsession with ornamented language as a charged mix of illness and desire: "I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style. I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings" (82). More than simply the aftermath of her debate with Burke, Wollstonecraft's disdaining the affectation of "culling" and "polishing" would be recognized by her eighteenth-century readership as part of the familiar contempt rhetoricians expressed for ornamentation in general. As we trace the antipathy toward sexual feeling that invades Wollstonecraft's arguments, we have located such revulsion in this argument as consistent with the Enlightenment's reading of classical rhetoric's idealization and denigration of the body as a body of language. The description of Quintilian's eunuch illustrated that not merely upon the male body did canonical rhetoric visit its hopes for truth and its fear of failure, but upon a deeply eroticized notion of the body. The eunuch's lack defined the borders of articulation in which the idealized rhetor could imagine himself as phallic and victorious. Quintilian's description of the eunuch implied desire because the eunuch was an object of desire and implied revulsion with desire because the eunuch, made beautiful by the knife, was a corruption of the natural. At the very installation of canonical rhetoric's obsession with the excellence of manliness, a revulsion and desire coinhabit the space between the writer and writing. Mary Wollstonecraft revisits this erotically charged mix, already in place in the discursive tradition of writing about writing, when she describes her intention to write at the outset of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*

In her introductory plan, Wollstonecraft described her revulsion with "pretty superlatives, dropping glibly from the tongue" that "vitiate the taste," and "create a kind of sickly delicacy," imagining truth instead as "simple" and "unadorned" (82). Imagined in language as that artfully constructed layer of "style" upon meaning, ornamentation is at once necessary and sadly a deficiency. Aristotle had described rhetoric's ambivalence with ornamentation, supplying the logic of a widespread distrust of imagery as the weapons of deceivers that Plato had articulated fully in his dialogues against the rhetoricians.[6] Words that stand in for things should be enough and would be enough were it not for a human weakness for pretty language. Purchasing a familiar distinction between language and world that Quintilian described "as that which is expressed, and of that which expresses" (3.5.1) Wollstonecraft announced, "I shall be employed about things, not words," continuing that she is "anxious to avoid that flowery diction which has slided from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversations" (82).

As Quintilian himself had written in the *Institutes of the Orator,* and as Smith, Campbell, and Blair had served up rhetoric's advice for the eighteenth century, the more ornamented the language, the more "flowery the diction," the more disguised the natural world that language eternally and imperfectly attempts to describe. Played out on bodies, the imperfection of language is cosmetic adornment personified in women, dangerous when emulated by men. Ultimately Wollstonecraft's complicity in the charged ambivalence toward the woman's body as a site of desire and revulsion leaks through in her numerous references to disgust with bodily function, eating, certainly, and, we may extrapolate from her dismissal of the importance of sexual pleasure, with desire itself. "And what nasty indecent tricks do they not also learn from each other," she warns, criticizing girls' boarding schools, "when a number of them pig together in the same bedchamber" (282). If indeed Wollstonecraft feared female desire more than she did male desire, as Mary Poovey suggests, rhetoric's locus of such lawless desire in the body of woman, as it apparently takes over the man in the eunuch, part and parcel of the logic of ensuring rational argumentation, was also a logic that Wollstonecraft has assimilated through the discourse.

While no one would suggest that the rhetorical tradition fully explains Wollstonecraft's attitudes toward sexuality, this tradition superimposes itself easily on such ambivalent representations of bodily function that we may find in the *Vindication* when rhetoric valorizes and despises

notions of public engagement measured against the manliness of the writer. So doing, rhetoric has given Wollstonecraft a vocabulary for claiming that the virtuous language of truth may emanate from a female body. By borrowing rhetoric's revulsion with the feminized male, Wollstonecraft insisted on the investiture of the writing subject for the woman who was "not masculine," nor a lady of fashion.

Such a female writer announced her entitlement to writing by the way she wrote, the words she chose. Because Enlightenment rhetoricians conceived that prose might be ameliorative in society's ongoing mission of reforming itself, one's writing style was extricated in moral choices. As British republican and scientist Joseph Priestley argued in the *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761): "The chief use of written language must be to record, extend, and perpetuate useful knowledge" (61). Taking up Priestley's injunction, Wollstonecraft merged the ameliorative project of the Enlightenment, perfecting society through language, with rhetoric's traditional disparagement of ornamentation. Disparaging the "mellifluous" precepts of James Fordyce, the Scottish Presbyterian minister and author of advice literature for young women (1765), Wollstonecraft maintained that "his discourses" were "written in such an affected style" that for this reason alone she would not "allow girls to peruse them." "I particularly object to the love-like phrases of pumped up passion," she continues. Instead, "speak to them [young girls] the language of truth and soberness" (193). Good language may be ameliorative—such language as Wollstonecraft herself claimed she intended to write.

When a writer has not spoken the language of truth and soberness, one must expect illness and moral degeneracy rather than amelioration. Wollstonecraft argued that the contaminating discursive flow of "pretty superlatives" fed to women "from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversations" engendered a "sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth." Worse, the "deluge of false sentiments and overstretched feelings, stifling the natural emotions of the heart, render the domestic pleasures insipid, that ought to sweeten the exercise of those severe duties, which educate a rational and immortal being for a nobler field of action" (82). In other words, sick language threatens motherhood itself, contaminating women and rendering them unfit for reproduction. The same enervating delicacy that afflicted the woman of fashion may be traced to a linguistic corruption of an excess of writing. As the "jargon" of the woman of

fashion made her ridiculous, diseased writing, those "sweet" superlatives, was at once repellent and seductive. To yield to its attractions placed in peril the reproductivity of a healthy and improved civil state.

Challenging the gendered discourse of rhetoric, Wollstonecraft, argue some of her critics, formed herself as a "masculine intellectual" (Poovey 1984, 55) or subsumed the rhetorical virtues of the *vir bonus*, Quintilian's "good man" (Kelly 1979, 276). Indeed, it would appear that the discourse permitted no other point of entry. The Wollstonecraft we read against the strictures of such a gendered notion of argument strained, however, against this masculinization. Mary Wollstonecraft played with polarizations familiar to her in the rhetorical tradition about writing style. She used "reason" and "passion" rhetorically to create a position for the woman writing. If in the end we must agree with Virginia Sapiro that Wollstonecraft "remained caught in a gender-bound language that was part of the mechanism of her own thinking" (1992, 221), I argue that she has transformed the fetters of this constraint in a daring appropriation of the masculinized values of rhetoric in order to enable the idea of a woman writing.

In the *Vindication* a new cast of characters commands the stage of writing. Where once the muscular intellectual warrior proposed and defended virtue in the agons of the marketplace, Wollstonecraft heroicized the exceptional woman writer; where the effete dandy held sway, the nemesis of the intellectual warrior, Wollstonecraft carved out the site of the woman of fashion. While these idealizations and abominations served Enlightenment arguments advancing the new bourgeois virtues of a middle station, they were also discursive responses to a long-standing rhetorical tradition that had obsessively canonized male virility as the driving force of rational persuasion.

Wollstonecraft, having visited upon the female body the familiar play of virtue, health, and productivity that canonical rhetoric had imagined on the male body, has indeed, as Cora Kaplan (1985) has argued, fatefully dichotomized the choice for Enlightenment women between a life of reason or passion. Yet, in order to invert a long-standing tradition of masculinized excellence in writing, Wollstonecraft apparently has accepted the dichotomous terms of rhetoric's vision of virtuous and vicious practice only in order to appropriate the idea of body for her own use. Wollstonecraft's female icon is a reversal, then, of Quintilian's trope of the emasculated man, the eunuch who occupied the site of such failure in the canonical transmission of advice on rhetoric. With such a

sleight of hand, Wollstonecraft deployed on the body of her own sex the same projection of illness, depletion, and infertility that had represented the failure to be sufficiently manly in the Enlightenment transmission of classical rhetoric.

Not only did Wollstonecraft reverse Quintilian's trope of writing failure, emasculation, by positing the body of a diseased corrupted woman; she also literalized the "fecundity" that Quintilian had imagined as the manly production of virtuous speech. Insisting on reason as a female provenance, Wollstonecraft returned such notions as "fertility" and "production" to the material body from which traditional rhetoric had abstracted them as masculine virtues describing good writing. No disembodied productivity, writerly fecundity and bodily reproduction fuse in Wollstonecraft's insistence on rational motherhood.

Wollstonecraft turned canonical rhetoric on its head: not the "good man," but the "good woman"; not rhetorical evil as emasculation, but rhetorical evil as spoilage of the uterus. The outcome of vitiation is imagined still as a barren, corrupt body, but as the body of a woman; the outcome of virtue is imagined as reproduction of the body and production of the mind, a separate and different female virtue to contend for space in the pantheon of human values.

In transposing the site of virtuous and vicious practice from the male body to the female, Mary Wollstonecraft enabled a public sphere for a woman writing. Indeed, one might add that in imagining herself the exceptional woman writer Wollstonecraft has not entirely foreclosed a woman's more integrated and cohesive emotional and rational life. Through the rhetorical act of insisting on exceptions, Wollstonecraft undermined the logic by which limitations on a woman's sphere may be argued as inevitably and naturally emanating from her sexual condition.

Moreover, imagining the woman writing, Wollstonecraft redefined the nature of sterile viciousness. Vice, conducive to sterility, failure to produce, is no longer the besetting ill of a male body invaded by the feminine. Rather than the subverting attractions of the feminine, vice is described as the besetting ills of inherited privilege, aristocratic indolence similarly inviting sterility when illness reproduced itself in diseased "half-formed" beings. More particularly, Wollstonecraft, in claiming the viciousness of inherited privilege, denied the legitimacy of inherited privilege itself, of which the oldest is that of the male. The woman who claimed when she arrived in London that she was the first of a new genus transmogrified the "good man" tradition of rhetoric to make a space for

another author, womanly, independent, and no slave to passion, someone who might dispel the ghosts of Horace Walpole's hyena from the scene of writing.

Notes

1. Readers are probably familiar with the recent novel by Frances Sherwood based on Mary Wollstonecraft's life (New York, 1993).

2. I explore this discursive masculinized tradition in my work *Manly Writing: Rhetoric, Gender, and the Rise of Composition* (1993).

3. Mary Wollstonecraft dedicated the *Vindication* to the French minister Talleyrand, hoping her words might find a more sympathetic audience among those who were advancing the rights of man. She directly addresses both men and women as she writes. She reassuringly cajoles "but, fair and softly gentle reader, male or female" (259) or, often in the diction of a jeremiad, when she exhorts "O my sisters" (238) or "Be just then, O ye men of understanding" (319). All references to the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* are to the Penguin edition (1992).

4. See John Barrell's (1983) historical account of class and language in the eighteenth century.

5. Bacon (1955) wrote of "turning with united forces against the Nature of Things, to storm and occupy her castles and strongholds" (x). He described nature as "under constraint and vexed," "forced out of her natural state, and squeezed and moulded" "by the hands of man" (447).

6. Aristotle said, "We ought in fairness to fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts: nothing, therefore, should matter except the proof of those facts. Still, as has been already said, other things affect the result considerably, owing to the defects of our hearers. The arts of language cannot help having a small but real importance, whatever it is we have to expound to others: the way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility" (*Rhetoric* 3.1.1404A).

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8

Mary Wollstonecraft and the Problematic of Slavery

Moira Ferguson

> A traffic that outrages every suggestion of reason and religion . . . [an] inhuman custom.
>
> —*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
>
> I love most people best when they are in adversity, for pity is one of my prevailing passions.
>
> —*Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*

History and Texts before *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

In 1790, Mary Wollstonecraft became a major participant in contemporary political debate for the first time, due to her evolving political analysis and social milieu. In contrast to *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), which drew primarily on the language of natural rights for its political argument, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) favored a discourse on slavery that highlighted female subjugation. Whereas the *Rights of Men* refers to slavery in a variety of contexts only four or five times, the *Rights of Woman* contains more than eighty references; the constituency Wollstonecraft champions—white, middle-class women—is constantly characterized as slaves. For her major polemic, that is, Mary Wollstonecraft decided to adopt and adapt the terms of contemporary political debate. Over a two-year period that debate had gradually reformulated its terms as the French Revolution in 1789

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that highlighted aristocratic hegemony and bourgeois rights was followed by the San Domingan Revolution that primarily focused on colonial relations.

Wollstonecraft's evolving commentaries on the status of European women in relation to slavery were made in response to four interlocking events: first, the intensifying agitation over the question of slavery in England that included the case of the slave James Somerset in 1772 and Phillis Wheatley's visit in 1773; second, the French Revolution in 1789; third, Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790) that unreservedly argued against sexual difference; and fourth, the successful revolution by slaves in the French colony of San Domingo in 1791.

This discourse on slavery employed by Wollstonecraft was nothing new for women writers, although it was now distinctly recontextualized in terms of colonial slavery. Formerly, in all forms of discourse throughout the eighteenth century, conservative and radical women alike railed against marriage, love, and education as forms of slavery perpetrated upon women by men and by the conventions of society at large.

Wollstonecraft's Earlier Works, Received Discourse, and the Advent of the Abolitionist Debate

Prior to the French Revolution, Mary Wollstonecraft had utilized the language of slavery in texts from various genres. In *Thoughts* (1786), an educational treatise, Wollstonecraft talked conventionally of women subjugated by their husbands who in turn tyrannize servants, "for slavish fear and tyranny go together" (Wollstonecraft 1787, 63). Two years later, in *Mary, A Fiction* (1788), her first novel written in Ireland during trying circumstances as a governess, the heroine decides she will not live with her husband and exclaims to her family: "I will work . . . , do anything rather than be a slave" (Wollstonecraft 1788, 49).[1] Here as a case in point, Wollstonecraft inflects slavery with the orthodox conception of slavery that had populated women's texts for over a century—marriage was a form of slavery; wives were slaves to husbands.

Wollstonecraft's early conventional usage, however, in which the word "slave" stands for a subjugated daughter or wife was soon to complicate its meaning. From the early 1770s onward, a number of events from James Somerset's court case to Quaker petitions to Parlia-

ment and reports of abuses had injected the discourse of slavery into popular public debate.

The Abolition Committee, for example, was formed on 22 May 1787, with a view to mounting a national campaign against the slave trade and securing the passage of an Abolition Bill through Parliament (Coupland 1933, 68). Following the establishment of the committee, abolitionist Thomas Clarkson wrote and distributed two thousand copies of a pamphlet entitled "A Summary View of the Slave-Trade, and of the Probable Consequences of Its Abolition" (Clarkson 1808: 276–85 and passim). Wollstonecraft's friend, William Roscoe, offered the profits of his poem "The Wrongs of Africa" to the committee. The political campaign was launched on the public in full force (Craton 1974, chap. 5).

Less than a year after the Abolition Committee was formed, Wollstonecraft's radical publisher, Joseph Johnson, cofounded a radical periodical entitled the *Analytical Review*. Invited to become a reviewer, Wollstonecraft's reviews soon reflected the new influence of the abolition debate (Sunstein 1975, 171). One of the earliest books she critiqued in April 1789 was written by Britain's most renowned African and a former slave; Wollstonecraft was analyzing a text based on specific experiences of colonial slavery for the first time. Its title was *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself,* in which Equiano graphically chronicles being kidnapped from Africa, launched on the notorious Middle Passage, and living out as a slave the consequences of these events.

While the *Analytical Review* acquainted the public with old and new texts on the current debate, Wollstonecraft was composing an anthology for educating young women that also reflected her growing concerns. Published by Joseph Johnson and entitled *The Female Reader: or Miscellaneous Pieces for the Improvements of Young Women,* the textbook cum anthology included substantial extracts promoting abolition. It included Sir Richard Steele's rendition from *The Spectator* of the legend of Inkle and Yarico, Anna Laetitia Barbauld's hymn-in-prose, "Negro-woman," about a grieving mother forcibly separated from her child, and a poignant passage from William Cowper's poem, "The Task," popular with the contemporary reading public:

> I would not have a slave to till my ground,
> To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,

> And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
> That sinews bought and sold have ever earn'd.
> No: dear as freedom is, and in my heart's
> Just estimation priz'd above all price,
> I had much rather be myself the slave,
> And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.
> (Wollstonecraft 1789, 29–31, 171, 321–2)

A series of events then followed one another in rapid succession that continued to have a bearing on the reconstitution of the discourse on slavery. In July 1789, the French Revolution erupted as the Bastille jail was symbolically stormed and opened. Coinciding with the French Revolution came Richard Price's polemic, Edmund Burke's response, and then Wollstonecraft's response to Burke and her review of Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education.* Meanwhile, in September and the following months, Wollstonecraft reviewed in sections the antislavery novel *Zeluco: Various Views of Human Nature, Taken from Life and Manners, Foreign and Domestic,* by John Moore. Let me back up and briefly elaborate how all this attentiveness to colonial slavery affected public debate and Mary Wollstonecraft's usage of the term.

The French Revolution

On 4 November 1789, Wollstonecraft's friend, the Reverend Richard Price, Dissenting minister and leading liberal philosopher, delivered the annual sermon commemorating the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 to the Revolution Society in London. The society cherished the ideals of the seventeenth-century revolution and advocated Dissenters' rights. This particular year there was much for Dissenters to celebrate. Basically, Price applauded the French Revolution as the start of a liberal epoch: "after sharing in the benefits of one revolution," declared Price [meaning the British seventeenth-century constitutional revolution], "I have been spared to be a witness to two other Revolutions, both glorious" (Price 1790, 55). The written text of Price's sermon, *Discourse on the Love of Our Country,* was reviewed by Wollstonecraft in the *Analytical*'s December issue. A year later, on 1 November 1790, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that attacked both Price and his sermon was

timed to be published on the anniversary of Price's address. It soon became a topic of public debate. Several responses quickly followed.

As the first writer to challenge Burke's reactionary polemic, Wollstonecraft foregrounded the cultural issue of human rights in her title: *A Vindication of the Rights of Men.* It immediately sold out. Not by political coincidence, she composed this reply while evidence about the slave trade was being presented to the Privy Council during the year following the first extensive parliamentary debate on abolition in May 1789. *The Rights of Men* applauded human rights and justice, excoriated abusive social, church and state practices, and attacked Burke for hypocrisy and prejudice. She argued vehemently for a more equitable distribution of wealth and parliamentary representation. By 4 December the same year, Wollstonecraft had revised the first edition and Johnson rapidly turned out a second one in January 1791 (Tomalin 1974).

In *The Rights of Men,* Wollstonecraft also frontally condemns institutionalized slavery:

> On what principle Mr. Burke could defend American independence, I cannot conceive; for the whole tenor of his plausible arguments settles slavery on an everlasting foundation. Allowing his servile reverence for antiquity, and prudent attention to self-interest, to have the force which he insists on, the slave trade ought never to be abolished; and, because our ignorant forefathers, not understanding the native dignity of man, sanctioned a traffic that outrages every suggestion of reason and religion, we are to submit to the inhuman custom, and term an atrocious insult to humanity the love of our country, and a proper submission to the laws by which our property is secured. (Wollstonecraft 1790, 23–24)

In *The Rights of Men,* Wollstonecraft explicitly argues for the first time that no slavery is natural and all forms of slavery, regardless of context, are human constructions. Her scorching words to Burke about his situating slavery "on an everlasting foundation" (in the past and the future) sharply distinguishes her discourse from her more orthodox invocations of slavery in *Thoughts* and *Mary.* Contemporary events have begun to mark the discourse on slavery in a particular and concrete way.

In particular, Wollstonecraft challenges the legal situation. In *The Rights of Men,* she graphically represents slavery as "authorized by law to

fasten her fangs on human flesh and . . . eat into the very soul" (Wollstonecraft 1790, 76). Nonetheless, although she supports abolition unequivocally, she considers "reason" an even more important attribute to possess than physical freedom. "Virtuous men," she comments, can endure "poverty, shame, and even slavery" but not the "loss of reason" (Wollstonecraft 1790, 45, 59).

The same month that Wollstonecraft replied to Burke, she favorably reviewed Catherine Macaulay Graham's *Letters on Education.* Macaulay's argument against the accepted notion that males and females had distinct sexual characteristics was part of the evolving discourse on human rights that connected class relations to women's rights. Macaulay also expropriated the language of physical bondage and wove it into her political argument. Denouncing discrimination against women throughout society, *Letters* also rails against "the savage barbarism which is now displayed on the sultry shores of Africa" (Ferguson 1985, 399). Macaulay takes pains to censure the condition of women "in the east"—in harems, for example—and scorns the fact that men used differences in "corporal strength . . . in the barbarous ages to reduce [women] to a state of abject slavery" (Ferguson 1985, 403–4). Macaulay's historical timing separates her from earlier writers who used this language; by 1790 slavery had assumed multiple meanings that included the recognition, implied or explicit, of connections between colonial slavery and constant sexual abuse.

