The Body in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft

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Declaration

I, Hannah Hutchings-Georgiou, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

My thesis explores the human body in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, and asks to what extent she creates a radical corporeal ideology. The opening section, 'Corporeal Parts', is devoted to a kind of literary excavation and analysis of bodily metaphors and parts (such as the heart, nerves and the mind-body problem), which are embedded in her writing. These chapters demonstrate the influence of medical and philosophical theories (morbid anatomy, cardio pathology, nervous physiology, moral philosophy and Rational dissent) on Wollstonecraft's thought. Corporeal metaphors act as sites of renegotiation, reconstruction and reformation for ideas on gender, education, familial and social relationships, political structures and identities; they act as nodes that reorient both writer and reader towards an alternative, reformed body. Section two, 'Corporal Strategies: Corporeal Schemes', uses the visual and material culture of the period to examine the bodies which are elided, erased or rhetorically exploited in Wollstonecraft's polemics. In her emerging corporeal ideology, othered bodies – queered, racialized, gendered, classed and disabled – are called upon to further her argument about the inadequate socialisation of white middle-class women. In doing so, Wollstonecraft often demands a more liberating corporeal agenda at the expense of these marginalised and oppressed groups, and their lived bodily experiences. The final section, 'Corporeal Legacies', surveys the visual representations of Wollstonecraft throughout history (from John Opie to Maggi Hambling) and asks who these works honour more: Wollstonecraft and her feminist ideas, particularly around the maternal body, or the reputations and interests of male patrons, artists and partners. In these visual depictions of Wollstonecraft's own body what and whose beliefs are embodied? And how are these pictorial portrayals used to advance the ideas of women artists and feminists today?

Impact Statement

My interdisciplinary thesis maps out the representation of the human body in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. It analyses bodily metaphors in light of developing philosophical and medical theories on the heart (cardio pathology), nerves (nervous physiology) and mind. The thesis also considers how key cultural concepts and political events in the late 1780s and 90s influenced Wollstonecraft's attitude to the body as a whole. In this, it builds on previous scholarship which engages with her views on sensibility, republicanism, slavery, abolitionism and rational dissent, as seen in the work of Barbara Taylor, Janet Todd, Eileen Hunt Botting, Catherine Packham and many others.

One salient theme in the project concerns othered bodies – those forms that are gendered, racialized, classed or unfairly dismissed because of disability and illness – and their importance to Wollstonecraft's proto-feminism. These bodies are often invoked for rhetorical effect or cited to reinforce Wollstonecraft's argument regarding the inadequate socialisation of white middle-class women. This rhetorical strategy often occurs at the expense of the lived corporeal experiences of marginalised peoples. In centring these underrepresented groups, the thesis also addresses Wollstonecraft's personal anxieties concerning the body as well as her prejudices towards such figures. Few scholars explore these areas of anxiety or strands of xenophobic, sexist and racist bias in Wollstonecraft's work, but I believe no study should ignore them.

The Body in the Work of Mary Wollstonecraft contributes to the field of Wollstonecraft studies by being the first doctoral project to focus primarily on bodies. It therefore has the potential to be a published monograph, either for an academic-leaning or trades publisher. In terms of academia, it furthers discussions around the feminism of Wollstonecraft and makes a strong argument for corporeality to be equally as crucial to her ideas (on liberty, education, gender, relationships and political and familial structures) as subjectivity. Outside of academia, the thesis can be used to explore the historical treatment of marginalised groups and identities (such as queer, minority ethnic, migrant, or gendered identities), specifically those who have been subject to British colonial and imperialist legacies. The project uses visual material culture not only to open up conversations about Wollstonecraft's ideas on power and the building of national identity through bodies, but to question what these ideas mean to us today and how this informs contemporary practises of feminism. The thesis probes into the political and personal impact of cultural representations of women in particular, and how such linguistic and pictorial depictions can be used to oppress or uplift, deconstruct or construct, humanise or dehumanise individuals (an issue highly relevant for our image-obsessed, media-saturated age). In a post Roe vs. Wade world, where the bodily rights of women, queer and trans individuals are under greater threat, the thesis has much to offer in its exploration of corporeal ideologies and human rights.

I have already used my research on Wollstonecraft for academic-facing activities (undergraduate seminars for teaching at UCL and workshops) and public-facing work (talks in schools, writing in magazines) and will continue to do so.