In *The Rights of Men,* however, Wollstonecraft had not exhibited any substantial attention to the question of gender. But, after she read Macaulay, her discourse on gender and rights shifted. Notably, too, as one edition after another of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* hit the presses, Johnson was concurrently publishing Wollstonecraft's translation of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children.* In the preface to this educational treatise, Wollstonecraft pointedly inserted a passage of her own, enjoining the fair treatment of Native Americans. In terms of democratic colonial relations as they were then perceived, Wollstonecraft rendered Salzmann more up to date. There was, however, still more to come before Wollstonecraft settled into writing her second *Vindication* in 1792.

First of all, information about slavery continued to flow unabated in the press. According to Michael Craton, "William Wilberforce was able to initiate the series of pioneer inquiries before the Privy Council and select committees of Commons and Lords, which brought something

like the truth of slave trade and plantation slavery out into the open between 1789 and 1791" (Craton 1974, 261). Nonetheless, in April 1791, the Abolition Bill was defeated in the House of Commons by a vote of 163 to 88, a massive blow to the antislavery campaign.

Just as much, if not perhaps more to the point, in August of that year, slaves in the French colony of San Domingo (now Haiti) revolted, another crucial historical turning point. The French Caribbean had been "an integral part of the economic life of the age, the greatest colony in the world, the pride of France, and the envy of every other imperialist nation" (James 1963, ix).

The conjunction of these events deeply polarized British society. George II switched to the proslavery side, enabling fainthearted abolitionists to change sides. Meanwhile, radicals celebrated. This triumphant uprising of the San Domingan slaves forced another angle of vision on the French Revolution and compounded the anxiety that affairs across the Channel had generated. Horrified at the threat to their investments and fearful of copycat insurrections by the domestic working class as well as by African Caribbeans, many panic-stricken whites denounced the San Domingan Revolution (Klingberg 1926, 88–95).

Although no one spoke their pessimism outright, abolition was temporarily doomed. When campaigners remobilized in 1792, they were confident of winning the vote and refused to face the implications of dual revolutions in France and San Domingo. Proslaveryites, now quite sanguine, capitalized on the intense conflicts and instigated a successful policy of delay. A motion for gradual abolition—effectively a plantocratic victory—carried in the Commons by a vote of 238 to 85.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

The composition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* started in the midst of these tumultuous events, its political ingredients indicating Wollstonecraft's involvement in all these issues. Indeed, Mary Wollstonecraft seems to have been the first writer to raise issues of colonial and gender relations so tellingly in tandem.

More than any previous text, the *Rights of Woman* invokes the language of colonial slavery to impugn female subjugation and call for the restoration of inherent rights. Wollstonecraft's eighty-plus references

to slavery divide into several categories and subsets. The language of slavery—unspecified—is attached to sensation, pleasure, fashion, marriage and patriarchal subjugation. It is also occasionally attached to the specific condition of colonized slaves.

Wollstonecraft starts from the premise that all men enslave all women and that sexual desire is a primary motivation: "I view, with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex. . . . For I will venture to assert, that all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, which I have already enlarged on, branch out of one grand cause—want of chastity in men" (1792, 37, 138).

Men dominate women as plantocrats dominate slaves: "As blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves and the latter a play-thing. . . . All the sacred rights of humanity are violated by insisting on blind obedience; or, the most sacred rights belong *only* to man" (44, 83). In permeating the text with the idea that women are oppressed by all men, Wollstonecraft accords all women, including herself, a group identity, a political position from which they can start organizing and agitating.

However, when Wollstonecraft begins to argue at a concrete level, when she confronts, say, the "foibles" of women, that sense of group solidarity dissolves. Notable examples are women's too ready acceptance of inferior educations, female vanity and an excessive display of feeling, exemplified in the following passages on: First, education:

> Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to the judgment. (23)

Second, self-involvement:

> It is acknowledged that [females] spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,—the only way women can rise in the world,—by marriage. And this desire

> making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act:—they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures. Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio! —Can they be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world? (10)

With such attention to vain practices and little intellectual encouragement, women can scarcely be expected to lead (nor do they lead) sensible lives:

> Nor can it be expected that a woman will resolutely endeavour to strengthen her constitution and abstain from enervating indulgencies, if artificial notions of beauty, and false descriptions of sensibility, have been early entangled with her motives of action. (43)

In censuring how white middle-class women act, Wollstonecraft views them as a homogenized group: "I view, with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex. . . . It is time to effect a revolution in female manners" (37, 45). She separates herself off from them as a mentor-censor.

Wollstonecraft's self-distancing arises from an understandably positive view she holds of her own ability to transcend situations that she generally deplores in the female population. Since she had broken through prescribed barriers in a rather independent fashion from an early age, she deplores the same lack of resourcefulness in other women; she sees no valid reason why other women cannot act the same way, her sense of female conditioning somewhat precarious. Or perhaps she understands her own social construction and her past inability to remove herself from certain scenarios—when she worked as the irascible Mrs Dawson's companion, for example. She could be projecting anger at her own passivity in earlier situations.

This sense of herself as set apart comes out even more clearly, though somewhat indirectly, in a footnote to the second *Vindication*. In the text proper, Wollstonecraft is referring to the length of time it will take for slaves—like white women presumably—to gather themselves up from the condition of slavery:

> Man, taking her body, the mind is left to rust; so that while physical love enervates man, as being his favourite recreation, he will endeavour to enslave woman: —and, who can tell, how many generations may be necessary to give vigour to the virtue and talents of the freed posterity of abject slaves. (76–77)

In the footnote Wollstonecraft quotes herself, stating that slavery always constitutes an untenable human condition: "Supposing that women are voluntary slaves—slavery of any kind is unfavourable to human happiness and improvement" (77). Then she purportedly quotes from an essay by a contemporary, Vicesimus Knox, as follows:

> The subjects of these self-erected tyrants [i.e., those who establish what norm of human affairs will be, either "some rich, gross, unphilosophical man, or some titled frivolous lady, distinguished for boldness, but not for excellence"] are most truly slaves, though voluntary slaves; but as slavery of any kind is unfavourable to human happiness and improvement, I will venture to offer a few suggestions, which may induce the subjugated tribes to revolt, and claim their invaluable birthright, their natural liberty. (77)

However, as it turns out, Wollstonecraft has altered Knox's quotation to underscore her own political orientation. In his essay, Knox was not talking of women, let alone calling them slaves.

Wollstonecraft's fiery response to female domination echoed in Knox's essay—that women should act independently and ignore strictures—is probably why the essay appeals so much to her. Entitled "On the fear of appearing singular," one of the essay's most telling passages encourages such (singular) thought, no matter the consequences or the social ridicule:

> It may not be improper to premise, that to one individual his own natural rights and possessions, of whatever kind, are as valuable as those of another are to that other. It is his own happiness which is concerned in his choice of principles and conduct. By these he is to stand, or by these to fall.
>
> In making this important choice, then, let the sense of its importance lead him to assert the rights of man. These rights will justify him in acting and thinking, as far as the laws of that

> community, whose protection he seeks, can allow, according to the suggestions of his own judgment. He will do right to avoid adopting any system of principles, or following any pattern of conduct, which his judgment has not pronounced conducive to his happiness, and consistent with his duties; consistent with those duties which he owes to his God, to his neighbour, to himself, and to his society. Though the small circle with whom he is personally connected may think and act differently, and may even despise and ridicule his singularity, yet let him persevere. His duty to freedom, his conscience, and his happiness, must appear to every man, who is not hoodwinked, superior to all considerations. (Knox 1782, 21–22)

This sense of importance that Wollstonecraft attached to independent or singular thought—a cornerstone of bourgeois individualist ideology—helps to explain her apparent lack of emotional solidarity with the white women she roundly castigates throughout the second *Vindication.* Although her intentions are unreservedly positive—to restore natural rights to all women—her approach is not entirely compassionate. She sees all around her that women "buy into" societal norms. Because she has resisted these norms and short-circuited her own social construction, she deplores women who have not followed suit.

This separation that Wollstonecraft maintains from other women prevents her from seeing the implications of women's response, especially in the common frivolous practices she condemns. She cannot see that flirting and vanity could have a positive dimension, could sometimes be deployed by these very women as strategies of resistance, as devious ways of assuming a measure of power. Wollstonecraft, instead, sees the trope of the coquette, for example, as exclusive evidence that women accept their inferiority. The following passage on Rousseau's ideas about women as sexual objects illustrates Wollstonecraft's dislike of teasing behavior. "Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquetish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire" (1792, 25). Wollstonecraft sees women as slaves to men not just because of male sexual lust, but because women enslave themselves through an obsession with fashion and an eager acceptance of inadequate education. She cannot see female foibles in any other context than female self-trivialization.

Furthermore, the blame that Wollstonecraft attaches to white women for their vanity is complicated by her assessment of the relationship between African women and dress:

> The attention to dress, therefore, which has been thought a sexual propensity, I think natural to mankind. But I ought to express myself with more precision. When the mind is not sufficiently opened to take pleasure in reflection, the body will be adorned with sedulous care; and ambition will appear in tatooing or painting it.
>
> So far is this first inclination carried, that even the hellish yoke of slavery cannot stifle the savage desire of admiration which the black heroes inherit from both their parents, for all the hardly earned savings of a slave are expended in a little tawdy finery. And I have seldom known a good male or female servant that was not particularly fond of dress. Their clothes were their riches; and, I argue from analogy, that the fondness for dress, so extravagant in females, arises from the same cause—want of cultivation of mind. (1792, 186–87)[2]

Wollstonecraft equates self-conscious dressing with lack of intellectuality. In doing so, she reveals her own acceptance (and construction) as a contemporary woman, bombarded by and receptive to such ideas about Africans as David Hume's:

> There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. . . . Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. (Hume 1898, 3:252)[3]

Wollstonecraft does not take into account either white women's resentment about powerlessness, their displacement of anger, their projection of personal power and pleasure, or, in the case of Africans and African Caribbeans, some customary cultural practices.[4] Given, too, her protestations to Sophie Fuseli about her scrupulous conduct toward the Swiss

painter, Henry Fuseli (and his toward Mary Wollstonecraft), her attack on coquetry might also betray a rather personal subtext.[5]

Wollstonecraft's views, then, of white women's behavior in particular, and of sexual difference in general are complex and politically self-contradictory.[6] Justifiably, she thinks of herself positively breaking through social constraints while the vast majority of women conforms to a restrictive mandate. She sees this process continuing as a result of practices that reach back to antiquity: "Man, from the remotest antiquity, found it convenient to exert his strength to subjugate his companion, and his invention to shew that she ought to have her neck bent under its yoke; she, as well as the brute creation, was created to do his pleasure" (49).

These contentions parallel ideas expressed in Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* where she argues that women are historically oppressed because of situation and circumstances; the only item distinctly separating men and women is physical strength which men have used to exercise freely their physical desires. The fine differences between them seem to be as follows: Catherine Macaulay wants women to stop being giddy but recognizes their social construction. At one level, Wollstonecraft concurs with this and even uses the language of "circumstances" to explain vain and flirtatious female behavior. But she seems much less patient—more desperate even—with women's situation. Catherine Macaulay is calmer, less rhetorically intense in her analysis, perhaps because with a certain amount of middle-class privilege in her life, the situation has affected her less.

Wollstonecraft's argument from antiquity has further implications, too. She contends that this age-old subjugation for unspecified reasons enables men's desire to transform women into tools for sexual lust. These beaten-down women with bent necks resemble the brute creation, brute a synonym in contemporary vocabulary for slaves. Thus, white women, slaves and oxen become part of a metonymic chain of the tyrannized; this association of colonial slavery with female subjugation opens up new political possibilities. The bent yoke, for example, suggesting excessive maltreatment also suggests insecurity on the part of the oppressor, a combination that precipitates insurrection. The question that permeates the image is: Who will eternally bear a brutelike status? Remember, too, that the San Domingan Revolution is less than a year old so Wollstonecraft's words inscribe a threat of resistance in them: "History brings forward a fearful catalogue of the crimes which their cunning has

produced, when the weak slaves have had sufficient address to over-reach their masters" (167).

Moreover, Wollstonecraft deliberately uses the language of slavery to define women's status: "When, therefore, I call women slaves, I mean in a political and civil sense; for, indirectly they obtain too much power, and are debased by their exertions to obtain illicit sway" (167). This imposed status, this condition of subjugation provokes women into the flirtatious behavior she dislikes, but also provokes duplicitous strategies of gaining power. In histories of slave insurrections, the ear of the master—necessary for finding things out and for facilitating the timing of rebellions—was frequently obtained through such "illicit sway." While decrying the domestic sabotage of coquetry, she affirms a time-honored slave strategy and the need for resistance. Perhaps more important, Wollstonecraft is suggesting collective opposition, but can only do so through positing the resistance of slaves and the London mob. Put bluntly, to suggest that women politically resist—although she herself does—only seems possible for Wollstonecraft at an oblique level, given her social conditioning.

Wollstonecraft also reemphasizes that the historical subjugation of women is linked to male desire for sexual as well as political and social power. In doing so, she fuses the oppression of white women and black female slaves as well as slaves in general. A striking passage from *The Rights of Woman* based on the trope of sexual abuse exemplifies the point. It includes one of the few specific references to contemporary African slaves in *The Rights of Woman,* or in any of Wollstonecraft's texts for that matter.

> Why subject [woman] to propriety—blind propriety, if she be capable of acting from a nobler spring, if she be an heir of immortality? Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a sure guard, only to sweeten the cup of man? (Wollstonecraft 1792, 82–83)

The passage announces that slaves and white women are subjected to tyrannical practices that have no purpose beyond the paltry one of "sweeten[ing] the cup of man." On the one hand, slaves should not be expected to give "vital blood" to produce sugar and cater to white British

colonial-patriarchal whim and profiteering. On the other hand, the "cup of man" symbolically intimates that a female (opponent) is doing the filling. This sexual innuendo is consistent with Wollstonecraft's complex sociosexual discourse throughout *The Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft's awareness of the generic use of *man* further problematizes her provocative phraseology and the relationship she hints at between sweetening men's cup and "poor African slaves." If only as faint shadows, black female slaves and the specific kind of sexual persecution they endure are ushered into view, interjecting themselves as sexual victims. Aware of political and personal levels, Wollstonecraft subtly denotes sexuality as one of the "prejudices" that brutalize white and black women alike. As Cora Kaplan suggests, "We must remember to read *A Vindication* as its author has instructed us, as a discourse addressed mainly to women of the middle class. Most deeply class-bound is its emphasis on sexuality in its ideological expression, as a mental formation, as the source of woman's oppression" (Kaplan 1986, 48).

Sex and resistance interact. A coquette's cunning that can overpower (manipulate) men, links to subterfuges and plots by slaves, especially by black female slaves who double as objects of desire. Or at least Wollstonecraft might unconsciously recognize that undue attentiveness to one's person means that desire is suppressed and life is lived on almost self-destructive, self-contradictory planes; excess vanity is not as foolish as she superficially thinks. Thus sexuality becomes the site of black female and by implication white female resistance. Women use the very object of desire—themselves, their bodies—to thwart those who desire.

Wollstonecraft knows, too, that external forces cause sexual and racial difference. She articulates this understanding in a positive review of Samuel Stanhope Smith's *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1787). She agrees with Smith that climate and social conditions are the principal causes of difference among men and women throughout the world, but that, above and beyond these differences, human beings constitute a unity (Johnson 1788, 2:431–39).[7] She again pinpoints superior male physical strength as the reason for this ongoing situation.

Thus she denies the conservative argument of innate difference and necessary cultural separations—that God created essentially distinct beings.[8] Such subjected people as African-Caribbean slaves and white Anglo-Saxon women are *prevented* from developing and exercising their reason; certain environments have precipitated their alleged propensity

for passion. Once again, Wollstonecraft is arguing opposing sides of a question. Whereas attention to dress proves that Africans, conceived in a totalized way, are an unmeditative people, in this reading they became people historically cut off from intellectual pursuit. With a change in circumstances, she argues, reason can replace alleged naïveté and infantilism.[9]

Wollstonecraft's intervention regarding sexually abused female slaves is not surprising. Through reviews and personal reading, Wollstonecraft was well attuned to this phenomenon. In 1789, a review of Equiano's *Travels* centerstages her horror at "the treatment of male and female slaves, on the voyage, and in the West Indies, which make the blood turn its course" (Johnson 1789, 28). Equiano categorically indicts "our clerks and many others at the same time [who] have committed acts of violence on the poor, wretched, and helpless females" (Equiano 1789, 69). In chronicling his feelings on finally leaving Montserrat, Equiano harrows readers by undergirding his despondency, disgust, and (silently) his sense of impotence: "I bade adieu to the sound of the cruel whip and all other dreadful instruments of torture; adieu to the offensive sight of the violated chastity of the sable females, which has too often accosted my eyes" (Equiano 1789, 121).

Besides her intimacy with Equiano's firsthand experiences, Wollstonecraft has presented a paradigm of slavery in an extract on Inkle and Yarico in *The Female Reader*. Shipwrecked British merchant Inkle is rescued and nursed back to health by islander Yarico. After they fall in love, Inkle promises to take Yarico to London and treat her royally, but when a rescue ship appears, Inkle cavalierly sells her to slave traders when their ship docks in Barbados. To top off his inhumanity, after Yarico pleads for mercy on account of her pregnancy, Inkle "only made use of that information to rise in his demands upon the purchaser" (Wollstonecraft 1789, 31).[10]

Hence, Wollstonecraft's subtle approach to the sexual abuse of black women in the "vital blood" passage, in reviewing Equiano, in spotlighting that last look at a pregnant Yarico in an anthology for adolescent girls. Since her discourse as a white woman is already shockingly untraditional, to speak sex, and of all things to speak openly of black women's sexuality and hint at abuse suffered at the hands of white planters, would be an untenable flouting of social propriety. She has to maintain a semblance of conventional gender expectations.

On the site of the body and sex, then, Wollstonecraft foregrounds the

relationship between black and white women and their common point of rebellion. At one point even, referring to women as "brown and fair," meaning dark and fair-haired white women most likely, slippage and connection between black and white women reopen a fissure of sorts for comparing overlapping oppressions. Slave auctions and the marriage market, for example, are represented as variations on activities that are life-threatening to African-Caribbean and Anglo-Saxon women (Wollstonecraft 1792, 144). Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft acknowledges by her loaded silences that the representation of others' sexuality as well as sexual self-representation is a tricky business (Jordan 1968, 150–54). Thus, in one sense, equal rights and a self-denying sexuality go hand in hand, because sexuality for Wollstonecraft (dictated at large by men) imperils any chances of female autonomy. Not only that, Wollstonecraft recognizes dissimilar codings for white female and bondwomen's bodies, differences in complicity and coercion. In keeping with her sense of singularity, she is much harder on middle-class white women, in part because she is closer to them. She does not feel affected by or implicated in female social conditioning. Unlike Catherine Macaulay who argues that women will only waken up if they understand their oppression, Wollstonecraft implicitly recommends imitation of her own bold behavior as the "wakening up" device. To recap briefly: all women have the same choices available as she did and should forego vanity and self-indulgence; they should break their "silken fetters." If she can short-circuit subjugation, her brief goes, so can anyone.

Thus beyond a rhetorical appeal to effect a revolution in female manners, Wollstonecraft tends to eschew a group response to the absence of female rights. This aloofness, furthermore, permeates—even undercuts—her sense of vindication. A buried sense of identification and solidarity expresses itself, instead, in a displaced way.

Specifically, Wollstonecraft talks about resistance only by talking about slaves. The successful revolution by slaves in San Domingo taught the British public that slaves and freed blacks could collectively overthrow systematic tyranny. In the following passage, by equating slaves with laboring-class "mobs" and using highly inflated diction for rebels, Wollstonecraft censures slaves' reaction. "For the same reason," states Wollstonecraft, quoting from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "women have, or ought to have but little liberty; they are apt to indulge themselves excessively in what is allowed them. Addicted in every thing to extremes, they are even more transported at their diversions than boys." She

continues this response to Rousseau: "The answer to this is very simple. Slaves and mobs have always indulged themselves in the same excesses, when once they broke loose from authority.—The bent bow recoils with violence, when the hand is suddenly relaxed that forcibly held it" (Wollstonecraft 1792, 144–45).

Yet since Wollstonecraft disdains passivity and servitude, she may be embedding an unconscious desire about female resistance that corresponds to her own. She could be hinting that women should emulate the San Domingan insurgents and fight back. The nuance is further stressed pictorially by the sexual overtones of female compliance in "bent bow." Just as important, the image resonates with the previous textual image of women from earliest times when necks bent under a yoke.

Put succinctly, what slaves can do, white women can do; or, as she asserts in *The Rights of Woman*, authority and the reaction to it push the "crowd of subalterns forward" (Wollstonecraft 1792, 17). Sooner or later, tyranny incites retaliation. San Domingo instructs women about the importance of connecting physical and moral agency. Struggle creates a potential bridge from ignorance to consciousness and self-determination. In the most hard-hitting sense, the San Domingan revolutionaries loudly voice by their bold example—to anyone ready to listen—that challenge to oppression is not an option but a responsibility. The social and political status quo is anything but fixed.

Wollstonecraft's metaphor of the bent bow also decrees a stern warning to men. It reminds readers that male tyrants and predators incite their own opposition; at some point those who are "bowed" may uncoil themselves and assault the "bender."

This image of the bent bow further recalls Wollstonecraft's own situation in the last decade. Undeterred by an emotionally unnerving home life, she tried her hand at most of the humdrum occupations open to women, refusing to be molded or deterred by social prescription. Befriending and being befriended by Dissenters like Richard Price only fortified Wollstonecraft's already firm opposition to women's lot. Moreover, her subtle, analogous, and multiply voiced threats address at least two major audiences. She overtly advises women to educate themselves and warns men that vengeance can strike from several directions. The fierce, conservative reaction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a response to the covert as well as the overt text.

In that sense, the wheel comes almost full circle. Wollstonecraft recognizes that all women are opposed by all men in a general group

identity. However, because she privileges personal and political singularity and takes pride in independent thought and action, she identifies her own resistance to gendered tyranny as the means by which women should subvert domination. She projects outward from her personal response to female domination, oblivious to more devious practices on the part of other females to assert themselves and gain at least some personal if not political power. In one sense, her bourgeois individualism prevents that insight since she sees herself outside customary female assimilation. Faced with oppression, women have simply made wrong choices. Consequently, Wollstonecraft can posit collective rebellion by white women to prescribed subordination only by analogy.

With this displaced reaction in mind, certain re-views of Wollstonecraft's diatribe against female reactions to males—their flirtatious behavior—can be more sympathetically read. Just as Wollstonecraft can indict Africans for being neither intellectual nor reflective while portraying a carefully executed and successful revolution, so, too, does she exhibit a conflictual stance toward women. Since slaves resist masters and since all men oppress all women, women will, by implication, resist their male masters. Thus indirectly, Wollstonecraft registers that through coquettish manipulation, however feebly or distortedly, a women's resistance could be enacted.[11]

This argument about slaves and mobs, that is, creates a fissure in the text. If we doubled back, say, on salient passages where Wollstonecraft condemns Rousseau—"Women should be governed by fear," he says, "to exercise her natural cunning and made a coquettish slave" (47)—Wollstonecraft's view of slaves' and mobs' resistances becomes open to reinterpretation: even though she assaults these self-trivializing behaviors and deplores their forms, at some level she may recognize them as tropes of insurrection; she uses female reaction to male domination in a plural way. Deploring how women try to finesse and please men through sexual maneuvering, she rhetorically conflates coquettishness with cunning and makes sexual manipulation double as a form of resistance to tyranny. Women "play at" blind obedience not only to get some of what they want, but unconsciously to ridicule their "masters," to cancel out tyranny with emotional excess, with a mirror-image perversion of power. Frivolous giggling is also a signal act of mimicry whereby women seem to conform to expectations. Ironically, the artificiality of forced laughing marks male desire and orthodox prescriptions for female behavior.

If Wollstonecraft is (unconsciously or not) subtly mocking the idea

that fear works as a governing principle to produce obedience, she foregrounds the idea that forced obedience linked to sex is a practice that can turn into its opposite: women will mimic the master's desire with design, they will use conformist ideas about womanhood to gain power. At times, Wollstonecraft recognizes these strategies more openly. The state of warfare that subsists between the sexes (races), makes them (the tyrannized group) employ those ruses or "illicit sway" that often frustrate more open strategies of force.

The aim of *The Rights of Woman*, then, is to vindicate women's rights. Starting from the premise that all women are oppressed by all men, Wollstonecraft subscribes to a concept of overall group identity. This is undercut, however, when she probes particulars because her sense of a personally wrought self-determination causes her to find women culpable for their vanity, their acceptance of an inferior education, their emphasis on feeling. She locates herself outside what she deems self-demeaning behavior.

So in the end, she posits a group response indirectly, only by looking at oppressed communities who have actively resisted—slaves in particular—and sometimes "mobs." Her suppressed sense of solidarity and identification with women express themselves through the rebellion of slaves whose bow (back) has been bent too far. This analogy also constitutes a threat against masters; contradiction is there from the beginning since all men are oppositional—within Wollstonecraft's political framework—to all women.

Put another way, Mary Wollstonecraft's construction within specific social and cultural boundaries that she resists produces a covert text. Her sense of personal singularity occludes her vision so she cannot always imagine or conceptualize flirtation as a tool of resistance. Despite a radical outlook, moreover, she still subscribes to a sense of class hierarchy that contradicts her demands for greater distribution of wealth and legal representation and for female independence and colonial emancipation. In that sense, her text brilliantly illuminates the bourgeois project of liberation. She embodies the liberal ideal of progress in demanding freedom in certain individuals but the shortcomings inherent in that ideal undercut it. The conditions that produced the text, then, end up questioning the text itself and highlighting its gaps and incompletions, its long series of tensions between bourgeois values and issues of class, race, gender, and desire. So deeply estranged from its internal conflicts

is *The Rights of Woman* that it cannot ideologically fulfill itself; an authentic, workable solution to female subjugation is impossible. The text trips over itself, its variant vindications ideologically incompatible. As a result, contradiction emerges as a major textual coherence, problem-solving beyond reach.

Additionally, because the text invokes the French and San Domingan revolutions, the complexity of sexual difference, inequities perpetrated against Dissenters, and the abolition movement, textual implosions inevitably occur. Even while the text appears to dampen inflammatory ideas and underwrite the current system, liberating ideas erupt to refute the self-contradictory discourse of bourgeois feminism.

Thus the issues that Wollstonecraft avoids or bypasses end up hollowing and shaping the text into a new determination. She talks about disaffection, yet often blames women's alienation on their own behavior; she poses the problem as one for which women bear responsibility. Her sociocultural myopia leads her to misread resistance. Concurrently, she undermines her own argument through parallels between white women and black slaves. Moreover, the condition of women that she illumines pinpoints an important area of sexual difference and pushes the frontiers of this debate forward. Put baldly, the text ironically subverts the very bourgeois ideology it asserts (that creates alienation) and demands liberation despite the restrictive system it promotes.

Furthermore, Wollstonecraft's usage of colonial slavery as a reference point for female subjugation launches a new element into the discourse on women's liberation. No coincidence, then, that Charlotte Smith in *Desmond* (1792) and Mary Hays in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) criticize colonial slavery along with discussions of women's rights; exploring popular controversies, they simultaneously allude to Wollstonecraft's innovative investigations and connections. First of all, their inscription of colonial slavery presupposes the presence of women of color and assumes a white, patriarchal class system as its common enemy. Second, it suggests unity among the colonized and their allies. Third, it centerstages the question of sexuality in gender relations and stresses the ubiquity of sexual abuse in qualitatively different environments.

By theorizing about women's rights using old attributions of harem-based slavery in conjunction with denotations of colonial slavery, Wollstonecraft was a political pioneer, fundamentally altering the definition of rights and paving the way for a much wider cultural dialogue.

Notes

1. Writers as diverse as Katherine Philips, the Duchess of Newcastle, Aphra Behn, Mrs Taylor, Lady Chudleigh, Sarah Fyge Field Egerton, Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchelsea, Elizabeth Rowe, Elizabeth Tollett, and many more frequently employed the metaphor of slavery to express the subjugation of women; marriage was far and away the front-runner situation in which women described themselves or other women as "enslaved." Note also that Wollstonecraft refers to the Spartan's perpetual subjugation in Lacedaemonian society of the Helots, state serfs bound to the soil, with no political rights. See Shimron (1972, 96), Mitchell (1952, 75–84), and MacDowell (1986, 23–25, 31–42).

2. Wollstonecraft does not hold exclusively to those attitudes, however. In the *Analytical Review* somewhat later, for example, she argues that Hottentot people act in harmony with their situation (*Analytical Review* 25, [May 1797]: 466).

3. The essay was first published in 1742, but the passage quoted was added as a footnote in the edition of 1753–54. See Cook (1936) and Curtin (1964, 42).

4. Mary Prince, for example, as a slave in Bermuda and then in Antigua is described by a vitriolic writer in a pro-slavery newspaper article. The trunk of her only worldly possessions (containing unspecified items) that she took from her owner when she left is exaggerated by this writer to "several trunks of clothes" to suggest excess vanity and even prostitution. "She at length left his house, taking with her several trunks of clothes and about 40 guineas in money, which she had saved in Mr. Wood's service" (Zuill 1937, 37).

5. Attentiveness to appearance, across cultures and stemming from different origins, infuriates Wollstonecraft. The fact that her own appearance is negatively commented upon at this time suggests itself as a factor that enters in. Apparently she spruced herself up when she became infatuated with Henry Fuseli, the Swiss painter. See Flexner (1972, 138–39).

6. For Wollstonecraft's views on Eros and her anger at women as sexual objects for men, see Blake (1983, 103–4).

7. See also Smith (1787).

8. Hannah More's renowned opinions on women constitute one of Mary Wollstonecraft's significant textual silences, but most notably in the second *Vindication*. When Wollstonecraft vociferously applauds women's assuming more prominent sociocultural roles, she implicitly intertextualizes More's opposition to this advice. See also Myers (1990, 260–62).

9. However, despite Wollstonecraft's argument that ethnic differences are due to climate and social conditions à la Stanhope Smith and her unilateral commitment to abolition, she remains ambivalent about black equality. Her acceptance of a system that operates on the differential between owners and workers on the basis of certain assumptions about European superiority can never square with an absolute human liberation. Everything is measured against the model of a European society that regards African society as the other. Wollstonecraft may Eurocentrically contend that people in other cultures would be smart and civilized if they were raised as she was, but her view of Olaudah Equiano's narratives gives the lie even to that belief: "We shall observe, that if these volumes do not exhibit extraordinary intellectual powers, sufficient to wipe off the stigma, yet the activity and ingenuity, which conspicuously appear in the character of Gustavus, [i.e., Equiano] place him on a par with the general mass of men, who fill the subordinate factions in a more civilized society than that which he was thrown into at his birth" (*Analytical Review* 4 [May 1789]: 28).

10. Aside from her commentary on Equiano's and Yarico's experiences, among others, Wollstonecraft also recognizes other ways that sexuality oppresses white women. She had dealt on a personal level with her sister Eliza's postpartum depression by effecting Eliza's separation from her husband, Hugh Skeys. She felt, it seems, as if Skeys were responsible for her sister's condition; she treated him, more or less, as a male predator, a villain of sorts. At

the same time, the *Rights of Woman* appeared at a time in her life when she was immersed in a difficult personal situation; the choices open to a woman who wants to work and to love—she was discovering—were very limited.

11. Remember too that, psychologically, Wollstonecraft's attack on male sexuality could mark a displaced attack on Fuseli whose male sexuality has engendered inner turmoil. Mary Poovey's argument that "men's [and not women's] unsatiable appetites" are Wollstonecraft's target is worth considering in the light of her passion for the Swiss painter (Poovey 1984, 71–76 and passim). See also discussions of displacement in Freud (1966, 155–56 and passim).

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9

Wollstonecraft, Gender Equality, and the Supreme Court

Louise Byer Miller

Written by Mary Wollstonecraft over two hundred years ago, the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1929) was a great feminist document. It transposed the concept integral to the American and French Revolutions—the inalienable rights of men—to include the inalienable rights of women. In the *Vindication*, Mary Wollstonecraft challenged the prevailing notions that God created women as men's inferiors. To the contrary, she asserted, women are men's equals, born with the same capacity to reason and the inalienable right to do so. Any inequalities between the sexes stemmed from environmental forces. If females could just be given equal opportunities such as educational advantages, they could achieve men's intellectual and spiritual accomplishments.

What has been the American experience with Wollstonecraft's ideas? Those who founded our nation envisioned "unalienable" rights reserved for white males, not slaves, Indians, or women. But their conception was not static over time. The United States Supreme Court, given its power of judicial review, eventually departed from the intent of the

framers and expanded the range of protections to those originally excluded from constitutional consideration.[1] The Court did so by its interpretation of subsequent amendments to the Constitution such as the Fourteenth, and laws enacted by Congress such as Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[2] But many decades in constitutional history passed before these changes transpired. At first, the Supreme Court's decisions merely reflected the prevailing sentiments of the times, including those about women's rights, which kept women legally subordinate in the domestic sphere and excluded them from the professions and citizenship rights. These prevailing sentiments stemmed from the negative attitudes about women from the colonial era onward, attitudes that revolted Mary Wollstonecraft.

The Second-Class Status of American Women

Although Wollstonecraft valued women's role in the domestic sphere, she disdained the legal trappings of subordination in the household, making women no more than property. From the seventeenth to the midnineteenth centuries in America, women who married lost their legal status, becoming "femme couvertes," or "veiled women" (Blackstone 1979, 430–33).[3] For example, under common law, married women could not hold title to their previously owned property or their own earnings, hold the right to be legal guardians of their own children if legally separated, sue or be sued, have the right to contract, or execute a will.

During this era women's political activities, aimed at changing the legal inequities between the sexes, were limited both in scope and nature (Flexner 1975, 15). But attuned with ideas similar to Wollstonecraft's, some American women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as Emma Willard, spoke out for obtaining their inherent rights in the educational sphere, primarily to become better wives and mothers (Flexner 1975, 23–40). Also in accordance with Wollstonecraft's views, some of these women rejected an educational system that was not broadly based and that adhered to the tenets of the French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote: "The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them

when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life sweet and agreeable to them—these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from infancy" (Rousseau 1906, 263).

But any educational opportunities for women during this period were sadly lacking. Until well into the nineteenth century, it was considered unnecessary and unwise to educate females. Their "natural destiny" was, of course, domesticity, and providing public support for academic study (for which women were considered physically and mentally incapable, anyway) was low on the public priority list. Nor was there a movement for coeducation, a concept important to Wollstonecraft, until after the Civil War.

Women had more educational opportunities toward the end of the nineteenth century. For example, by that time three thousand female students were enrolled in institutions of higher education that offered a standard academic curriculum (Rhode 1989, 289–90). Increasing numbers of women had more opportunities ushered in by the twentieth century, but the Supreme Court was slow to grant women constitutional equality in any sphere. Whether it was in the professions, in business, or in civic callings, state laws continued to deny many rights based upon assumptions of male superiority, against Wollstonecraft's views.

This essay will first review how until 1971 the U.S. Supreme Court by its decisions reinforced traditional views about women. Then it will explain how changes in the Court's doctrine have served to help correct inequities in women's rights, creating a society more favorable to equality between the sexes in accordance with the views of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Early Court Interpretation

The Fourteenth Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution in 1868. It forbids a state to abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens, or deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, or to deny any person equal protection of the laws. However, these prohibitions are vague statements in need of interpretation. Exactly what protection the amendment provides, and what specifically constitutes privileges or immunities, due process, or equal protection, at any given

time or in any particular situation, is determined by the Supreme Court of the United States given its power of judicial review.

The Court did not use this power in a gender-equality case until the nineteenth century when it held that the intent of the Fourteenth Amendment was to abolish only racial discrimination (*The Slaughter-house Cases,* 1873). In fact, the Court at that time upheld any state laws that had a discriminatory impact on women so long as there was some rational relationship to a governmental objective, and it was legitimate for that objective to be the reinforcement of traditional views which role-typed the sexes. Two nineteenth-century cases illustrate the Court's jurisprudence.

In 1873, the Court was asked to decide whether the Fourteenth Amendment's privileges or immunities clause protects a woman's right to practice law in Illinois. The Court held that it did not. Illinois, under the police power of the state, could reasonably determine who, or rather what sex, was qualified for practicing law in its state courts. The Court ruled that "in view of the peculiar characteristics, destiny, and mission of women, it is within the province of the (state) legislature to ordain what offices, positions and callings shall be filled and discharged (only) by men" (*Bradwell v Illinois* 1873, 142).

Similarly in an 1874 case, the Court held that the privileges or immunities of citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment did not contravene a Missouri law that limited suffrage to males. Undoubtedly, the Court said, women are citizens, but the privileges or immunities of citizens under the Fourteenth Amendment are largely undefined, and suffrage is not necessarily coextensive with citizenship (*Minor v Happersett* 1874). States could decide whether or not it was appropriate for women to vote while the Court accepted and reinforced the states' views that a woman's destiny lay not in the public sphere but in the domestic realm. (It was not until 1920 that this decision was abrogated by the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote.)

Until well into the twentieth century, Supreme Court jurisprudence was consistent with the previous century's rulings on gender-rights issues. The Court's position was that women were born different from men, and thus could be treated constitutionally different, even if it worked to women's detriment (Freedman 1983, 921). For example, in 1908 the Court interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment somewhat differently than before, and found it provided substantive support for ameliorating

the harsh working conditions of women in certain establishments. However, the Court's rationale was not based on notions of equality of opportunity, but on paternalistic views of the proper role of women in society. The concern centered on protecting women's reproductive functions and "preserv[ing] the strength and vigor of the race" (*Muller v Oregon* 1908, 421). Women's advocacy groups grew to regret this decision as it led to low work status for women by keeping them from higher paying occupations.[4]

Another relevant case was decided in 1948. Despite an attack challenging a Michigan statute on Fourteenth Amendment equal protection clause grounds, the Court affirmed the right of the state to prohibit the licensing of women bartenders unless they were the wives or daughters of the male owners of the bars in which they were employed. In spite of the fact that women fulfilled many traditionally male occupations during World War II, the Court found the state objective a reasonable protective measure given the barmaid's employment environment. It even asserted that the state could totally prohibit women from working as barmaids. In the midtwentieth century the Court still was willing to draw "a sharp line between the sexes" (*Goesaert v Cleary* 1948, 466) and despite the deleterious effects on women, to reinforce traditional views of a "woman's place" and a "man's place."

The Warren Court

Between the time the 1948 case was decided and the era of the most liberal Court in American history, events were rapidly changing in American society. Women were less housebound than ever before: the birth rate had been in steady decline since the late 1950s; the divorce rate rose; more women were attending institutions of higher education; and the two-income family had become an accepted part of the social scene, so that by the end of the 1960s forty percent of all women over sixteen were employed (Chafe 1972, 218–19). Additionally, by the 1960s the feminist movement, which had been active at other times in American history, was revived again.[5] It was part of an era of civil rights reform, which protested treating individuals on the basis of physical characteristics. Leaders included Betty Friedan, who castigated the myth

of the "happy homemaker" and advocated revolutionary changes in gender roles (Friedan 1963).

Politicians surely noted these events, which evoked a federal level response: in 1961, President Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women to study the legal barriers to women's rights, which eventually led to the formation of important feminist organizations such as the National Organization for Women; Congress passed the Equal Pay Act of 1963[6] and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and momentum built for the Equal Rights Amendment to be added to the U.S. Constitution.[7] But the Warren Court stood firm in the face of a broad mandate for women's rights; the Court's jurisprudence did not change, even though it was starting to rethink its standards of review in interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.

During the 1960s a two-tier approach emerged that separated the upper tier of interests, made up of suspect classes (such as race) triggering a "strict scrutiny" standard, from a lower tier of interests, composed of nonsuspect classes (such as gender) triggering a "reasonableness" or "rationality" standard.[8] Under "strict scrutiny" the Court demanded a closer fit between the classification of the right and the law's purpose (Gunther 1985, 588–89). Under the "reasonableness" standard, the Court continued to accept any remotely reasonable legislative purpose. In practical terms this meant that it became very difficult for a discriminatory race-based statute to withstand Court scrutiny, but still easy for a discriminatory gender-based statute to be upheld, even though such statute had negative implications for women's rights.