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Note on Texts and Abbreviations

Page numbers for works by Wollstonecraft will be included in the body of the thesis. All page numbers for secondary sources and primary works by other writers will be found in the footnotes.

I have chosen to use the following modern editions of Wollstonecraft's works unless stated otherwise in the thesis:

> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, (ed) Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
>
> ---, *Letters written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, (eds) Jon Mee and Tone Brekke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
>
> ---, *Mary, or The Wrongs of Woman*, (ed) Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
>
> ---, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft,* (ed) Janet Todd (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

Once cited in the body of the thesis, the following works by Wollstonecraft will be referred to in their abbreviated form:

Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life (1787) – *Thoughts*

Mary, A Fiction (1788) – *Mary*

Original Stories from Real Life, with Conversations Calculated to regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Goodness and Truth (1788) – *Original Stories*

The Female Reader: Or, Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose and Verse; selected from the best writers, and disposed under proper heads; for the improvement of young women. By Mr. Cresswick, teacher of elocution. To which is prefixed a preface, containing some hints on female education (1789) – *The Female Reader*

A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) – *Rights of Men*

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) – *Rights of Woman*

An Historical and Moral View on the Progress of the French Revolution (1794) – *An Historical and Moral View*

Letters written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796) – *A Short Residence*

'Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation' (1798) – 'Letter on the Present Character'

Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman (1798) – *Wrongs of Woman*

The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft (1773-1797; published 2003) – *Letters*

Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis of the Thesis

Introduction

Intentions of the thesis: to demonstrate that the human body is integral to Wollstonecraft's ideas on freedom and to address that any scholarly reading of her politics is incomplete without addressing the importance of corporeality. To highlight that her representation and examination of the body intersects with eighteenth-century discussions from various medical and scientific fields – cardio-pathology, nervous physiology, physiognomy and psychiatry – and that her writing both adheres to and interrogates prevailing ideas and advancements in these debates. To show that visual and material culture not only frames or opens the door to such debates, but participates in the shaping and making of bodies at the heart of them, and that Wollstonecraft's own corporeal ideals were, in turn, inflected with these conceptions. In addition to this, to analyse the body as a contextual – historically defined yet shifting – space, as well as an ethical and political one; to explore how public and literary arenas – revolutionary France, the British colonies, radical literary London – make bodies and are also made by them. To foreground the bodies – gendered, queered, disabled, racialized, classed – that Wollstonecraft's corporeal ideology hides, omits, exploits or exhorts.

Section 1: Corporeal Parts

Chapter 1: Healing the Cankered Heart (pp.21-38)

This chapter argues for a reformist ethic of affectivity in Wollstonecraft's oeuvre despite her own employment of sentimental tropes, forms and vocabulary in her fictional and private writing. Using the figure of the coquette's heart as described in Addison's essay – an emotional core devoid of sincerity, integrity and virtue, a crux as paradoxically oblique as it is hollow – I discuss Wollstonecraft's antipathy towards excessive sensibility and women being aligned with feeling over reason, as found in her early didactic literature. Under the shadow of the coquette's heart, women's education and subsequent health and socio-political opportunities are curtailed, and it is with all of this that Wollstonecraft takes particular umbrage, especially when espoused by educational theorists and didactic writers of the mid to late 1700s, Rousseau, Gregory and Fordyce. I also explore Wollstonecraft's anxiety over the bodily repercussions of gendered emotions and socialisation, as found in her fictional writings, and consider how this overlaps with the cardio pathology of the time. In the final section, I reflect on Wollstonecraft's own employment of the metaphor of the heart in her private and published letters, and ask whether this goes against her reformist ethic of affectivity or connects her to the socially and morally corrosive emotion she so stridently argues against in her early writings and later polemics.

Chapter 2: To Nobly Boast the Firm Gymnastic Nerve? Wollstonecraft, Gender & Nervous Physiology (pp.39-58)