The irony is that the Warren Court, which desegregated the schools (*Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* 1954), expanded the rights of the indigent (*Griffin v Illinois* 1956), demanded "one person, one vote" (*Baker v Carr* 1962), and expanded the rights of the accused (*Miranda v Arizona* 1966), also decided that a woman's place was "the center of home and family life." These words were from a 1961 case in the Warren Court era, which upheld a Florida law (automatically including men on the jury list but excluding women unless they specifically registered for jury duty) against a Fourteenth Amendment equal protection clause challenge. The Warren Court was consistent with previous Courts' views as it excused women from their civic duty because of their "special responsibilities" (*Hoyt v Florida* 1961, 62). By its actions the Warren Court, like all the previous Courts, reinforced societal views of domesticity as women's proper sphere; gender discriminatory laws in the United

States still were allowed to stand. The broader interpretation of women's constitutional rights was another decade away.

The Burger Court

The "conservative" Burger Court proceeded to change the judicial standard of review used in gender-discrimination cases, which led to the negation of numerous state laws and policies that adversely affected women.[9] Under the Burger Court the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment became an immediate focus of constitutional debate concerning gender discrimination issues. In the first key case in 1971, the Court used a "fair and substantial relationship" test and held that under the Fourteenth Amendment mere administrative convenience in Idaho estate administration was not a sufficient basis under which to justify the automatic awardal to the father and not the mother the administration of a deceased child's estate (*Reed v Reed* 1971).

But gender was not viewed as "suspect" in numerous Burger Court decisions in the 1970s and 1980s. The closest the Court came to viewing gender as suspect (one vote short) was in a 1973 case where it held unconstitutional under the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment differential standards based upon administrative convenience for obtaining military benefits for spouses of servicewomen as opposed to spouses of servicemen. The Brennan plurality decried the "statutory distinctions between the sexes (which) often have the effect of invidiously relegating the entire class of females to inferior legal status without regard to the actual capabilities of its individual members" (*Frontiero v Richardson* 1973, 686–87).

By the mid-1970s the Burger Court used a new standard to judge gender-discrimination cases. This standard was crystallized in a 1976 case based on the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court found Oklahoma's assertion unsupportable that "sex represents a legitimate, accurate proxy for the regulation of drinking and driving" (*Craig v Boren* 1976, 204). Called an "intermediate standard of review," this new standard accords gender-discrimination issues middling protection, and requires that a sex-based classification be substantially related to an important government objective to be upheld by the Court. With this standard, the loose "reasonable" or "rational relationship" test

disappeared, but "strict scrutiny" still was not applied to gender issues, nor is it to this day.

Nonetheless, during the Burger Court era, many gains were made in the name of women's constitutional rights. This was two hundred years after Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and more than 200 years after the Founders of our nation wrote about "unalienable" rights. The U.S. Supreme Court, the arbiter of what fundamental rights individuals possess, finally rejected the "baggage of sexual stereotypes" (*Orr v Orr* 1979, 283), "romantic paternalism" (*Frontiero v Richardson* 1973, 684), and "archaic and overbroad generalizations" (*Califano v Goldfarb* 1977, 207). Women no longer could be automatically excused from jury duty (*Taylor v Louisiana* 1975; *Duren v Missouri* 1979), forced to accept mandatory maternity leaves regardless of the circumstances (*Cleveland Board of Education v LaFleur* 1974),[10] receive fewer benefits from employers because of longevity issues (*Los Angeles Department of Water and Power v Manhart* 1978; *Arizona Governing Committee v Norris* 1983), be paid less than their male counterparts for the same type and quality of work (*Corning Glass Works v Brennan* 1974), be discriminated against in partnership decisions (*Hishon v King & Spaulding* 1984), or be excluded from all-male private clubs with public characteristics (*Roberts v United States Jaycees* 1984). The Burger Court also recognized that "hostile environment" sexual harassment is cognizable under Title VII (*Meritor Savings Bank v Vinson* 1986).[11]

The Fourteenth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act were the fulcrums the Court used to enhance the constitutional rights of women. Additionally, reproductive freedom rights, integral to the notion of equality for women, received firm support in the Burger Court era. For more than a hundred years previous to a 1973 decision, women who did not want to bear children either lost their liberty to make that decision or jeopardized their health and well-being in attempting to terminate their pregnancies. But the Burger Court held that under certain circumstances women were entitled to privacy in decisions about their bodies (*Roe v Wade* 1973).[12]

The Burger Court was not totally consistent in its jurisprudence concerning women's rights. Some backtracking occurred (*Geduldig v Aiello* 1974; *General Electric Co. v Gilbert* 1976),[13] and very notably in the area of public funding for reproductive freedom (*Beal v Doe* 1977; *Maher v Roe* 1977; *Poelker v Doe* 1977; *Harris v McRae* 1980).[14] Nonethe-

less, this Court left an impressive record, laying the foundation for future decisions on gender issues.

The Rehnquist Court

If the Burger Court is considered conservative, the Rehnquist Court surely is thought of as more so. But when that Court came into existence in the mid-1980s, it handed down some important decisions in tune with the Burger Court's advocacy of constitutional equality for women.

The Rehnquist Court upheld an affirmative action program for women, ruling that preferential treatment was necessary to transcend societal attitudes that kept women out of certain jobs (*Johnson v Transportation Agency, Santa Clara County* 1987). The Court also decided that by barring women from membership, a group of "private" New York City clubs with public characteristics, such as being the source of important business contacts, denied women equal treatment (*New York State Club Association v City of New York* 1988). In another case, the Court held illegal fetal protection programs by employers. These programs barred women, but not men, of reproductive age from certain "high risk" jobs and deprived even sterile women of significant employment opportunities (*International Union, United Auto v Johnson Controls, Inc.* 1991). The Court upheld a preferential employment program for pregnant workers (*California Federal Savings and Loan Association v Guerra* 1987), the partnership rights of women against sex stereotyping (*Price Waterhouse v Hopkins* 1989), and the right of victims of sexual discrimination in educational settings to sue for punitive damages (*Franklin v Gwinnett* 1992). Most recently, the Rehnquist Court broadened the definition of hostile sexual harassment in the workplace. Its ruling will allow victims to win suits more easily (*Harris v Forklift Systems* 1993).

But the Court has been criticized for its decisions contrary to the reproductive freedom rights of women, the effect of which makes it more constitutionally restrictive and practically difficult for adult women and minors to exercise freedom of choice. Although *Roe v Wade* has been reaffirmed (*Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v Casey* 1992), the Court has upheld state laws that have imposed waiting periods before abortions can be performed on women and minors (*Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v Casey* 1992; *Hodgson v Minnesota* 1990).

The Court also has allowed states to prohibit public employees and public facilities from assisting or performing abortions; has allowed states to prohibit public funds to encourage or counsel pregnant women to have abortions in non–life threatening situations (*Webster v Reproductive Health Services* 1989); and has allowed the federal government, through its regulations, to "gag" recipients of federal funds (such as clinics) with respect to abortion counseling (*Rust v Sullivan* 1991). President Clinton abolished these later federal restrictions immediately after taking office.

Mary Wollstonecraft believed that motherhood was very important. Yet involuntary motherhood restricts women from being able to exercise their rights in other areas, such as employment. For this reason alone, most women's rights activists consider the Rehnquist Court's jurisprudence a mixed one.

Wollstonecraft and the Court

Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* advocated a world that benefited both sexes with equal participation by both women and men in the rights and duties of civil society. Women would be allowed more opportunities and independence, have a civil existence in the state, and even be represented in government. These were far-reaching ideas for Wollstonecraft's time, and also, until recently, for the United States. Some of her ideas have finally come to fruition in the United States, in part because of broadened Supreme Court interpretation of the U.S. Constitution.

As Wollstonecraft envisioned, granting equal rights to women has benefited men. Because of the change in standard of review and the Court's movement away from sex stereotyping, both sexes can now be required to pay alimony (*Orr v Orr* 1979); and the custody rights of unwed fathers to their children have been enhanced by Court rulings (*Stanley v Illinois* 1972; *Caban v Mohammed* 1979).[15] In the educational realm, the Court has declared that denying a man entrance to an all-female nursing program at a state school is sex discrimination under the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause (*Mississippi University for Women v Hogan* 1982). But the Court has never ruled that single-sex education, whether public or private, is unconstitutional in general,[16] even though women traditionally have been discriminated against in

that realm. For example, as compared to all-male schools, all-female schools were often short on "intangibles" such as library resources;[17] and women used to be barred from the most "elite" all-male, private schools, further disadvantaging them in their career tracks.[18]

The future direction of the Court is both certain and uncertain. The world of constitutional equality for women built largely by the Burger Court in terms of moving away from sex stereotyping, the changed standards of review, and the substantive decisions in many areas including the gender rights of males,[19] will remain regardless of who is the Chief Justice and what shifts in personnel occur on the Court. But the area of reproductive freedom is in flux. The recent decisions indicate that the Court may be inclined to give the states more leeway in regulation of the reproductive freedom rights of their citizens.[20]

The Burger and Rehnquist Court decisions have greatly enhanced gender equality. And society as a whole will become healthier as the trend to compensate employees on the basis of merit and not on gender increases; when jobs are not denied to women on the basis of their sex; when sexual harassment can be punished; when partnerships are doled out on a nondiscriminatory basis; when women, like men have to fulfill civic obligations such as jury duty; and when "private" clubs with public characteristics that were previously all-male have to open their doors to women. Mary Wollstonecraft's vision of a different world for women may finally be coming to fruition, partly as a result of the United States Supreme Court, which gives contemporary interpretation to the U.S. Constitution.

Notes

1. Although not provided for in the U.S. Constitution, the Court's power of judicial review (the ability to interpret that document and rule on the constitutionality of legislative and executive actions) emanates from *Marbury v Madison* (1803). In terms of the Court protecting those originally excluded from constitutional consideration see, for example, *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) (African-Americans); *Yick Wo v Hopkins* (1886) (aliens); *Griffin v Illinois* (1956) (the indigent).

2. Title VII bars employment discrimination on the basis of race, religion, national origin, or sex.

3. By the midnineteenth century, many states passed married women's property acts that abrogated the "femme couverte" status of married women.

4. In general, see Baer (1978).

5. McGlen and O'Connor (1983) asserted that there were three periods in American history that were peaks in the women's movement. The first period was the early phase

(1848–75) in which the abolitionist movement sparked feminism; the second was the suffrage phase (1890–1925) where the feminist movement was linked with progressivism, the temperance movement, and social reform in general. The third phase began in 1966 and lasts to the present.

6. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 reflects Congress's intentions that employers pay males and females equitably "for equal work or jobs the performance of which requires equal skills, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions."

7. This proposed amendment stated that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article. The amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification." An Equal Rights Amendment, in slightly different form, was introduced in Congress every year since 1923. But it was not a candidate for two-house Congressional passage until 1970 although it passed the Senate in 1950 and in 1953. Eventually defeated, it was the subject of conflict and controversy for many years.

8. Rights also subject to strict scrutiny that were deemed "fundamental," included the right to vote.

9. This Court is often branded with a conservative label given the nature of its decisions; some of them reduced rights in various areas, for example, those accused of crimes; see *New York v Quarles* (1984). For an analysis of the jurisprudence of the Burger Court, see Blasi (1983).

10. Nor can women lose their seniority rights if they take a leave because of pregnancy, *Nashville Gas Co v Satty* (1977).

11. Between 1976 and 1986 the courts came to recognize two types of sexual harassment that violate Title VII. The first is "quid pro quo harassment" where the employer makes sexual demands on an employee in exchange for a job advantage or under threat of an adverse employment consequence such as dismissal or demotion; there may be a tangible loss for noncompliance. In the second form, called "hostile environment harassment," there may or may not be a tangible loss and the harassment may come from the supervisor or from another employee. "Hostile environment harassment" changes the conditions of employment, usually over a span of time. The victim may be subject to such indignities as unwelcomed touching or adverse comments of a sexual nature. The loss can be in the form of psychological damage, making it difficult to work in a setting that is considered abusive or degrading, potentially forcing the victim to quit the job; see Pollack (1990).

12. See other Burger Court decisions, supporting reproductive freedom rights, such as *Planned Parenthood v Danforth* (1976).

13. Because of the unpopular nature of both these decisions, and to overturn *Gilbert*, Congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which amended Title VII to extend its objective to pregnancy discrimination.

14. Other decisions that backtracked on gender equality include *Michael M. v Superior Court of Sonoma County* (1981) and *Rostker v Goldberg* (1981).

15. But on this issue the Court's jurisprudence has turned on the particular circumstances of each case—for example, see *Parham v Hughes* (1979); *Lehr v Robertson* (1983); *Michael H. v Gerald D.* (1989). Another case that supported the gender rights of males is *Wengler v Mutual Insurance Co.* (1980), which upheld a man's rights under a state workers' compensation law.

16. The closest the Court came to ruling on that issue was in *Vorchheimer v School District of Philadelphia* (1977) where no majority decision was rendered. The Court split 4–4 on whether a female student could attend a *public* all-male high school.

17. See the arguments against single sex schools in *Vorchheimer* (1977).

18. For example, until 1951 Harvard Law School excluded women.

19. Other Supreme Court decisions have benefited both males and females. See, for example, decisions involving the Social Security Act: *Weinberger v Wiesenfeld* (1975); *Califano v Goldfarb* (1977); *Califano v Westcott* (1979).

20. There has been much controversy as to how the more recent Justices on the Court will vote. Justice Souter was in the majority in *Rust v Sullivan* (1991), but voted to uphold *Roe v Wade* (1973) in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v Casey* (1992). He was joined by Justices O'Connor and Kennedy, adopting an "undue burden" standard, which allows states some leeway in regulating abortions, yet allows these justices to uphold *Roe v Wade*. Justice Thomas was in the minority in *Casey* and joined the dissenters, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, Justices Antonin Scalia and Byron R. White (just replaced by Ruth Ginsburg). Justice Ginsburg has yet to rule on a major case involving reproductive freedom rights.

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10

Women's Rights and Human Rights: Intersection and Conflict

Dorothy McBride Stetson

> The concept of human rights, like all vibrant visions, is not static or the property of any one group; rather its meaning expands as people reconceive of their needs and hopes in relation to it.
>
> —Charlotte Bunch, "Women's Rights as Human Rights"

Since the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, compliance with human rights standards has been a major issue in international politics. For decades charges of alleged violations of civil and political rights were a source of contention between the Western democracies and the communist countries; with the decline of communist-dominated governments, the goal of advancing human rights has appeared as the basis for a "New World Order." Western policy makers classify nation-states, from Europe to the Caribbean and from Africa to Southeast Asia, according to their progress toward democratization, judicial independence, and market economies (Humana 1992).

Finding a working standard of rights in a global context is extremely difficult because so many cultures and interests are involved. Specialized rights documents have proliferated as the U.N. and other regional organizations struggle to respond to needs of special groups. The U.N. has developed twenty-two human rights instruments ranging from the rights of the child to those of refugees. The issue has entered feminist

circles, prompted by questions about how the international human rights debate pertains to women. "There is a growing conviction among women activists in virtually every country that women's rights are human rights" (Maureen O'Neil, in Kerr 1993, v). Advocates for women are seeking to include their perspectives in the debate on human rights. Although strategies vary, advocates are united by a common belief that conventional human rights standards do not adequately treat the needs of women and that, until they do, women have lesser rights than men.

The occasion of the bicentenary of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* offers the opportunity to add to this debate over women's human rights the insights of one of the first political theorists to make rights for women a central focus of a vision of social and legal justice. Although she wrote in another time and place, Wollstonecraft's perceptions of what we call gender roles inform the contemporary debate on human rights for women on the international and comparative political scene. She used insights from the radical debates of her day and her own direct experience in events and ideas of the French Revolution to analyze the place of women in European society. She did not limit her interests to narrow themes of elite power in her own country. Rather, Wollstonecraft endeavored to understand the dramatic political and social changes underway in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century: revolution, the establishment of republican government, and citizens' rights. Now we find her ideas inform questions that dominate the intellectual and political debate at the end of the twentieth century: human rights, democratization, war and revolution, the foundations of state formation, and the role of the state in society. And, in turning her attention to the gender aspects of these phenomena, her work is potentially more useful to comparative politics today than is that of many of her male counterparts whose views of democracy were limited to all-male assemblies elected by male property-owners.

This essay will examine two points of contention in the debate over human rights for women. The first issue is one familiar to women's studies' students of American history, to wit: when the Declaration of Independence says "All men are created equal," does that include women? In other words, does the human in human rights include women and men equally? Or is special action required to gain rights for women? The second issue involves the relation between the family and the state: How do the guarantees of human rights that bind government to protect the freedom and integrity of individual citizens treat family relationships?

Does an implicit or explicit public/private dichotomy treat the family, and women's status in it, as private, and therefore outside of state concern? The first two sections of this essay will incorporate Wollstonecraft's views into the contemporary debate on each of these questions. The third section will consider the various strategies advocated by activists to achieve human rights for women. It will conclude with commentary from Wollstonecraft on each of these strategies.

Rights of Man, Woman, Men, Women, Humans

The concept *human rights* replaced the term *rights of man* (derived from the French Revolution) during the debate over the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947. Advocates for women were critical of the apparent exclusion of women, especially when some delegates from nonindustrial countries indicated that, for them, rights of man specifically excluded women and that was the way they wanted it:

> According to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, who was Chairman of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the old phrase was changed because of an interpretation given to it, at an early stage of international discussion, by a delegate from some benighted country. "I assume," he blandly remarked, "that when we speak of the rights of man, we mean what we say. My government of course could not agree to extend these rights to women." (Raphael 1988, 54)

While deliberations in the Commission on Human Rights were under way, another newly appointed United Nations commission, assigned to promote the status of women, brought activist women from many different countries to the international stage. They demanded removal of all words that excluded women from proposed human rights documents. When the first draft of Article 1 of the Declaration stated "all men are free and equal in dignity and rights," various gallant attempts were made to appease the women (Morsink 1991). Some suggested the term *mankind* be used. Eleanor Roosevelt replied that it was customary to use mankind to mean both men and women. For a time, the majority of the commission agreed to keep the "all men" term and add a

footnote explaining that "all men" meant "all human beings." The U.N. Commission on the Status of Women responded by insisting that the term "all people" be used. Another compromise, briefly considered, would have used both; that is, all people: men and women. The Belgian delegation argued that when translated into "Tous les hommes: hommes et femmes" the statement would make little sense (Morsink 1991, 235).

The Commission on Human Rights finally agreed to the following "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Then they went on to add: "They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (United Nations 1948, Art. 1). Thus, this gendered reference to the foundation of society and the state as a family-like community of brothers belies the Commission's concession to women's rights activists. Even without the reference to *fraternité*, the substitution of "human beings" for "all men" does little to reassure skeptics that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees equal treatment for women. Some argue that even the apparently inclusive terms "human," "human family," "humankind," and "human being" are not free of sexist implications. For those convinced that "man" means "male," the mere substitution of human does not change the perspective on the subject. In its historical origins and subsequent use the concept of rights—whether of man, citizen, or human—meant male rights. For some feminist writers, all norms of society are drawn from male reference points: the subject is male (Minow 1988). It is striking that despite language such as the "brotherhood of men" few human rights advocates admit that this central principle of eighteenth-century revolutions against absolutism and the organic state might mean what it says; but feminists are not fooled (see Pateman 1988, chap. 4).

Mary Wollstonecraft wrote two books about rights, one on the rights of men and one on the rights of woman. A main theme of this work is the argument that the term *man* does not include woman and that since the condition of women has evolved separately it must be analyzed separately. The solution, for her, lay in the fundamental principle that rights belong to women and men equally in their capacities as human beings. The basis for differentiating people must not be sex but variations in the qualities of reason and virtue. Since men and women have equal capacities for reason there was no natural superiority of men; physical and parental differences do not limit women.

Why did Wollstonecraft talk of the rights of *woman* rather than the

rights of *women*, which is the more common use in the contemporary debates? Discussion of gender issues in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often used the term woman. The meaning was as a collective noun, rather than a plural one, as in *woman movement*. It is similar to the way we use "human" to apply to all human beings or humankind. This use was heavily influenced by the translations of documents written in French. The French language refers to human rights as *les droits de l'homme*. The demands of citizens during the French Revolution against absolute privilege of the nobility found voice in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Olympe de Gouges, like Mary Wollstonecraft, declared that this charter did not free women from their chains. In 1791 she drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen (reprinted in Levy et al. 1979, 89–92).

The political significance of these terms was apparent again in the early 1980s when the French government established the *Ministère des droits de la femme*. The first minister, Yvette Roudy, sought to have the name changed to *droits des femmes*, arguing that the concept of woman's rights referred to women as a separate and different category of citizens while women's rights conveyed the idea of a group seeking political influence as a class (Stetson 1987, 23 n. 29). Such debates over the use of specific words illustrate the need to clarify the definition and application of terms like "human," "mankind," and "women's rights" and not assume common understanding and usage.