Nervous physiology – its diverging theories and diagnoses, cultural and medical mythologies – could be seen as a barometer for equality and oppression, as an opportunity to recalibrate or pander to pre-existing gender stereotypes and their bodily attendants. Wollstonecraft's writing and its contemporary (Polwhele) and posthumous reception (Godwin and Browning through to Todd and Gordon) capture this fruitful dilemma perfectly. In her polemics she identifies healthy nerves and an awareness of nervous physiology as part of the reformation – the strengthening – of women's minds and bodies; in her private letters, however, she relates her own nervous disorders in a manner not so dissimilar to the heroine of a sentimental novel. Through readings of her two Vindications and early personal letters, alongside recent biographers' fashioning and framing of her ill health, I will argue how Wollstonecraft not only recognised the liberating potential of nervous physiology for women, but became caught in its cultural biases and prejudices – prejudices that still persist today. The final section will extend this discussion of the simultaneous potential and problems posed by nervous physiology through a reading of Mary, via Ashley Tauchert and Claudia L. Johnson's arguments on transgender positionality and queer eroticism in the work, and looks to Wollstonecraft's relationship with Frances Blood, when asking if her conception of nervous physiology challenges or fulfils a gender essentialism she passionately despises in other works.

Chapter 3: Wollstonecraft and the Soul/Mind-Body Problem (pp.59-99)
Opening with Roy Porter and George Rousseau's re-articulation of soul-body dualism in the enlightenment as an unsolvable problem, rather than a philosophically resolvable question, as well as Blake's controversial illustrations of feminised disembodied souls, I anchor my argument about Wollstonecraft's ideas on the interrelationship between soul and body, disembodiment and embodiment, social construction and gendered corporeality in this fruitfully problematic terrain. Quite simply, Wollstonecraft sees the body as integral to the development of the soul (or its synonyms reason and mind); though the soul has pre-eminence, corporeality is never relegated or condemned to the side lines. However, a certain type of body – what I theorise as carceral corporeality – arises for women specifically through poor socialisation. Thus, the first section of this chapter is in dialogue with the ideas of Elizabeth Grosz and Elizabeth A. Wilson, in order to evaluate this carceral body as found in the Rights of Woman, a corporeal type which derives its rhetorical power from disempowered marginal Black and brown bodies. The second section moves specifically into the possible theological roots and vision of Wollstonecraft's soul-body dialectic, and asks to what extent her ideas on embodiment, deiformity and futurity are influenced by and depart from Richard Price's. The third section considers how carceral corporeality, as explored in the preceding parts of the chapter, becomes Gothicised, dramatized and literalised in Wollstonecraft's final novel, The Wrongs of Woman, where a pregnant heroine is falsely imprisoned in an asylum. By contextualising this novel and drawing on Foucauldian theories concerning madness and prisons, the section engages with Wollstonecraft's interrogation of this state, and the dialectical experience of disembodiment and embodiment, which prepares the ground for a final section about soul-soaring, writing and the erotic, as well as spiritual, possibilities of disembodiment in this world, not the next.

<u>Section 2: Corporeal Strategies & Schemes</u>

Chapter 4: The Return of the Rococo Body and the "Vagina of Versailles" (pp.101-127)
Anish Kapoor's sculptures in the gardens and palace of Versailles, most notably his controversial work 'Dirty Corner', provide the overarching metaphor for this chapter and a lens through which to read it. Though Wollstonecraft's political writings came centuries before Kapoor's work, the emerging corporeal ideology in her revolutionary writings echo his representation of the return of the repressed, of the bloody chaos of the French Revolution rearing up on former historical systems and structures from the ancien régime, as well as its own proposed rationale and order. Through analysis of 'A Letter on the Present Character', Rights of Men and An Historical and Moral View, I trace the emergence of two mutually inferring corporeal types: the rococo body and the republican form, with the former constituting a self-interested, dissolute, immoral corporeality and the latter a rational, masculine, collective one. I consider how they are informed by Wollstonecraft's xenophobia as well as her idealisation of republicanism, both of which were influenced by eighteenth-century French and British visual, material and literary culture. The first section explores her Francophobic conceptions of French manners, structures and symbols, as found in her political writings and the visual culture of the time. The second section explores in depth her interrogation of Edmund Burke's Reflections and the perpetuation of these corporeal types as reinforced by attacks on the French monarchy. The final section considers how these bodily types are publically and ideologically shaped, and how in turn they shape public spaces and behaviour. This section traces the return of the rococo body on its republican counterpart through the bloody excesses and violence of the latter years of the French Revolution, as captured in Wollstonecraft's An Historical and Moral View.