Although Mary Wollstonecraft argued ardently that women are equal to men as human beings and as citizens, she also insisted that women's special place in the political community be recognized. Women need not take the same roles as men to have rights. They must have rights in the roles they have: "The being who discharges the duties of its station is independent; and speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 145).

Thus the rights of women that Wollstonecraft contemplates is not a neutral adherence to a male standard, but what people today call women's own list of human rights. That list is derived from the oppression women endure at home, in their relations with men. Wollstonecraft railed against the way men kept women ignorant, frivolous, dependent: "the wanton solace of men" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 146). Today, women's human rights activists crusade against domestic violence, called "perva-

sive and structural" and societies where "women cannot even leave their own homes or their own country without permission of their husbands" (Cook 1993, 13–14).

Public/Private Dichotomy

In its acceptance of the assumption from social-contract theory that there is a separation of public and private spheres that places the family outside civil society, the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains blatant contradictions of its pretensions to apply to men and women equally. Article 16 states: "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State" (United Nations 1948, Art. 16:3). Article 12 guarantees: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation" (United Nations 1948, Art. 12). Thus, U.N. international human rights standards are rooted in the desire to protect the male-dominant family and the honor of its paterfamilias. No recognition appeared in the debates on these articles that protecting the honor of the male head in some cultures and religions has often supported draconian methods to limit education, work, reproductive rights, and sexual freedom of their wives (Morsink 1991).

Article 23 underscores the separate-spheres ideology that gives priority to the husband as breadwinner and worker by stating that "everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection" (United Nations 1948, Art. 23:3). During deliberations of the Commission on Human Rights, efforts to assert a right to legal divorce and remarriage, essential for the dignity and safety of women subject to abusive husbands and in-laws, were thwarted when some delegates complained that this would oppose the basic standards of Christian countries. When the Declaration was adopted in 1948, laws in many nations empowered the husband to refuse to allow his wife to seek education or employment, to control all the assets and earnings of himself and his wife, and to make major decisions regarding the children without consulting their mother. By refusing to face the issue of women's status in family relationships

and by protecting cultural practices that relegate them defenseless against persecution due to traditional patriarchal and religious standards, the U.N. Declaration is, in the eyes of many women's advocates, woefully inadequate in addressing human rights for women (Kerr 1993; Tomasevski 1993; Bunch 1990). The protection of privacy in the family translates to the state's giving men protection from interference in their patriarchal control over women as mothers, wives, and workers. To overcome this exclusion, the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women has, since the 1940s, pressured the United Nations to enact special guarantees for women. The most recent and important of these is the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1980).

Mary Wollstonecraft's political theory is solidly in the liberal tradition; essential to that tradition is the public/private dichotomy (Pateman 1988). However, her work in vindicating the rights of woman directly confronted and bridged that dichotomy. Throughout Wollstonecraft's writing she integrates her treatment of government and public matters with views of family and private concerns. She draws parallels between tyranny in government and tyranny by husbands and fathers: "The *divine right* of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is to be hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 41). For Wollstonecraft public virtue cannot be obtained in the absence of private virtue. "A truly benevolent legislator always endeavors to make it the interest of each individual to be virtuous; and thus private virtue becoming the cement of public happiness, an orderly whole is consolidated by the tendency of all the parts towards a common centre" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 144). Marriage is the foundation of society; if there is to be equality in society, men and women must be equal in the family. "If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfill the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 165).

Along these lines, Wollstonecraft argued that justice had the same meaning in relations between citizens and the state as in so-called private family relations (anticipating Okin's [1991] argument for family justice). In fact, without equality, marriage was little more than legalized prostitution in Wollstonecraft's view. Of course, freedom in the family included the right to divorce, for without divorce marriage was "insufferable

bondage" (quoted by Sapiro 1992, 149). In short, Wollstonecraft had an organic view of the interdependence of all social institutions; separation of public and private spheres was artificial and the root of the sorry state of women in the aristocratic circles she observed. The key to rights for women would be their rights and relations with men within the family. Any theory of women's human rights must confront, as Mary Wollstonecraft did, women's special roles as mothers. Today, the place of family roles and their relation to the so-called public arena vary widely in various cultures and political contexts. Wollstonecraft would certainly agree with those who argue that women should not be deprived of citizenship, autonomy, and dignity as citizens just because they retain traditional family duties.

Wollstonecraft addressed her essay on the vindication of women's rights to Charles de Talleyrand as a *legislator,* and advocated a system of national education for boys and girls together to nurture their equal capacity for reason, independence, and citizenship (Wollstonecraft 1988, 157–78). The contemporary human rights/women's rights advocates have a longer list of demands but central to them is that social, cultural, and economic rights have an equal place with civil and political rights. Just what role the state can play in securing these rights remains problematical. Although more than 115 countries have ratified the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, many continue to retain traditional and legal practices against the goals of the convention (Tomasevski 1993, 117).

Strategies for Human Rights for Women

Advocates for human rights for women have a variety of strategies for including concerns of women in the international discourse on human rights. Three will be discussed here: integration, separation, and transformation. Integration strategies work to ensure that women share with men the basic guarantees labeled as human rights. Complaints by the Commission on the Status of Women during the drafting of the U.N. Universal Declaration on Human Rights yielded this caveat in Article 2: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex,

language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (United Nations 1948, Art. 2). Similarly, Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits discrimination with respect to the enjoyment of the rights outlined in the document on the basis of "sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, or other status" (Brownlie 1971, 344). In the last decade, Amnesty International and other international human rights organizations have developed another integration strategy: to consider the special ways that women suffer from violations of conventional human rights (Amnesty International, 1991). These groups expose cases where police use rape as a form of torture or abuse wives and daughters of regime opponents as a form of blackmail. In 1993, Amnesty International joined with other human rights organizations to charge Serbian military commanders in the Bosnian civil war with human rights abuses for their use of rape as a systematic instrument of war (Stephens 1993). Integration strategies do not seek to add to the standard list of human rights, but rather to pay heed to the way women and other social groups fare under particular regimes and policies.

Strategies of separation involve the development of a separate charter of women's rights in order to focus on the special needs of women and to overcome the effects of cultural and religious practices in oppressing women. Foremost among these efforts is the previously mentioned Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). A special convention is needed, according to CEDAW's preamble, because despite the many human rights documents adopted by member states of the United Nations, "extensive discrimination against women continues to exist" (United Nations 1980). The drafters of this convention sought to overcome the public/private dichotomy by including specific guarantees for women in marriage and as mothers. Signatories pledge to take measures "to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and custom and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women" (United Nations 1980, Art. 5). While asserting that women should have the same rights as men in politics, work, and education, CEDAW includes special attention to health care and family planning and urges states to take

measures to suppress traffic in women and prostitution. Separation strategies urge governments to add to their responsibilities commitments to the special needs of women.

Advocates of transformation strategies argue that both integration and separation approaches relegate women to a specialized and secondary category as far as human rights are concerned. They favor a plan to change the standard list of human rights guarantees—to redraft it—from a feminist perspective. So far these demands have been mostly found in the writings of feminist legal theorists who envision a transformation of standard lists of rights to include claims of women against male dominance itself (MacKinnon 1989; Bunch 1990; Pateman 1988). The list of rights derived explicitly from gender analysis focuses on reproductive rights, sexual slavery, and violence against women, especially family violence. Transformation strategies require securing a central place in human rights organizations and changing priorities of what is widely recognized as the list of basic human rights. Rather than special attention to women as a subgroup, this requires that human rights become women's rights. The United Nations' attention to domestic violence illustrates the difficulties of this approach. The United Nations *has* taken a special interest in violence against women (United Nations, 1989). After describing a variety of causes, its 1989 report maintains that the ultimate solution to the problem is to address the general inferior status of women (105). Although those advocating transformation have only recently become active in international debates, they have pushed the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the so-called Helsinki accords) to incorporate some feminist demands into the Human Dimension of the CSCE (Sorenson 1991).

To what extent does Mary Wollstonecraft's theory inform these strategies of integration, segregation, and transformation? Her work has something for advocates of each strategy to consider. In her treatment of the concept of equality, she seeks to integrate women into the concept *human*. As noted above, she devotes much attention to the need for equal public education, declaring that "to render also the social compact truly equitable, and in order to spread those enlightening principles, which alone can ameliorate the fate of man, women must be allowed to found their virtue on knowledge, which is scarcely possible unless they be equated by the same pursuits as men" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 173). She argues that by eliminating the sex distinction in debates about rights, society will be improved.

Yet we have seen that Wollstonecraft also confronted the special problems of women in the family that make the integration approaches by themselves ineffective. Her conception of equality in marriage envisioned both spouses as parents and even addressed the need for some form of economic independence for wives: "How much more respectable is the woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling any duty, than the most accomplished beauty!" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 149). "Nor will women ever fulfill the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens, till they become free by being able to earn their own subsistence, independent of men; in the same manner. . . . Nay marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 165).

Finally, Wollstonecraft, like the transformation strategists, made issues of sexuality central to her analysis, specifically the way men use women sexually and thus rob them of dignity. "When Richardson makes Clarissa tell Lovelace that he had robbed her of her honour, he must have had strange notions of honour and virtue. For, miserable beyond all names of misery is the condition of a being, who could be degraded without its own consent" (Wollstonecraft 1988, 72).

Laws have long treated crimes of sexuality, such as rape and prostitution, from the male point of view. A man whose sister or wife was raped or seduced found himself robbed of honor. Thus it followed that women who are raped must also feel this loss of honor. Fathers suffered the loss of their daughter's virginity to a rapist as if they had been robbed of a priceless treasure. Thus, men assumed that if women valued what their fathers, brothers, and husbands valued, they would resist a would-be rapist to the utmost. If they did not resist, therefore, it was proof they did not value their virginity and chastity and no rape occurred. Thus laws have defined lack of consent in rape prosecutions according to how much the woman fought her attacker.

Mary Wollstonecraft considered rape and seduction from a woman's point of view—not as a loss of her value, but as a loss of her dignity as a citizen. Labeling rape a crime against the dignity and rights of women makes Wollstonecraft a visionary. Two hundred years after she wrote these words, many nation-states still do not consider coerced sexual intercourse a serious problem. Still fewer define the crime by focusing on sexual assault as a form of *political* crime, that is, a practice that contributes to women's lack of autonomy, dignity, and self-respect—

essential qualities to enjoy the equality of rights guaranteed by democratic government. Feminist theorists have begun to analyze the relations between the role of women in the family and their place as citizens (Dietz 1985; Phillips 1991; Okin, 1991). Mary Wollstonecraft's work at the dawn of the democratic revolution two hundred years ago remains pertinent to the contemporary discourse on women's human rights, citizenship, and democracy.

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11

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft: Restoring the Conversation

as recalled by Virginia Sapiro and Penny Weiss

(This conversation was constructed almost entirely from the writings of Rousseau and Wollstonecraft. Quotation marks indicate what is original. We strove to preserve the sense of the two writers as we understand them; we did not select apparently appropriate quotations out of the context in which they are originally found. Throughout much of this conversation we selected passages where we have reason to believe that Wollstonecraft was indeed responding at least in part to her reading of Rousseau.)

Introductory Thoughts

Our speakers reflect on JJR's work.

JJR: "Childhood is unknown. Starting from the false idea one has of it, the farther one goes, the more one loses one's way" (*Em.* 33). "[I]t would assuredly be the most unbelievable thing in the world that . . . the

Emile were the work of a man who did not love children" (*Rev.* 125).

MW: March, 1787. Dear Everina, "I am now reading Rousseau's *Emile,* and love his paradoxes. He chuses a *common* capacity to educate—and gives as a reason, that a genius will educate itself—however he rambles into that chimerical world in which I have too often wandered—and draws the usual conclusion that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. He was a strange inconsistent unhappy clever creature—yet he possessed an uncommon portion of sensibility and penetration" (*Corr.* 1787).

JJR: "I want to inquire whether there can be a legitimate and reliable rule of administration in the civil order, taking men as they are and laws as they can be. I shall try always to reconcile . . . what right permits with what interest prescribes, so that justice and utility are not at variance" (SC 46).

MW: "The *Social Contract* of Rousseau, and his admirable work on the origin of the inequalities amongst mankind, had been in the hands of all France, and admired by many, who could not enter into the depth of the reasoning. In short, they were learned by heart, by those whose heads could not comprehend the chain of argument, though they were sufficiently clear to seize the prominent ideas, and act up to their conviction" (*Fr Rev* 61).

JJR: "I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself. Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man" (*Conf.* 17). "I wrote my first *Confessions* . . . in constant anxiety about ways to keep them from the rapacious hands of my persecutors in order to transmit them, if it were possible, to other generations" (*Rev.* 7).

MW: "The *Confessions* . . . will ever be read with interest by those persons of sensibility who have pondered over the movements of their own hearts." "[T]hough we must allow that he had many faults which called for the forbearance of his friends, still what have his defects of temper to do with his writings? It is impossible to peruse his simple descriptions without loving the man in spite of the weaknesses of character that he himself depicts, which never appear to have risen from depravity of heart" (Reviews, December 1791).

JJR: "I am now alone on earth . . . I would have loved men in spite of themselves. Only by ceasing to be humane, have they been able to slip away from my affection. . . . But I, detached from them and from everything, what am I? That is what remains for me to seek" (*Rev.* 1).

MW: Dear William, "I am not well—I am hurt—But I mean not to hurt you. Consider what has past as a fever of your imagination; one of the slight mortal shakes to which you are liable—and I—will become again a Solitary Walker" (*Corr.* 1796).

A first skirmish.

JJR: "By the very law of nature women are at the mercy of men's judgment, as much for their own sake as for that of their children" (*Em.* 364).

MW: "What nonsense! when will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject" (*RW* 94).

Both discuss the purpose and reception of their work.

JJR: "I foresee that I will not easily be forgiven for the side I have dared to take. Running counter to everything that men admire today, I can expect only universal blame; and the fact of having been honored by the approval of a few wise men does not allow me to count on the approval of the public. . . . [Fortunately?] I do not care to please either the witty or the fashionable" (*FD* 33).

MW: "My opinion . . . respecting the rights and duties of woman, seems to flow so naturally from the . . . simple principles [that give substance to morality], that I think it scarcely possible, but that some of the enlarged minds who form . . . your admirable constitution, will coincide with me" (*RW* 65).

JJR: "How can one dare blame the sciences before . . . [this] most learned societ[y], praise ignorance in a famous Academy, and reconcile contempt for study with respect for the truly learned? . . . I am not abusing science, I [tell] myself; I am defending virtue before virtuous men" (*FD* 34).

MW: "[M]y arguments . . . are dictated by a disinterested spirit—I plead for my sex—not for myself. . . . It is . . . an affection for the whole human race that makes my pen dart rapidly along to support what I believe to be the cause of virtue" (*RW* 65).

JJR: "[T]he position most advantageous for one with a just cause is to have to defend himself against an upright and enlightened opponent who is judge in his own case" (*FD* 34).

MW: Well, "I aim at being useful!" (*RW* 75).

On Reason

Both floridly celebrate reason.

JJR: "It is a grand and beautiful sight to see man emerge from obscurity somehow by his own efforts; dissipate, by the light of his darkness in which nature had enveloped him; rise above himself; soar intellectually into celestial regions; traverse with giant steps, like the sun, the vastness of the universe; and what is even grander and more difficult come back to himself to study man and know his nature, his duties, and his end" (*FD* 35).

MW: "The utility of collecting a number of facts, and prying into the properties of matter, cannot be contested. To see harmony which subsists in the revolution of the heavenly bodies simply stated, and silently to mark how light and darkness, subsiding as we proceed, enables us to view the fair form of things, calms the mind by cultivating latent seeds of order and taste. We trace in this manner, the footsteps of the Creator, and a kind of elevated humility draws us to the pure source of goodness and perfection for all knowledge rises into importance, as it unites itself to morality" (*Reviews*, August 1789).

JJR qualifies his celebration; MW does not.

JJR: "If a few men must be allowed to devote themselves to the study of the sciences and arts, it must be only those who feel the strength to walk alone in their footsteps. . . . It is for these few to raise monuments to the glory of human intellect" (*FD* 63).

MW: "*Every* attempt . . . to investigate the human mind, in order to regulate its complicated movements, deserves praise; and the experience of a sagacious individual, will ever throw new light on a subject, intimately connected with the happiness of mankind and the progress of moral improvement" (*Reviews*, August 1789, our emphasis).

JJR seems to turn on reason altogether.

JJR: On the contrary. "[O]ur souls have been corrupted in proportion to the advancement of our sciences and arts toward perfection. Can it be said that this is a misfortune particular to our age? No, gentlemen; the evils caused by our vain curiosity are as old as the world. The daily ebb and flow of the ocean's waters have not been more steadily subject to the course of the star which gives us light during the night than has the fate of morals and integrity been subject to the advancement of the sciences and arts. Virtue has fled as their light dawned on our horizon, and the same phenomenon has been observed in all times and in all places" (*FD* 39–40).

MW tries to establish common ground.

MW: "In what does man's pre-eminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole; in Reason. . . . [F]rom the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow" (*RW* 81).

Further on the relationship among reason, passion, and instinct, and the need for education.

JJR: "Conscience, conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice, certain guide of a being that is ignorant and limited but intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and bad which makes man like unto God. . . . Without [conscience] I sense nothing in me that raises me above the beasts, other than the sad privilege of leading myself astray from error to error with the aid of an understanding without rule and a reason without principle" (*Em.* 290).

MW: "Conscience, or reason, which you will; for in my view of things, they are synonymous terms" (*RM* 11). "Children are born ignorant, consequently innocent; the passions are neither good nor evil . . . till they receive a direction, and either bound over the feeble barrier raised by a faint glimmering of unexercised reason, called conscience, or strengthen her wavering dictates till sound principles are deeply rooted, and able to cope with . . . headstrong passions. . . . What moral purpose can be answered by extolling good dispositions . . . when [they] . . . are described as instincts: for instinct moves in a direct line to its ultimate end, and asks not for guide and support" (*RM* 31).

On human development and reason.

JJR: Yes, "[w]e are born weak, we need strength; we are born totally unprovided, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything we do not have at our birth and which we need when we are grown is given us by education" (*Em.* 38). And, indeed, "Before the age of reason we do good and bad without knowing it, and there is no morality in our action" (*Em.* 67).

MW: "Children cannot be taught too early to submit to reason, the true definition of that necessity, which Rousseau insisted on . . . ; for to submit to reason is to submit to the nature of things, and to that God, who formed them so, to promote our real interest" (*RW* 227).

JJR: "To reason with children was Locke's great maxim. . . . I see nothing more stupid than these children who have been reasoned with so much. Of all the faculties of man, reason . . . is the one that develops with the most difficulty and latest. And it is this one which they want to use in order to develop the first faculties! The masterpiece of a good education is to make a reasonable man, and they claim they raise a child by reason! . . . If children understood reason, they would not need to be raised" (*Em.* 89).

MW: "Intellectual improvements, like the growth and formation of the body, must be gradual" (*Thoughts* 10).

JJR: "[B]y speaking to them from an early age a language which they do not understand, one accustoms them to show off with words, to control all that is said to them, to believe themselves as wise as their masters, to become disputatious and rebellious" (*Em.* 89). "Treat your pupil according to his age" (*Em.* 91).

MW: "How then are the tender minds of children to be cultivated? . . . Above all, try to teach them to combine their ideas. It is of more use than can be conceived, for a child to learn to compare things that are similar in some respects, and different in others. I wish them to be taught to think—thinking, indeed, is a severe exercise, and exercise of either mind or body will not at first be entered on, but with a view to pleasure. Not that I would have them make long reflections; for when they do not arise from experi-

ence, they are mostly absurd" (*Thoughts* 11). Further, "I am, indeed, persuaded that the heart, as well as the understanding, is opened by cultivation. . . . And, perhaps, in the education of both sexes, the most difficult task is so to adjust instruction as not to narrow the understanding, whilst the heart is warmed by the generous juices of spring, . . . nor to dry up the feelings by employing the mind in investigations remote from life" (*RW* 135).

Setting the terms of debate on reason and gender.

JJR: Oh, "reason . . . [H]ow many questions are raised by this word! Are [for example] women capable of solid reasoning? Is it important that they cultivate it? Will they succeed in cultivating it? Is its cultivation useful for the functions which are imposed on them? Is it compatible with the simplicity that suits them?" (*Em.* 382).