Chapter 5: Wollstonecraft and the Rhetoric of Enslaved Bodies (pp.128-154)
The writing and illustrations of John Gabriel Stedman's problematic Narrative bookend this chapter on the rhetorical employment of Black and brown bodies in the political work of Wollstonecraft and her milieu. Wollstonecraft has rightly been acknowledged as having pro-abolitionary sympathies and it is evident in her work that she had empathy for the plight of enslaved African people who endured the abhorrent institution of slavery in the British colonies. However, her journalistic and polemical writing betrays a bias to collapse the Black body with the 'slavebody', to use Toni Morrison's terminology, and, more significantly, to employ the sign of the brutalied enslaved Black body to simultaneously highlight, discuss and renegotiate the moral and affective failing of white individuals. This signifying power is often used to expound the socio-political, psychological and spiritual position

of white European middle-class women, and often at the expense of the reality and liberty of the Black or brown subject. Descriptions and references to enslaved or free Black and brown bodies, therefore, often elide the corporeal reality and perpetuate the power dynamics Wollstonecraft ostensibly decries. An analysis of this in her work begins with a review written about the freed but formerly enslaved author Olaudah Equiano. The review betrays bias towards Equiano reminiscent of prevailing European scientific ideas on Black and brown individuals, and upon this I consider the material and visual culture underpinning such attitudes in Britain, some of which may have shaped Wollstonecraft's views and collapsing of the enslaved body with the 'blackbody'. The middle section is devoted to allowing Equiano to answer back to such a reading in my own readings of his spiritual biography, and the following section engages with Wollstonecraft's further elision of the realities of Black bodies in her Rights of Men when responding to Burke, and when employing republican rhetoric and prejudiced ideas found in Rights of Woman and her early didactic literature respectively.

Section 3: Corporeal Legacies

Chapter 6: Hidden Figures, Painted Bodies: Portraying Wollstonecraft, from Opie and Hambling (pp.156-178)

Written in light of the growing developments of the Mary on the Green campaign to have a public work of art dedicated to Mary Wollstonecraft in Newington Green, this chapter examines the visual representations of Wollstonecraft from the late eighteenth through to the early twenty-first centuries. In line with theories by art historian Marcia Pointon it evaluates who these portrayals truly betray (the sitter, the artist, the patron or the viewer?). Focusing specifically on John Opie's portraits, particularly his influential work from 1797, I argue that the works are not so much sociological documents of Wollstonecraft, but visual histories of the painter himself, as well as the patrons and subsequent organisations and authors who borrow or recreate past images. I deconstruct the self-construction of these images to ask whether they reflect the bodily ideals of Wollstonecraft or the artist, and ask to what extent the corporeal (pregnancy) and social realities (impoverishment, marriage) of the writer were elided or extended in these portraits and commemorative artworks too.

Coda: 'Schlongs' & Thongs; the Naked Issue around Women's Bodies Today (pp.179-180)

This coda follows on from the issues explored in Chapter 6 and uses the final Maggi Hambling sculpture of the Mary on the Green campaign, and the journalistic commentary surrounding it, to pause for thought on the response to female-encoded bodies, which cuts to the core of the thesis. Irrespective of the political advancements subsequent feminist movements have made in the last two centuries or so, female-encoded bodies still seem to be regarded as problematic and are responded to as such, even by some feminist thinkers and scholars, and even more so when the overt gendering of one's corporeality intersects with race, disability and class. Contemporary responses to the nudity of the female figure standing atop of the sculpture highlights the pre-existing prejudice towards women's bodies when visible, nude or included in any intellectual, cultural or political matter. In the disapproval towards this 'every woman' form – some of which is not wrong because of the type of body (white, slim, non-disabled) it depicts – we hear the critical, essentialist and sexist voices of the past towards female embodiment, visibility and corporeality recurring once again around a sculpture that intends to represent the ideas and spirit of Wollstonecraft's work. This coda unites historic discussions on Wollstonecraft's work and life to contemporary conversations around women and their social-political rights, demonstrating how many of the issues her writing presents and raises have still not been resolved today.

Conclusion: the Peculiarity of the Body (pp.181-182)

Using a telling quotation from one of Wollstonecraft's letters to Godwin in the winter of 1797, I argue that my thesis has advocated for the importance of the body in Wollstonecraft's writing. Wollstonecraft's responses to and representations of corporeality are intrinsic to her ideas on social justice, gender parity, education, and universal rights. In my conclusion, I reiterate how this needs to be recognised within Wollstonecraft scholarship, as well as other academic and non-academic fields of learning and knowledge, like Gender Studies, Disability Studies, Politics, Education, Philosophy and Political History.

Preface: Locating One's Self in Relation to the Wollstonecraftian Body

Fig. 1. Stewy, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, stencil graffiti on the New Unity Church, Newington Green, London, c.2013.

In 2015 I began my PhD proposal with this solitary image (fig.1). I had posed with it before, drink in hand, squinting at the summer sun and smiling at the disparity between a jean-clad millennial and a demurely attired radical of the 1790s. Little did I know, long after taking the picture, that this stencilled graffiti would become a source of curiosity for me and result in a research project. I had been close to Wollstonecraft before, several years earlier, during my MA. For a good month I could be seen in the British Library with my head in a tattered copy of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, puzzling over her animated prose and sticking notes into every page where a bodily conceit sprung out at me. Back at home, I continued to puzzle over these slips of paper, rhetorical body parts abstracted further by print, but palpable and forceful to my mind. Assembling them in a typed essay betrayed the very deliberate act of *dis*-assembling operative in Wollstonecraft's writing – but how else to make sense of the body, her "corps" of ideas, *the* Wollstonecraftian form, in her work?

Looking back, this question still feels unanswerable. The dual-process of assemblage and dis-assemblage continues to occur; the post-its stuck into a well-worn book, now evolved into chapters on the 'heart', 'mind' and 'nerves', still spill out, overlap and occasionally threaten to undo the other as isolated units devoted to individual organs or bodily theories. The body as Wollstonecraft saw it cannot be encapsulated by one image, one statue, one sculpted word or bronze bust, even when designed by Maggi Hambling (fig.24) or Martin Jennings. Locating the body in her work; tracing its lineaments, contours, multiple postures, surface tensions, inner tremors, contextual ailments and perfections was, at times, as hard as positioning oneself in relation to the statue which Stewy's stencil anticipated. In 2015, it was everywhere implied and referred to by the Mary on the Green campaign, a material figure in all its concrete wholeness yet to materialise. In 2023, the statue, like my thesis, is here, but neither one appearing makes the Wollstonecraftian body any more cohesive and recognisable. Fragments, profiles, side-views and sneaky snapshots of the rhetorical and literal body are aplenty, but the coherent whole evades full exposure, unlike the graffiti on the wall.

Introduction

> …The want of wood, has made me catch the most violent cold I ever had; and my head is so disturbed by continual coughing, that I am unable to write without stopping frequently to recollect myself. – This however is one of the common evils which must be borne with – bodily pain does not touch the heart, though it fatigues the spirits. (p.278)[1]

Written during the coldest winter of the century in France, when firewood was scarce and food was being rationed, the above quotation shares something of Wollstonecraft's startling honesty and desire to convey her emotions, even when in the lowest of 'spirits'.[2] Addressed to Gilbert Imlay, her partner at the time though he was often away for prolonged periods on commercial ventures, Wollstonecraft's letter swings from tones of annoyance and disappointment to moments of piousness and philosophising, castigation and confession. What is striking about the passage is the attention she draws to her body, irrespective of other feelings and points of discussion. Perhaps suffering from a cold at this time of year (early January) and during conditions of unprecedentedly harsh weather would not come as a surprise to the reader. But the detail in which Wollstonecraft relates her bodily ailments, movements and illnesses was not isolated to this letter alone. Across much of her correspondence to Imlay – and to a family friend, George Blood, her sisters Everina and Eliza, as well as William Godwin later in the 1790s – descriptions of her body and the way it shapes her mental state abound. Of course immediacy, intimacy and honesty are characteristics of much eighteenth-century informal epistolary writing, but with Wollstonecraft these aspects are fully and unapologetically embraced, permitting her to share more than perhaps her readers had bargained for. Like Imlay, the reader is almost conveyed before her, as she momentarily 'stops' the epistle to 'recollect' herself after a disturbing fit of 'coughing'. Real time and letter time become altered by the chronology of her own bodily disturbances as captured, albeit intermittently and in broken syntax, on the page. In other letters to Imlay, Wollstonecraft details stomach aches and bowel disorders (p.240) during her pregnancy, in addition to her newborn daughter's contraction of smallpox and her attempts to cure her (p.262). Bodies are afforded just as much citational presence in her letters as the feelings and ideas they contain. And, of course, references to absent individuals create proximity, substitute a kind of tactility and embody the bodies that cannot be present at the time of writing. Yet, Wollstonecraft's privileging of descriptions and records of bodies, particularly her own, and her consideration of how the body interacts with the 'heart' or bears upon the mind ('…my mind has always hitherto enabled my body to do whatever I wished…', she declares to Imlay in an earlier epistle, p.246), betrays a deeper interest in corporeality and its importance, not just to the personal sphere with its domestic ties and cares, but the wider political world too.