MW: "[T]he inquiry is whether she have reason or not" (*RW* 122). "[E]ither nature has made a great difference between man and man, or . . . the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial" (*RW* 73). "Women are . . . to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men" (*RW* 9). "[P]rove. . . . to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency, that [women] want reason—else this flaw in your [work] . . . will ever shew that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality" (*RW* 68).

Abstract and practical reason.

JJR: Well, "[t]he quest for abstract and speculative truths, principles, and axioms in the sciences, for everything that tends to generalize ideas, is not within the competence of woman" (*Em.* 386).

MW: "[T]he power of generalizing ideas, to any great extent, is not very common amongst men or women" (*RW* 123).

JJR: True, "the art of generalizing ideas . . . is one of the most difficult and belated exercises of human understanding." It is not clear that "the average man [will] ever be capable of deriving his rules of conduct from this manner of reasoning" (GM 161). Further, "general and abstract ideas are the source of men's greatest errors" (*Em.* 274). "Thank heaven, we are delivered from all that terrifying apparatus of philosophy. We can be men without being scholars" (*Em.* 290).

Disagreement over the link between reason and virtue, not only, but especially for women because of the nature of everyday duties.

MW: "Reason comes from God, and is given in whole to each individual, so each individual can be perfected" (*RW* 122). "[I]t is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason" (*RW* 21).

JJR: "The use of reason that leads man to the knowledge of his duties is not very complex. The use of reason that leads woman to the knowledge of hers is even simpler" (*Em.* 382).

MW: "[S]urely, Sir, you will not assert, that a duty can be binding which is not founded on reason? . . . [T]he more understanding women acquire, the more they will be attached to their duty—comprehending it" (*RW* 67).

JJR: "[W]ho would want to spend his life in sterile speculations if each of us, consulting only the duties of man and the needs of nature, had time for nothing except his fatherland, the unfortunate, and his friends?" (*FD* 48).

MW: "I do not mean to insinuate that either sex should be so lost in abstract reflections or distant views, as to forget the affections and duties that lie before them. . . . [O]n the contrary, I would warmly recommend them, even while I assert, that they afford most satisfaction when they are considered in their true, sober, light." For example, "Connected

with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, [women's] moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold [their] own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue" (*RW* 95).

JJR: "A brilliant wife is a plague to her husband, her children, her friends, her valets, everyone. From the sublime elevation of her fair genius she disdains all her woman's duties" (*Em.* 409). "In general, if it is important for men to limit their studies to useful knowledge, it is even more important for women, because . . . their lives do not permit them to indulge themselves in any preferred talent to the prejudice of their duties" (*Em.* 368).

MW: "I . . . infer that reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly, and I must . . . repeat, that sensibility is not reason" (*RW* 133). "Rousseau was more consistent when he wished to stop the progress of reason in both sexes, for if men eat of the tree of knowledge, women will come in for a taste; but from the imperfect cultivation which their understandings now receive, they only attain a knowledge of evil" (*RW* 89).

JJR sees some exception to the rule of ignorance for women.

JJR: "I would not indiscriminately object to a woman's being limited to the labors of her sex alone and left in profound ignorance of all the rest. But . . . such a woman would be too easy too seduce. . . . Moreover, since she is subject to the judgment of men, she ought to merit their esteem. . . . How will she go about all this if she is ignorant of our institutions, if she knows nothing of our practices and our proprieties, if she knows neither the source of human judgments nor the passions determining them?" (*Em.* 382–83). Finally, "how will a woman who has no habit of reflecting raise her children? How will she discern what suits them? How will she incline them toward virtues she

does not know, toward merit of which she has no idea?" (*Em.* 408–9).

MW presses the point.

MW: "How indeed [will] she, when her husband is not always at hand to lend her his reason?—when they both together make but one moral being" (*RW* 89). "[T]his duty [of caring for children] would afford many forcible arguments for strengthening the female understanding, if it were *properly* considered" (*RW* 222, our emphasis). "To be a good mother—a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. . . . [U]nless the understanding of woman be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly" (*RW* 223).

JJR: Whatever women might be capable of, "[a]ll their studies ought to be related to practice." "[T]he art of thinking is not foreign to women, but they ought only to skim the sciences of reasoning" (*Em.* 426).

MW: "[T]he knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature. . . . [W]omen, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being—one of Rousseau's wild chimeras" (*RW* 108).

JJR: "If woman could ascend to general principles as well as man can, and if man had as good a mind for details as woman does, they would always be independent of one another, they would live in eternal discord, and their partnership could not exist" (*Em.* 377).

MW: "If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should be educated after the same model, or the inter-

course of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfill the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens, till they become free by being enabled to earn their own subsistence, independent of men; in the same manner, I mean, to prevent misconstruction, as one man is independent of another. Nay, marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses." "So convinced am I of this truth that I will venture to predict that virtue will never prevail in society till the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason; and till the affections common to both are allowed to gain their due strength by the discharge of mutual duties" (*RW* 237).

On Gender

They begin with some basic agreement about natural similarity.

JJR: "In everything not connected with sex, woman is man. She has the same organs, the same needs, the same faculties. The machine is constructed in the same way; its parts are the same; the one functions as does the other; the form is similar; and in whatever respect one considers them, the difference between them is only one of more or less" (*Em.* 357). "Up to the nubile age children of the two sexes have nothing apparent to distinguish them: the same visage, the same figure, the same complexion, the same voice. Everything is equal: girls are children, boys are children; the same name suffices for beings so much alike" (*Em.* 211).

They differ on the education and social construction of women and men.

MW: "A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it though it may excite a horse-laugh. —I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour" (*RW* 125).

JJR: On the other hand, "[a] perfect woman and a perfect man ought not to resemble each other in mind any more than in looks" (*Em.* 358).

MW: "I wish to throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty. For man and woman, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same" (*RW* 120).

JJR: "[M]an and woman are not and ought not to be constituted in the same way in either character or temperament[;] it follows that they ought not to have the same education" (*Em.* 363).

MW: "[F]alse system[s] of education . . . consider[. . .] females rather as women than human creatures" (*RW* 73).

JJR: To cultivate man's qualities in women and to neglect those which are proper to them is obviously to work to their detriment. . . . [T]he two are incompatible" (*Em.* 364).

MW: "[F]rom every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind; —all those who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine" (*RW* 74).

JJR: "[J]udicious mother, do not make a decent man of your daughter" (*Em.* 364).

MW: "The mother, who wishes to give true dignity of character to her daughter" must do the opposite of

what Rousseau says "with all the deluding charms of eloquence and philosophical sophistry" (*RW* 110).

Women as subjects of men.

JJR: "In the union of the sexes . . . [o]ne ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak. One must necessarily will and be able; it suffices that the other put up little resistance. Once this principle is established, it follows that woman is made specially to please man. If man ought to please her in turn, it is due to a less direct necessity. His merit is in his power; he pleases by the sole fact of his strength. . . . If woman is made to please and to be subjugated, she ought to make herself agreeable to man" (*Em.* 356).

MW: "I have quoted this passage, lest my readers should suspect that I warped the author's reasoning to support my own arguments. . . . [I]n educating women [Rousseau's] fundamental principles lead to a system of cunning and lasciviousness. Supposing woman to have been formed only to please, and be subject to man, the conclusion is just, she ought to sacrifice every other consideration to render herself agreeable to him: and let this brutal desire of self-preservation be the grand spring of all her actions, when it is proved to be the iron bed of fate. . . . But . . . I may be allowed to doubt whether woman was created for man" (*RW* 148). Yours and other "books . . . tend, in my opinion, to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue" (*RW* 91).

The dependence of ruler and ruled.

JJR: Well, "[w]oman and man are made for one another, but their mutual dependence is not equal. Men depend on women because of their desires; women depend on men because of both their desires and their needs" (*Em.* 364).

MW: "Whilst man remains such an imperfect being as he appears hitherto to have been, he will . . . be the slave of his appetites; and those women obtaining most power who gratify a predominant one, the sex is

degraded by a physical, if not by a moral necessity" (*RW* 116).

JJR: "[W]oman [has] more facility to excite the desires than man to satisfy them. This causes the latter, whether he like it or not, to depend on the former's wish and constrains him to seek to please her in turn" (*Em.* 360). "Is it our fault that they please us when they are pretty, that their mincing ways seduce us, that the art which they learn from you attracts us and pleases us, that we like to see them tastefully dressed, that we let them sharpen at their leisure the weapons with which they subjugate us?" (*Em.* 363).

MW: "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood" (*RW* 75). "I lament that women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions, which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when, in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority" (*RW* 125). "Who ever drew a more exalted female character than Rousseau? though in the lump he constantly endeavoured to degrade the sex. And why was he thus anxious? Truly to justify himself the affection which weakness and virtue had made him cherish for that fool Theresa. He could not raise her to the common level of her sex; and therefore he laboured to bring women down to hers" (*RW* 246).

The sexual basis of appropriate gender relations.

JJR: Consider the origin of "attack and defense, the audacity of one sex and the timidity of the other. . . . Who could think that nature has indiscriminately prescribed the same advances to both men and women, and that the first to form desires should also be the first to show them? . . . Since the undertaking has such different *consequences* for the two sexes, is it natural that they should have the same audacity in abandoning themselves to it? With so great an

inequality in what each risks in the union, how can one fail to see that if reserve did not impose on one sex the moderation which nature imposes on the other, the result would soon be the ruin of both, and then mankind would perish by the means established for preserving it?" (*Em.* 358–59).

MW: "Men are more subject to the physical love than women. I know of no other way of preserving the chastity of mankind, than that of rendering women rather objects of love than desire. The difference is great" (*Hints* 272). "The want of modesty . . . arises from the state of warfare so strenuously supported by voluptuous men as the very essence of modesty, though, in fact, its bane" (*RW* 195). "It is vain to expect much public or private virtue, till both men and women grow more modest—till men, curbing a sensual fondness for the sex, or an affectation of manly assurance, more properly speaking, impudence, treat each other with respect" (*RW* 195). "Till men are more chaste, women will be immodest" (*RW* 196).

JJR, like MW, uses political metaphors for husband and wife.

JJR: "Doubtless it is not permitted to anyone to violate his faith, and every unfaithful husband who deprives his wife of the only reward of the austere duties of her sex is an unjust and barbarous man. But the unfaithful woman does more; she dissolves the family and breaks all the bonds of nature. In giving the man children which are not his, she betrays both. She joins perfidy to infidelity." "If there is a frightful condition in the world, it is that of an unhappy father who, lacking confidence in his wife, does not dare to yield to the sweetest sentiments of his heart, who wonders, in embracing his child, whether he is embracing another's, the token of his dishonor, the plunderer of his own children's property. . . . It is important, then, not only that a woman be faithful, but that she be judged to be faithful by her husband, by those near her, by everyone. . . . [S]he [should]

give evidence of her virtue to the eyes of others as well as to her own conscience" (*Em.* 361). "Opinion is the grave of virtue among men and its throne among women" (*Em.* 365).

On appearances and reputation.

MW: "Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man" (*RW* 88); and "should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives" (*RW* 88). "Exterior accomplishments are not to be obtained by imitation, they must result from the mind, or the deception is soon detected, and admiration gives place to contempt" (*Reader* 59). Besides, "faithless husbands will make faithless wives" (*RW* 68).

JJR: "From . . . habitual constraint comes a docility which women need all their lives, since they never cease to be subjected either to a man or to the judgments of men and they are never permitted to put themselves above these judgments" (*Em.* 370).

MW: "Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him the gift of reason?" (*RW* 67).

JJR: "The first and most important quality of a woman is gentleness. As she is made to obey a being who is so imperfect, often so full of vices, and always so full of defects as man, she ought to learn early to endure even injustice and to bear a husband's wrongs without complaining. It is not for his sake, it is for her own, that she ought to be gentle. The bitterness and the stubbornness of women never do anything but increase their ills and the bad behaviour of their husbands" (*Em.* 370).

MW: "Formed to live with such an imperfect being as man, they ought to learn from the exercise of their

faculties the necessity of forbearance; but all the sacred rights of humanity are violated by insisting on blind obedience; or, the most sacred rights belong only to man. The being who patiently endures injustice, and silently bears insults, will soon become unjust, or unable to discern right from wrong. . . . Of what materials can that heart be composed, which can melt when insulted, and instead of revolting at injustice, kiss the rod? . . . Nature never dictated such insincerity. . . . Let the husband beware of trusting too implicitly to this servile obedience; for if his wife can with winning sweetness caress him when angry, and when she ought to be angry, unless contempt has stifled a natural effervescence, she may do the same after parting with a lover" (*RW* 153).

More on the dependencies of the masters and the powers of the weak.

JJR: In fact, "the stronger appears to be master but actually depends on the weaker. This is due not to a frivolous practice of gallantry or to the proud generosity of a protector, but to an invariable law of nature which gives woman more facility to excite the desires than man to satisfy them. This causes the latter, whether he likes it or not, to depend on the former's wish and constrains him to seek to please her in turn, so that she will consent to let him be the stronger" (*Em.* 360).

MW: "Women, . . . obtaining power by unjust means, . . . become either abject slaves or capricious tyrants" (*RW* 114). "When men boast of their triumphs over women, what do they boast of?" (*RW* 195).

JJR: "[W]hat is sweetest for man in his victory is the doubt whether it is weakness which yields to strength or the will which surrenders. And the woman's usual ruse is always to leave this doubt between her and him" (*Em.* 360).

MW: "I . . . exclaim against the sexual desire of conquest when the heart is out of the question" (*RW*

125). "How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes! For instance, the winning softness so warmly, and frequently, recommended, that governs by obeying. What childish expressions, and how insignificant is the being . . . who will condescend to govern by such sinister methods!" (*RW* 89).

On the value of weakness.

JJR: "Far from blushing at their weakness, [women] make it their glory. Their tender muscles are without resistance. They pretend to be unable to lift the lightest burdens. They would be ashamed to be strong. Why is that? It is not only to appear delicate; it is due to a shrewder precaution. They prepare in advance excuses and the right to be weak in case of need" (*Em.* 360).

MW: "Rousseau has furnished [women] with a plausible excuse . . . to be proud of a defect, which could only have occurred to a man, . . . that they might, forsooth, have a pretext for yielding to a natural appetite without violating a romantic species of modesty, which gratifies the pride and libertinism of man" (*RW* 109). "[T]his artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength, which leads [women] to play off those contemptible infantine airs that undermine esteem even whilst they excite desire" (*RW* 77).

JJR: "[Men] constantly say, 'Women have this or that failing which we do not have.' [Their] pride deceives [them]. They would be failings for [men]; they are [women's] good qualities" (*Em.* 363).

MW: "As a philosopher, I read with indignation the plausible epithets which men use to soften their insults; and, as a moralist, I ask what is meant by such heterogeneous association, as fair defects, amiable weaknesses, &c?" (*RW* 103).

JJR: "The peculiar cleverness given to the fair sex is a very equitable compensation for their lesser share of strength, a compensation without which women would be not man's companion but his slave. It is by means of this superiority in talent that she keeps herself his equal and that she governs him while obeying him. Woman has everything against her—our defects, her timidity, and her weakness. She has in her favor only her art and her beauty. Is it not just that she cultivate both?" (*Em.* 371).

MW: "[T]he arbitrary power of beauty . . ." (*RW* 90). "Let me reason with the supporters of this opinion who have any knowledge of human nature, do they imagine that marriage can eradicate the habitude of life? The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day, when summer is passed and gone" (*RW* 96). "[T]he great art of pleasing . . . is only useful to a mistress; the chaste wife, and serious mother, should only consider her power to please as the polish of her virtues. . . . [H]er first wish should be to make herself respectable" (*RW* 97).

JJR: "[T]here is quite a difference between wanting to please the man of merit, the truly lovable man, and wanting to please those little flatterers who dishonor both their own sex and the one they imitate" (*Em.* 365).

The need for independence.

MW: "To gain the affections of a virtuous man is affectation necessary?" (*RW* 97). "Besides, the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will . . . *merit* his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions" (*RW* 98, our emphasis). "Men have superior strength of body; but were it not for mistaken notions

of beauty, women would acquire sufficient to enable them to earn their own subsistence, the true definition of independence" (*RW* 155).

Duty and occupation.

JJR: "Is it not a sound way of reasoning to present exceptions in response to such well-grounded general laws? Women, you say, do not always produce children? No, but their proper purpose is to produce them. . . . Finally, what does it matter that this or that woman produces few children? Is woman's status any less that of motherhood, and is it not by general laws that nature and morals ought to provide for this status? Even if there were intervals as long as one supposes between pregnancies, will a woman abruptly and regularly change her way of life without peril and risk? Will she be nurse today and warrior tomorrow? . . . Will she suddenly go from shade, enclosure, and domestic cares to the harshness of the open air, the labors, the fatigues, and the perils of war?" (*Em.* 262).

MW: "As a proof of the inferiority of the sex, Rousseau has . . . exclaimed, How can they leave the nursery for the camp!" "Fair and softly, gentle reader, male or female, do not alarm thyself, for though I have compared the character of a modern soldier with that of a civilized woman, I am not going to advise them to turn their distaff into a musket, though I sincerely wish to see the bayonet converted into a pruning hook. I only recreated an imagination . . . by supposing that society will some time or other be so constituted, that man must necessarily fulfill the duties of a citizen, or be despised, and that while he was employed in any of the departments of civil life, his wife, also an active citizen, should be equally intent to manage her family, educate her children, and assist her neighbors. But, to render her really virtuous and useful, she must not, if she discharge her civil duties, want, individually the protection of civil laws; she must not be dependent on her husband's bounty for

her subsistence during his life, or support after his death—for how can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? or virtuous, who is not free?" (*RW* 216–17).

JJR: "If I were sovereign, I would permit sewing and the needle trades only to women and to cripples reduced to occupations like theirs" (*Em.* 199).

MW: "Women might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses. And midwifery, decency seems to allot to them" (*RW* 218). "Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue, if they were educated in a more orderly manner, which might save many from common and legal prostitution. Women would not then marry for . . . support" (*RW* 218). "I may excite laughter, by dropping a hint, which I mean to pursue, some future time, for I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government" (*RW* 217).

On power and inequality.

JJR: "So, decide to raise them like men. . . . The more women want to resemble [men], the less women will govern them, and then men will truly be the masters" (*Em.* 363).

MW: " 'Educate women like men,' says Rousseau, 'and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us.' This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves" (*RW* 131).

JJR: "When woman complains . . . about unjust man-made inequality, she is wrong. This inequality is not a human institution—or, at least, it is the work not of prejudice but of reason" (*Em.* 361).

MW: "Surely it is *madness* to make the fate of thousands depend on the caprice of a weak fellow creature,

whose very station sinks him necessarily below the meanest of his subjects!" (*RW* 85, our emphasis).

JJR: "[I]n relations between men, the worst that can happen to someone *is* for him to see himself at the discretion of someone else" (*SD* 72, our emphasis).

MW: "[A]ll power inebriates weak man; and its abuse proves that the more equality there is established among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society" (*RW* 85).

JJR: "One who believes himself the master of others is nonetheless a greater slave than they" (SC 46).

MW: "Let there be then no coercion *established* in society" (*RW* 68).

JJR: "Force is a physical power. I do not see what morality can result from its effects" (SC 48).

MW: "Do you not act a similar part, when you *force* all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark?" (*RW* 67).

On Inequality

A more general discussion on inequality ensues, with much agreement.

JJR: "[D]isastrous inequality [is] introduced among men by the distinction of talents and the debasement of virtues. . . . One no longer asks if a man is upright, but rather if he is talented; nor of a book if it is useful, but if it is well written. Rewards are showered on the witty, and virtue is left without honors" (*FD* 58).

On class and property.

MW: "One class presses on another; for all are aiming to procure respect on account of their property: and property, once gained, will procure the respect due only to talents and virtue. Men neglect the duties incumbent on man, yet are treated like demi-

gods; . . . There must be more equality established in society, or morality will never gain ground" (*RW* 211).

JJR: "The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared by someone who, uprooting the stakes or filling in the ditch, had shouted to his fellow-men: Beware of listening to this imposter; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the earth to no one!" (*SD* 141–42).

MW: "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" (*RM* 9). "From the respect paid to property flow, as from a poisoned fountain, most of the evils and vices which render this world such a dreary scene" (*RW* 211).

JJR: "It is precisely because the force of things always tends to destroy equality that the force of legislation should always tend to maintain it" (*SC* 75).

MW: Precisely. "Nature having made men unequal, by giving stronger bodily and mental powers to one than to another, the end of government ought to be, to destroy this inequality by protecting the weak. Instead of which, it has always leaned to the opposite side, wearing itself out by disregarding the first principle of its organization" (*Fr Rev* 17).

JJR poses the common analogy of family and state.

JJR: "The family is . . . the prototype of political societies. The leader is like the father, the people are like the children; and since all are born equal and free they only alienate their freedom for their utility" (*SC* 47).

MW once again presses the analogy by arguing for a small republic.

MW: "A man has been termed a microcosm; and every family might also be called a state. States, it is true, have mostly been governed by arts that disgrace the character of man" (*RW* 249). But as for the family, "I exclaim against the laws which throw the whole weight of the yoke on the weaker shoulder, and force women, when they claim protectorship as mothers, to sign a contract, which renders them dependent on the caprice of the tyrant, whom choice or necessity has appointed to reign over them. Various are the cases, in which a woman ought to separate herself from her husband" (*Wrongs* 179).

JJR returns to his main subject.

JJR: Even when "government and laws provide for the safety and well-being of assembled men, the sciences, letters and the arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which men are burdened, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seem to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized peoples" (*FD* 36).

MW agrees with his point but turns it to her purpose.

MW: Just like "those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence" (*RW* 75). "Thus degraded, her reason . . . is employed rather to burnish than to snap her chains" (*RW* 171). "Men . . . submit every where to oppression, when they have only to lift up their heads to throw off the yoke." "Women, I argue from analogy, are degraded by the same propensity . . . and, at last, despise the freedom which they have not sufficient virtue to struggle to attain" (*RW* 121). "Equality," you know, "will not rest firmly even when founded on a rock, if one half of mankind be chained to its bottom by fate, for they will be continually undermining it through ignorance or pride" (*RW* 211). "Still harping on the same subject, you will exclaim—How can I avoid it, when most of the struggles of an uneventful life have been occasioned

by the oppressed state of my sex; we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel" (Scand. 25).

JJR pursues the subject of the value of passion.

JJR: "Whatever our moralists say, human understanding owes much to the passions. . . . It is by the activity of the passions that our reason improves itself; we seek to know only because we desire to enjoy; and it is impossible to conceive a man who had neither desires nor fears giving himself the trouble of reasoning" (*SD* 189).

MW substantially agrees.

MW: "Poetry certainly flourishes most in the first rude state of society. The passions speak most eloquently, when they are not shackled by reason" (*Hints*). But "for what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to brutes" (*RW* 81). "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" (*Thoughts* 37).

JJR parts from her on the blessings of civilization.

JJR: "[I]t must . . . be agreed that the more violent the passions, the more necessary laws are to constrain them. But the disorders and crimes these passions cause every day among us show well enough the inadequacy of laws in this regard, it would still be good to examine whether these disorders did not arise with the laws themselves; for then, even should they be capable of repressing these disorders, the very least that ought to be required of the laws is to stop an evil which would not exist without them" (*SD* 134). "Let us begin by distinguishing the moral and the physical in the sentiment of love. The physical is that general desire which inclines one sex to unite with the other. The moral is that which determines this desire and fixes it exclusively on a single object. . . . Now it is easy to see that the moral element of love is an artificial sentiment born of the usage of society and extolled with much skill and care by women in order

to establish their ascendancy and make dominant the sex that ought to obey. . . . It is therefore incontestable that love itself, like all the other passions, has acquired only in society that impetuous ardor which so often makes it fatal for men" (*SD* 134–35).

Their differences are maintained.

MW: "Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature, they are only brutal when unchecked by reason" (*RW* 200). "When we contemplate the infancy of man, his gradual advance toward maturity, his miserable weakness as a solitary being, and the crudeness of his first notions respecting the nature of civil society, it will not appear extraordinary, that the acquirement of political knowledge has been so extremely slow, or that public happiness has not been more rapidly and generally diffused" (*Fr Rev* 15). "Our ancestors have laboured for us; and we, in our turn, must labour for posterity. It is by tracing the mistakes, and profiting from the discoveries of one generation, that the next is able to take a more elevated stand" (*Fr Rev* 183). "Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all was right originally: a crowd of authors that all is now right: and I, that all will be right" (*RW* 84).

Concluding Thoughts

A reminder of MW's respect for JJR.

MW: "He was a strange inconsistent and unhappy clever creature—yet he possessed an uncommon portion of sensibility and penetration" (Scand. 145). He was "an author so thoroughly acquainted with the human heart" (*Reviews* 49). "Rousseau's literary station has long been settled by time on a firm basis; his genius spreads flowers over the most barren tract, yet his profound sagacity and paradoxical caprice; his fascinating eloquence and specious errors, may be seen by their own light" (*Reviews* 136). "[T]he excess

And, indeed, her identification with him.

> of his affection for his fellow-creatures, his exquisite sensibility, and that panting after distinction, so characteristic of genius, all contributed to render his conduct strange and inexplicable to little minds" (*Reviews* 231–32).

A Note on Sources

Rousseau, of course, was dead before he could have heard of Wollstonecraft. As one of us has argued previously (Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* [University of Chicago Press, 1992]), Wollstonecraft's intellectual relationship with Rousseau was intriguing. Those who have read only *The Rights of Woman*, especially if they have attended only to the surface arguments about women's education, may imagine she found him wholly lacking in merit. A closer examination of her work leads to a different conclusion. Rousseau served as a leitmotif in Wollstonecraft's life; he reappears regularly in her writing not just as a canonical father but as a representative of certain ideas and struggle in her thinking. Like the later musical technique of the leitmotif, Rousseau sometimes stands in the foreground as the main subject, as in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and some of her reviews; sometimes his presence can be discerned as a context or further explanation of the main subject, as in *Mary* and *A Short Residence*, or in her struggles with personal issues and problems, as we see, for example, in her reference to the *Solitary Walker* in her correspondence with Godwin. She often seems to have returned to Rousseau when she was contemplating a difficult intellectual or emotional problem. She used much the same words to characterize his personal and emotional character as she used to describe her own.

With what works of Rousseau was Wollstonecraft familiar? And how well did she know them? It is important to remember, in her reading of Rousseau, that she was a devotee of his works, but she was not a scholar; many scholars would no doubt quibble with her interpretations of him. Her writings indicate with great certainty that she had read *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *Emile*, *The Confessions*, and *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. She probably read *A Discourse on Inequality* and the *Letter to D'Alembert*. She may have read the *Social Contract*, but she may have been familiar with it only through reputation. In her career as a reviewer, she reviewed many works by and about Rousseau including the second part of *The Confessions*, and volumes entitled *Thoughts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva; The Beauties of Rousseau; Letters on the Works and Character of J. J. Rousseau* by Mme. de Staël; *Laura; or, Original Letters. In two volumes. A Sequel to the Eloisa of J. J. Rousseau*; and *Letters on the Confessions of J. J. Rousseau.*

Work used for citation in this conversation:

Rousseau

Conf. *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.* Translation and notes by J. M. Cohen. New York: Penguin, 1978.

Em. *Emile; or, On Education.* Introduction, translation, and notes by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books, 1979.

FD *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts (First Discourse).* In *The First and*

Second Discourses, edited by Roger D. Master, translated by Roger D. Masters and Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964.

GM *Geneva Manuscript* (first version of *On the Social Contract*). In *On the Social Contract with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, edited by Roger D. Masters, translated by Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.

Rev. *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Translation with preface, notes, and an interpretive essay by Charles E. Butterworth. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1982.

SC *On the Social Contract; or, Principles of Political Right*. In *On the Social Contract with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, edited by Roger D. Masters, translated by Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.

SD *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality* (Second Discourse). In *The First and Second Discourses*, edited by Roger D. Masters, translated by Roger D. Masters and Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964.

GM *Geneva Manuscript* (first version of *On the Social Contract.*) In *On the Social Contract with Geneva Manuscript and Political Economy*, edited by Roger D. Masters, translated by Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.

Wollstonecraft

The editions of all of the works except the letters are from Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, eds., *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: New York University Press, 1989). The correspondence of Wollstonecraft (abbreviated Corr.) are found in Ralph M. Wardle, ed., *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

Corr. *Correspondence*

Fr Rev *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, 1794

Reader *The Female Reader*, 1789

RM *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, 1790

RW *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792

Scand. *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, 1796

Thoughts *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, 1788

Wrongs *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria*, posthumous

Reviews *Misc. book reviews*

12

"The Same Subject Continued": Two Hundred Years of Wollstonecraft Scholarship

Wendy Gunther-Canada

> The stamen of immortality, if I may be allowed the phrase, is the perfectibility of human reason. . . . Reason is, consequentially, the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth. Every individual is in this respect a world in itself.
>
> —Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Mary Wollstonecraft's writings as a philosopher of reason and a novelist of sensibility exhibit the complexity of a woman who embodied the virtues and passions of the revolutionary world of the late eighteenth century within her own being. For more than two centuries scholars have commented on the relationship between Wollstonecraft's life experiences and her experimental theory. Her works are imbued with a deep humanism that is often confrontational, claiming rationality for women and denying sexual difference, as in her polemics on rights; and sometimes contradictory, opposing mind to body, as in her novels. Wollstonecraft's writings remind us of the dueling claims of wish and will upon human perfectibility and of the profound need of imperfect individuals for an enlightened community. The recent bicentennial of her well-known treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, requires us to examine the differing interpretations of her thought, which in the past two hundred years has had a tremendous impact on the development of many different feminisms in theory and practice.

Wollstonecraft's philosophy as well as her fiction reflect a critical

analysis of the multiple meanings of gender and class in an era of democratic revolution in France and, as Gary Kelly (1992) suggests, "cultural revolution" in England (1; all references are to be found in the Works Cited section). Her work challenged and broadened the popular debate about political rights by resiting the struggle for civic virtue and equality from parliaments to within the home. Wollstonecraft consistently argued that the success or failure of the Enlightenment principles embodied within the democratic ideals of the French Revolution would depend upon the ability of men and women to reason together and respect each other in their own families. Her philosophy reflected, as Virginia Sapiro (1992) has argued, a deep commitment to civic humanism that required private virtue and public spirit (296). Thus Wollstonecraft called for women to join with men in the revolutionary struggle to reform both their personal lives and their political institutions in order to sustain and enhance the progress of justice and equality.

From the heroine of her earliest fiction, whom she boldly declared to represent a new being, neither "a Clarissa or a Sophie," to Maria of her final fragment, Wollstonecraft explored the boundaries of the self, challenging gender identity and class distinctions to reorder the relationship between the sexes and among women themselves (1989a, 5). Her radical confrontation with the democratic discourse of the late eighteenth century revealed a woman keenly aware of the enormous inequalities of class and gender that defined the existence of men and women, children and adults. She formed a theory that rebelled against the conservative claims that gender, generation, and rank categorically determine the history of an individual's life.

Wollstonecraft infused her social theory into her polemical fictions. These works provided alternative tales unique within the literary context of the late eighteenth century in their depiction of the brutality of childhood and the hardships of marriage. Her novels contested the romantic plots of a Richardson or Rousseau. At the same time she created her own fictions of sense and sensibility, politicizing the intimate female struggle for identity and autonomy. Wollstonecraft generalized this struggle as the historical attempt of all men and women to achieve independence and virtue through reason. The new being that emerged from her writing was the "woman with thinking powers," a woman of merit who was ready to use her own mind to its fullest potential in order to compete fairly in the race of life (1989a, 5). In the new democratic

world born of Enlightenment philosophy this thinking woman represented a model citizen.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft framed a powerful challenge to both aristocratic privilege and the opposing discourse of democratic thought in her reviews, educational tracts, translations, treatises, and fictions. Her work as a professional writer drew on the complex experience of dependence and uncertainty in her previous employments as a lady's companion, seamstress, teacher, and governess. Her wide reading on the novel, education, politics, travel, and religion informed her daily engagement in the intellectual debates of her age as a member of the important radical community surrounding the publisher, Joseph Johnson, which included Henry Fuseli, Thomas Christie, William Godwin, and Thomas Paine. Yet she alone among these social critics argued that civil rights for women must be included in the revolutionary constitutions. Her writings denied the codes of coverture in which the interests of individual women were assumed to be singularly represented by their husbands. Wollstonecraft condemned the "absurd unit of husband and wife" and went so far as to assert that women should represent themselves within revolutionary assemblies (1989b, 215–17).

It is in the controversial *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that Wollstonecraft directly confronted the patriarchal politics of aristocratic society by analyzing how birth and rank reproduced a system of gender oppression that denied each generation of girls and women the opportunities of education, property, and autonomy. Wollstonecraft's critical examination of class privilege underscored the corrupting influence of both wealth and poverty upon women. In treatise and novel she argued that a combination of individual education and social change were needed in order to secure independence for both sexes. She sought to free women from their own slavish desires so that they could be the rational partners of men in marriage while exercising for themselves the rights and duties of virtuous citizens in the republic.

If Wollstonecraft's belief in reason reflected her reading of John Locke, her faith in the guidance of the heart represented her relationship to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Neither philosopher allowed women to participate fully with men in the public sphere because of their mutual concern about the disruptive impact of heterosexuality upon the social contract. Wollstonecraft's theory of women's rights necessarily raised the question of female sexuality. Her radical challenge to marriage and conventional

sexual distinctions seemed to support individual freedom in forming erotic attachments, while her arguments concerning modesty for both sexes sought to control the excesses of passion. A number of scholars have commented on the conflict of mind and body within Wollstonecraft's writings, especially within *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Her analysis of the many tensions that exist between the exercise of reason and the experience of passion was ultimately unsuccessful in resolving this conflict, which has engaged philosophers since the time of the *Symposium.* This is not to detract from the revolutionary significance of Wollstonecraft's critique of sexual inequality within the social contract. She was singular in her insistence that both men and women share the responsibility of sexuality and bear equally the consequences of their behavior, as parents. Most important, Wollstonecraft refused to consent to a social contract that in theory opposed rational males to sexual females, and in practice offered democratic equality and liberty to men in society in exchange for the patriarchal restraint of women within the home.

For two centuries the interpretation of the meaning of Wollstonecraft's feminism has often been grounded in a reading of her account of the female body. In the passages where late eighteenth-century critics remarked upon the licentious line, some contemporary scholars find sublimated desire. Cora Kaplan (1986) has suggested that Wollstonecraft's argument for female rationality necessarily represses female sexuality and desire (36). The conflict between femininity and rationality that mark Wollstonecraft's work raises the issue of her treatment of sexual difference. She wrote in 1792, "from every quarter have I heard the exclamations against masculine women; but where are they to be found?" (1989b, 74). This designation (which she derided as a "bugbear") was to be applied to herself, as a woman author, as well as to her feminist theory (1989b, 76).

We might ask to what extent Wollstonecraft's attack on sexual difference replicated the androcentric model found within other eighteenth-century texts. If Sophie is to be educated exactly like Emile, have we replaced difference with sameness, and thus avoided the more interesting question of alternative subjectivities? Some scholars have embraced these ambiguities and conflicts within Wollstonecraft's theory, so as to develop new ideas of femininity and power. Mary Jacobus (1986) argues that Wollstonecraft's writings display a "difference of view" that is indicative of women's confrontation with the discursive boundaries of

the masculine and feminine within the literary tradition (27). In this manner, Wollstonecraft's appropriation and experimentation with both the treatise and the novel suggests an innovative attempt to bridge discursive gaps in order to reach an audience of female readers.

Finally, it is important to place these modern examinations of the meaning and method of Wollstonecraft's thought within a broader discussion of the lessons that she sought to teach the women of her age. The fundamental principle of Wollstonecraft's theory is that human independence is only gained through reason. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she claimed that women would threaten the progress of democratic governments and Enlightenment ideals if they were not educated to participate rationally in society. Her plan for the national coeducation of girls and boys, and for fuller employment for women, brought the rights revolution into the home. Women, too, were to play a critical role in the struggle for equality, liberty, and fraternity by reforming themselves, revolutionizing their relationships with their husbands, and educating their children for democratic citizenship.

It is intriguing that this explicitly political challenge to the distribution of power between the sexes was considered by even the radical supporters of the rights of men as an "elaborate treatise on female education" ("A Vindication" 1792, 248). The democrat Rousseau had similarly argued that Plato's *Republic* "was not at all a political work"; a remarkable statement given that in Book V, Socrates outlined a plan to educate women with men for the leadership and rule of the community (Rousseau 1979, 40). No one would claim that *Emile*, subtitled *On Education* is simply a pedagogical exercise. Rousseau had stated that we must choose to educate either men or citizens (1979, 39). In the revolutionary world of the late eighteenth century Mary Wollstonecraft asked why women had never been given this choice. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she forcefully called for both educational reform and political change, noting that the civic education of women must encompass a larger vision of personal virtue and a broader conception of public participation.

The contemporary response to Wollstonecraft's work varied widely from enthusiastic praise of her bold and innovative thought, to open condemnation of her subversive theory. Her writings encouraged other women, like Mary Hays and Amelia Opie, to pen feminist polemics, as well as sparked numerous serious refutations and comic parodies. However, her life and work were largely vilified in the years following her

death by the publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of the "Rights of Woman."* In this first biography the public was provided with intimate details about Wollstonecraft's affair with the American Gilbert Imlay, as well as her own passionate encounters with Godwin. Popular reaction to these transgressions of the feminist author made Wollstonecraft the very model of the wrongs of woman that she had sought to redress in her treatise on women's rights. Mary Hays tried to vindicate Wollstonecraft and her feminist philosophy in her novel of 1799, *The Victim of Prejudice.* Unfortunately, as Mary Poovey argues, Wollstonecraft had become a symbol of impropriety for another generation of women writers, including her own daughter Mary Shelley, and the consummate author of *Pride and Prejudice,* Jane Austen (Poovey 1984, 113). Indeed, almost a hundred years later, the historian Harriet Martineau could write in her own autobiography that Mary Wollstonecraft "was with all her powers, a poor victim of passion" (David 1987, 47). For years the debate about women's rights was subsumed within the larger discourse on feminine propriety. Wollstonecraft's demands for substantive political change were generally dismissed as women internalized the struggle for self. The revolution in female manners had ended. Women turned away from Wollstonecraft, closed *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* and returned to their conduct books.

In the middle of the nineteenth century public debate concerning the role of women sparked fresh interest in Mary Wollstonecraft and her feminist theory. European and American women joined in popular movements for the abolition of slavery and the extension of universal suffrage. To speak of women's rights was to question radically the meaning of women's lives and this examination required women to reassess the difficult lessons of Wollstonecraft's life and thought. In 1843 Margaret Fuller noted in *Woman and the Nineteenth Century* that Wollstonecraft's "existence better proved the need of some new interpretation of woman's rights, than anything she wrote" (Fuller 1992, 284). Certainly the day was fast approaching when Wollstonecraft's very existence would be newly interpreted as part of a larger historical effort. Perhaps the best examples of the influence of her theory in the nineteenth century are Harriet Taylor's *Enfranchisement of Women* and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women.* American suffragettes Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony worked under her portrait. Stanton's *History of Woman's Suffrage,* first published in 1889, is dedicated to Wollstonecraft.

The movement for women's suffrage in America and England in the first decades of this century marked a resurgence in the importance of Wollstonecraft and her theory on women's rights. A series of books were published that sought to situate *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* within the renewed battle for greater educational and economic opportunities and political participation for women. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes briefly treated Wollstonecraft in *British Freewomen: Their Historical Privilege.* Mary Beard considered the force of Wollstonecraft's arguments in relation to the struggle for the empowerment of women in *Women as a Force in History.* G. R. Stirling Taylor's curiously titled *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Study in Economics and Romance* reconsidered the lessons of Wollstonecraft's life and theory. J. M. S. Tompkins examined Wollstonecraft's contribution to the development of the novel in *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800.*

Wollstonecraft argued in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that women and soldiers were in similar need of civic education to fulfill their duties as democratic citizens (1989b, 216). Women gained the suffrage in both America and England after the First World War. They entered the workforce in record numbers during the Second World War and challenged deep-seated ideas about sexual difference. It was not easy for these women who had helped to win the war to maintain their economic and political gains during the peace. In 1947 Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg published the misogynist classic *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex,* which depicted the eighteenth-century Mary Wollstonecraft as the very model of twentieth-century sexual pathology. Wollstonecraft, and the rights of woman, were again in need of vindication.

Just as each generation has had to continue the struggle for women's rights, each generation has had to rediscover Mary Wollstonecraft. The sexual politics of liberty and equality are a historical process. Our progress toward the goals defined within Wollstonecraft's writings has been greatly hampered by the fact that throughout the course of the last two hundred years, with the sometimes exception of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* her work, like that of many other feminist authors, has been out of print. The project of reclaiming Mary Wollstonecraft was enormously aided by the scholarship of Ralph Wardle who produced the first critical biography of Wollstonecraft in 1951 and collected and published her letters over the next two decades. The brilliant resurgence of the women's movement in America and Europe in the 1970s led to an explosion of scholarship on Mary Wollstonecraft. New editions of *A*

Vindication of the Rights of Woman were issued, new biographies reconsidered the relationship of her revolutionary theory and rebellious life, and a score of texts and articles sought to place her radical writing in novel and treatise firmly within the tradition of women's intellectual history.

In the future we will undoubtedly see the same subject continued; as different feminisms emerge, each will look back to confront a different Mary Wollstonecraft. The enduring importance of her work is that it challenged the false universality of Enlightenment reason, by analyzing the historical differences of sex and class, and contested a democratic politics that absented the multiple meanings of production and reproduction. Wollstonecraft's polemical writings offer a variety of fractured images of the confrontation of authority and femininity, in the home, in the streets, within the court, and under the crown. She demands that we think again about the politics of gender and genre, to see the interconnections between fiction and philosophy. She reminds us as writers to consider our readers seriously. She is the theorist of the education of daughters, giving voice to the unfortunate girl neglected within her household under the codes of primogeniture. She is the philosopher of the rights of woman, demanding a civil existence for women, married and unmarried, in a patriarchal society. Finally, she is the critic of the forefathers of the canon, who disrupted the narrative tradition of literature, and the discursive tradition of political thought by articulating her own rich concepts of self, family, democracy, and citizenship.

Mary Wollstonecraft's writings are embedded in her understanding of the complex realities of human life and death. Her work is marked by a philosophical engagement with poverty and prejudice, age and health, that speaks to the unique strengths and weaknesses of every man and woman. To read her works is to meet a nuanced idea in a sentence hurriedly noted, the brilliant rhetorical flourish marked by exclamation, and to find dots and dashes in the place of words where emotion blots the page. In her letters, novels, and *Vindications* we encounter a life cut short by tragic death, words not written and thoughts not completed. For almost two hundred years her untimely death has been a source of deep frustration and sorrow for her readers. Wollstonecraft wished to be useful, the author of things not words (1989b, 76). Her words profoundly challenged the nature of things and contributed to change in her century and ours. In the annotated bibliography that follows, I highlight a few of the many excellent studies and surveys of Mary Wollstonecraft's

writings. The variety and richness of the research shows how her work continues to deny easy categorization and to provide a vital source of ideas and enlightenment.

Annotated Bibliography

Works by Mary Wollstonecraft

Scholarly editions of all of the following texts can be found in the seven-volume collection *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (New York: New York University Press, 1989). Many of the texts are also available in critical editions published by Everyman, Norton, Oxford, and Penguin.

Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties in Life. Wollstonecraft's first text, published in 1787, provides a practical guide for parents intent on educating their daughters. The text is noteworthy for suggestive chapters such as "The Temper" and the "Unfortunate Situation of Females, Fashionably Educated, and Left Without a Fortune."

Mary, a Fiction. Wollstonecraft's first novel is widely regarded as a semi-autobiographical account of her experience as a child and young adult. Published in 1788, this work is significant because it deals with a young woman's attempts to care for herself and others in relationships that defy eighteenth-century conventions.

Original Stories from Real Life with Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness. This childhood reader, published in 1788, eavesdrops on the conversations between the governess, Mrs. Mason, and her two charges, Mary and Caroline.

The Female Reader or Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse; Selected from the Best Writers; and Disposed under Proper Hands. This collection, published in 1789, seeks to introduce young women to moral lessons culled from various sources including the Bible and Shakespeare.

A Vindication of the Rights of Men. Wollstonecraft's reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France.* This tract represents Wollstonecraft's entry in to the debate about political rights and includes a scathing attack on privileges of class and the prejudices of gender. The first edition of this text was published in 1790.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. This controversial and celebrated text offers a critical examination of women's education and calls for a revolution in female manners. First published in 1792, this second *Vindication* radicalized the debate about patriarchy and democracy by advocating autonomy for women in private pleasures and public pursuits.

An Historical and Moral View of The Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe. Wollstonecraft's firsthand account of the revolution in France published in 1794. In this lengthy work she is guarded about the progress of the Revolution in securing equality, liberty, and fraternity, as she witnessed firsthand the Terror of Robespierre.

Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. This work is composed of a series of letters from Wollstonecraft to her lover Gilbert Imlay.

She wrote these missives while traversing across Scandinavia in search of the captain and cargo of a ship carrying contraband that Imlay had financed. These letters, published in 1796, provide a brilliant portrait of their adventuresome author, as well as the political culture of Scandinavia.

The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria. This novel was left unfinished at her death in 1797, but was published in William Godwin's collection *Posthumous Works of the Author of the Rights of Woman* in 1798. In this fiction, Wollstonecraft examines the relationship of women to the law. Her heroine, Maria, attempts to live by the laws dictated by her own reason only to come into bitter conflict with the partial and patriarchal codes of the British legal system.

The corpus of Wollstonecraft's work also includes several translations as well as numerous anonymous review articles for the journal *Analytical Review.* Her thoughts and feelings are very well documented in her personal letters to friends and family members. See the following:

The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft. 1979. Edited by Ralph M. Wardle. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Godwin and Mary: The Letters of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. 1966. Edited by Ralph M. Wardle. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.

Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft

Godwin, William. 1987. *Memoirs of The Author of "The Rights of Woman."* Edited by Richard Holmes. New York: Penguin. This memoir, first published in 1798 (only six months after Wollstonecraft's death), did much to scandalize the memory of the champion of women's rights. In the first edition, Godwin revealed Wollstonecraft's romantic attachments as well as intimately wrote of their own premarital relationshnip. Godwin's text, to a large extent, became the model for other biographies. However, Godwin's telling of the story of Wollstonecraft's radical confrontation of theory and practice became the subject of notoriety not critical inquiry.

Sunstein, Emily, W. 1975. *A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft.* New York: Harper and Row. Sunstein provides a biographical portrait of Wollstonecraft that stresses the multiple hardships of her childhood that she transcended in her tenacious struggle to achieve autonomy and dignity in adult life. Sunstein frames much of her discussion of Wollstonecraft's feminism around Wollstonecraft's relationships with other women instead of the popularized encounters with men. This text grounds Wollstonecraft's revolutionary theory in the historical experiences of her daily life.

Tomalin, Claire. 1974. *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft.* New York: New American Library. Tomalin's biography presents a tortured and torturing Wollstonecraft, plagued by the neuroses, poverty, and brutality that were the lot of many women at the end of the eighteenth century. This well-researched text retraces Wollstonecraft's journey from hack writer to feminist critic. Tomalin offers a challenging reading of Wollstonecraft's feminism, arguing that it is the product of a conflicted woman who embodied the conflicted spirit of her time.

Wardle, Ralph M. 1951. *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. This biography has been critically important to students of Wollstonecraft as it represents the first modern scholarly examination of her life

and work. Wardle combines archival research with letters and documents to re-create the discursive context and historical events that structure Wollstonecraft's writings. However, his effort to document and discuss her contribution to intellectual history, written in an era before the rise of the women's movement, is largely uninformed by the feminism that is at the very center of her theory.

Select Secondary Sources

The scholarship on Mary Wollstonecraft's life and writings spans almost two centuries. This work has been produced in waves, often following the rise and decline of the feminist cause. In the last two decades there has been a renewed interest in Wollstonecraft, a crest in scholarship evidenced by books, essays, and scores of journal articles. In selecting the sources for this bibliographic essay I have limited the scope of my survey by focusing exclusively on books. Therefore, the following sources represent just a sampling of the Wollstonecraft scholarship currently available to her readers. Students of Mary Wollstonecraft will find that the analysis of her work crosses disciplinary boundaries and thus enriches our understanding of both women's writing and women's rights.

Aldis, Charles Sir. 1803. *A Defense of the Character and Conduct of the Late Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Founded on the Principles of Nature and Reason, as Applied to the Peculiar Circumstances of Her Case; a Series of Letters to a Lady.* London: James Wallis. These letters to a "Lady," written a mere five years after Wollstonecraft's death, respond to the widespread public ridicule of the champion of the rights of women. Aldis's defense of Wollstonecraft reconciles her advocacy of female independence with her intimate actions as a woman. This work is a revealing commentary on the character and conduct of Wollstonecraft's most vocal critics, who by attacking her passions, expose their own patriarchal politics.

Anderson, Bonnie S., and Judith P. Zinzer. 1988. *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present.* Vol. 2. New York: Harper and Row. This ambitious survey places Wollstonecraft's writings within the ongoing historical struggle of women for education, autonomy, and power. The authors examine and contrast Wollstonecraft's arguments for female reform within *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to those of the Christian moralist Hannah More. They also explore how Wollstonecraft's radical democratic theory calls upon the newly created nation-state to alleviate the suffering of women in families and society on this side of heaven, in *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria.*

Barker-Benfield, G. J. 1992. *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Barker-Benfield surveys the historical transformation of gender identity and the shifting meanings of self and society in eighteenth-century Britain. This fascinating study, which focuses on the changing manners and modes of living of the British people, provides the context for a critical examination of Wollstonecraft's thought. Barker-Benfield's analysis emphasizes the powerful influence of Wollstonecraft's writings on the politics and culture of her nation.

Beard, Mary. 1987. *Women as a Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities.* New York: Persea Books (originally published 1946). Beard argues that Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* reinforces Blackstone's legal doctrine of the civil death of women upon marriage. She suggests that Wollstonecraft's Rousseauian reading left the legal inequalities of women largely unchallenged. The force

of Wollstonecraft's attack on matrimonial law in *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* might have tempered Beard's criticisms if it had been in print at the time Beard was writing her history.

Coole, Diana. 1988. *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism.* Hemel Hempstead, Herts: Harvester Wheatsheaf. Coole contrasts the republican theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau with the liberal critique of Mary Wollstonecraft. Coole notes that though Wollstonecraft denies moral and rational differences between the sexes, she reproduces a similar sexual division of labor within the household and the republic. The chapter on Rousseau and Wollstonecraft ends with a provocative discussion of the meaning of Wollstonecraft's theory of sexual equality for postmodern theorists of difference.

Eisenstein, Zillah. 1981. *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism.* New York: Longman. Eisenstein's study of the liberal origins of feminist theory offers a challenging reading of Wollstonecraft's writings that focuses on the problems of claiming equality of opportunity for women without refuting the patriarchal split between the roles of men and women in private and public life. Eisenstein suggests the extent to which Wollstonecraft's analysis of women as a sexual class was limited by her acceptance of bourgeois values and ideology.

Ferguson, Moira, and Janet Todd. 1984. *Mary Wollstonecraft.* Boston: Twayne. This survey of Wollstonecraft's writings is a particularly good source of information about her early works. Ferguson and Todd discuss the significance of personal experience on Wollstonecraft's analysis of gender and class, as well as assess the continuing historical importance of her contribution to feminist thought.

Figes, Eva. 1982. *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850.* New York: Persea Books. Figes situates Wollstonecraft's novels within a critical examination of women's literary tradition from Fanny Burney to Elizabeth Gaskell. She explores how Wollstonecraft employs the conventions of the gothic genre in *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* in order to decry the social conventions that constrain women's lives.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. 1984. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination.* New Haven: Yale University Press. This text makes extensive reference to Wollstonecraft's works while placing her novels and polemics within the rich thematic context of nineteenth-century women's writing. Of special note are efforts by Gilbert and Gubar to trace how Wollstonecraft's theory was integrated into the fiction of her daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley.

Jacobus, Mary. 1986. *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism.* New York: Columbia University Press. Jacobus argues that fiction allows Wollstonecraft greater freedom to express the feminist ideals she espoused in her polemics. Her intriguing examination of genre and gender suggests the significance of Wollstonecraft's personal life and professional writing upon the transforming currents of feminist thought. See also Jacobus, "A Difference of View," in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism,* edited by Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

Jones, Vivien, ed. 1990. *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity.* London: Routledge. This anthology contains a brief excerpt from Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.* A key feature of this text is that it places Wollstonecraft's work within the broad historical debate on women's roles and the meaning of femininity.

Kaplan, Cora. 1986. *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism.* London: Verso.

Kaplan offers several essays that examine Wollstonecraft's treatment of female sexuality in A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She provocatively argues that Wollstonecraft is unsuccessful at repressing female desire, a desire that wars with reason, and thus reinscribes a fear of the female body that prevents the liberatory experience of a subjectivity alive to sexual pleasure.

Kelly, Gary. 1992. *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft.* New York: St. Martin's. The extraordinary ability of Mary Wollstonecraft to infuse a radical philosophy of the "mind" into debates about court culture and political rights is at the center of Kelly's analysis of her revolutionary feminist thought. He argues that Wollstonecraft's polemical work in treatise and novel played a critical role in the culture revolution in England, which both shared and contested the ideals of revolutionary France. See also Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780–1805,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

Landes, Joan. 1988. *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Landes skillfully interrogates the republican rhetoric of the French Revolution to highlight the centrality of sexual segregation to revolutionary theory and practice. Her critical reading of Wollstonecraft's A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* denotes the severe limitations that the ideals of republican motherhood place upon women as citizens in a democratic regime.

Langbauer, Laurie. 1990. *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press. In this detailed examination of the oppositional role of the romance within the larger tradition of the novel, Langbauer analyzes the subversive meaning of the maternal relationship in Wollstonecraft's fictions. Langbauer employs the semiotic to offer a radical interpretation of maternity and difference in Wollstonecraft's novels.

Martin, Jane Roland. 1985. *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman.* New Haven: Yale University Press. Martin explores the gendered historical discourse on education to expose how women have remained on the margins of the pedagogical debates surrounding civic education. She questions the political efficacy of Wollstonecraft's philosophical legacy to her feminist daughters, suggesting that in transforming Emile into Emily, Wollstonecraft replicates an androcentric model of citizenship.

Mews, Hazel. 1969. *Frail Vessels: Women's Role in Women's Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot.* London: University of London, Athlone Press. This study traces the impact that the late eighteenth-century debate on women's rights had upon the literary expression of women's duties in nineteenth-century novels. Mews treats Wollstonecraft's A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as a touchstone for future generations of women authors and their creative explorations of female subjectivity.

Moers, Ellen. 1985. *Literary Women: The Great Writers.* New York: Oxford University Press. This text positions Wollstonecraft's works along a historical continuum of letters, novels, and poems written by women. Moers's discussion of the gothic elements of *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria,* as well as her suggestive analysis of passion within her prose, highlights Wollstonecraft's feminist interventions and formal innovations to our understanding of gender and genre.

Pateman, Carole. 1989. *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory.* Stanford: Stanford University Press. This collection of Pateman's essays includes many important references to Wollstonecraft's contribution to the discourse of political thought. Of particular interest is a section entitled "Wollstonecraft's Dilemma," which examines the complex relationship of women to the welfare state.

Paul, Charles Kegan. 1971. *Mary Wollstonecraft: Letters to Imlay, with Prefatory Memoir.* New York: Haskell House (originally published 1879). This nineteenth-century compilation of Wollstonecraft's letters to Imlay is chiefly notable for the Victorian memoir that serves as its introduction. Paul, who had reissued Godwin's *Memoir of the Author of the "Rights of Woman,"* provides his own sketch of Wollstonecraft, rehabilitating her as a Christian whose faithful efforts to educate and reform her sex were misunderstood by both her contemporaries and their descendants.

Poovey, Mary. 1984. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. The complex role of propriety is examined in this study of how women's writing both reflected and challenged the discourse of femininity in the nineteenth century. Poovey demonstrates the multiple pressures upon women writers and the tensions between authority and femininity. Her analysis of the works of Wollstonecraft and Shelley sheds new light on the discursive relationship between mother and daughter.

Sapiro, Virginia. 1992. *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Sapiro skillfully articulates the primacy of Wollstonecraft's notion of virtue in structuring her political theory. She demonstrates the importance of the principles of civic humanism to Wollstonecraft's work. This text positions Wollstonecraft's writings within the canonical tradition of political thought, detailing her theoretical connection to the liberal tradition of John Locke and republicanism of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Spender, Dale. 1986. *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen.* London: Pandora. Spender argues that Wollstonecraft's innovative use of autobiographic detail within her fictions played an important role in the historical development of the novel. Most significant, Wollstonecraft's brave integration of her personal history into her didactic fictions greatly politicized these works, which transformed the novel while introducing new readers to feminist ideas.

Stopes, Charlotte Carmichael. 1894. *British Freewomen: Their Historical Privilege.* London: Swan Sonnenschein. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* [*sic*] "trumpets" a brief mention in this nineteenth-century plea for women's suffrage. Stopes's misspelling of the title of Wollstonecraft's text is indicative of the fragmentation of women's intellectual history; a fragmentation that continues to deprive women of freedom in this century.

Taylor, Barbara. 1983. *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century.* New York: Pantheon Books. This text explores Wollstonecraft's radical contribution to utopian ideals and movements in the nineteenth century. Taylor traces the impact that Wollstonecraft's support of democratic principles and sexual egalitarianism had upon the Owenites and other socialist communities.

Taylor, G. R. Stirling. 1969. *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Study in Economics and Romance.* New York: Greenwood (originally published 1911). Taylor posits a dialectic of economic necessity and romantic desire as the tumultuous forces behind Wollstonecraft's passionate exploration of the phenomenology of female independence. This study was written in response to a centennial celebration of Wollstonecraft's work and notes the renewed relevance of her writing on women's rights for the women's suffrage movement of the early twentieth century.

Todd, Janet. 1980. *Women's Friendship in Literature.* New York: Columbia University Press. This work examines the primary bonds of Wollstonecraft's heroines to their mothers and their subsequent difficulties in finding and maintaining relationships of equality with other women. Todd traces the development of the female

friendships that Wollstonecraft claims are so necessary for women's independence and self-worth in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in her two fictions. She argues that Mary and Ann of Wollstonecraft's early work are women divided by experience and united by the author in death; whereas the friendship between Maria and Jemima of her final fragment hints at the possibility of transforming the lives of both women. Also see Todd, *A Wollstonecraft Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

Tompkins, J. M. S. 1961. *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press (originally published 1932). Tompkins's early study of the novel notes the radical challenge that Wollstonecraft's *Mary, a Fiction* and *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* posed to late eighteenth-century society. She claims that Wollstonecraft's fictions, though mediocre novels, were powerful polemics that in theme and characterization rebelled against marriage and female dependence.

Woolf, Virginia. 1957. *Women and Writing.* Edited by Michele Barrett. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. This collection of essays, which questions the relationship of women to words, as well as focuses on specific women authors, includes a particularly evocative tribute to Wollstonecraft. Woolf retraces Wollstonecraft's voyage through life, noting that her confrontations with the forces of revolution inside and out were tenuously resolved in the creation of philosophy and art. See also Woolf, *The Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1953).

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RE-READING THE CANON

FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

EDITED BY MARIA J. FALCO

WOMEN'S STUDIES / POLITICAL SCIENCE / PHILOSOPHY

This collection of essays was originally designed in honor of the 1992 bicentennial of the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*—a work, revolutionary for its time, that argued on behalf of the political, economic, and social equality of women. Ten feminist scholars prominent in the fields of political philosophy, constitutional and international law, rhetoric, literature, and psychology argue that Wollstonecraft, by reason of the scope and complexity of her thought, belongs in the "canon" of political philosophers along with Rousseau and Burke, her contemporaries, both of whom she strenuously engaged in political debate.

Combining the liberalism of Locke and the "civic humanism" of Republicanism, Wollstonecraft explored the need of women for coed and equal education with men, economic independence whether married or not, and representation as citizens in the halls of government. In doing so, she foreshadowed and surpassed her much better known successor, John Stuart Mill.

These essays explore the many aspects of her thought which resound so tellingly to the modern woman, including her ground-breaking attempt to be completely self-sufficient. The final bibliographical essay outlines the changing interpretations of Wollstonecraft's work over the past two hundred years and evaluates her standing among political theorists today.

Maria J. Falco is Professor Emerita of Political Science at DePauw University. She is the author of *Truth and Meaning in Political Science: An Introduction to Political Inquiry* (Charles Merrill, 1973) and *"Bigotry!": Ethnic, Machine, and Sexual Politics in a Senatorial Election* (Greenwood Press, 1980) and the editor of *Through the Looking-Glass: Epistemology and the Conduct of Political Inquiry: An Anthology* (University Press of America, 1979) and *Feminism and Epistemology* (Haward Press, 1987).

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