I begin with the personal, with the human form, with Wollstonecraft's exhausted body as written and recorded by her own hand, because bodily descriptions, citations and figures are found extensively throughout her personal and political writing. Her consideration of corporeality starts with her own, as well as the bodily dramas of those closest to her (nursing her dying mother; supporting her best friend and sister during child birth and post-natal depressive experiences respectively), but goes outward into the corporeal strength or weakness of nations. Across her polemical writings, the health of individual bodies is compared to or compounded with that of the body politic. In her fiction, the combined physiological and psychological position of her heroines often reflects the socio-political constraints, cultural construction and spatial parameters imposed upon them. And in her didactic literature, the outer body either testifies to or is

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[1] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, (ed) Janet Todd (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp.277-278, 278.

[2] See Todd's footnote in *Letters*, p.278.

encouraged to disclose the mind. Bodies and their relationships to the inner – whether that be psychological, neuro-physiological or spiritual – and the outer socio-political worlds are continually explored. It is this language of the body – both the direct referents and indirect bodily realities contained by the metaphorical – that I have chosen to locate, analyse, arrange and reconstruct in this thesis.

Using eighteenth-century medical writings by John Bell, Matthew Baillie, Robert Whytt and George Cheyne, as well as recent theories by Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Gaston Bachelard, Roland Barthes, Homi K. Bhabha, Elizabeth Grosz and Elizabeth A. Wilson, I have excavated and analysed these bodily conceits and references, and attempted to contextualise the Wollstonecraftian body as I have "found" it in her writing. The first section is divided into chapters that deal exclusively with this bodily language as it manifests in Wollstonecraft's prose, particularly around the heart, the nervous system and the soul-body problem. Moving between the metaphor and the literal bodily reality and medical context upon which it depends, these chapters strive to unpack eighteenth-century biases around diverse bodies and their scientific, philosophical or cultural representations, whilst also asking if Wollstonecraft conforms to or departs from such depictions. In these critical literary dissections, I have found, for instance, that the heart, both in its rhetorical and literal address, was not simply imagined by Wollstonecraft or was hers alone, but was a heart that beat with *and* against the passion-infused writings of Rousseau and the moral philosophy of its time. It was an organ conflicted in origin and systemisation too, for its rhythm was in and out of sync with sentimental novelists of the mid-to-late eighteenth century. It was a heart both morbid *and* very much alive, drained and flushed with the developing anatomical writings of the time, and Baillie and Bell were an audible murmur in it. When it came to the nerves, however, those receptors and conveyers of sensed sentiment, I found that Wollstonecraft was not only fully attuned to contemporary philosophies involving physiology, nervous disorders and the soul, but was all-too-aware of the double-edged sword nervous physiology presented for women and all gendered bodies. In her writings on the mind, Wollstonecraft went beyond the ideas of Richard Price and the Cambridge Platonists to consider the problematic history of soul-body dualism and what this meant for women. Was the soul-body problem, as Wollstonecraft reconceived it across her polemics and later fiction, one that opened up new forms of embodiment for women or did it make them more desirous of embracing extended moments of disembodiment, whether through the written word or the natural world? Using a New Historicist form of critical analysis, I endeavour to answer such questions and to understand the body as it was being culturally, socio-politically and medically conceived in the long eighteenth century.

The visual and material culture of Wollstonecraft's period is also a useful lens through which to view the ideas on corporeality, embodiment and disembodiment encountered in her work. The second and third sections incorporate analysis of pictorial depictions of bodies, including Wollstonecraft's. Much like Hambling's controversial sculpture, the visual and material culture of the long eighteenth century preserves key attitudes from the public imaginary concerning the lives and attributions of bodies. The visual rhetoric of these images, the idioms constructed through and embedded in them, are, as Ludmilla Jordanova argues, 'mediators' not 'mirrors' between the past and present.[3] Images, like words, are not only imbued with meaning but help to develop and disseminate it. They not only reveal how bodies were perceived and treated at the time, but assist in shaping this perception and treatment. There is a reciprocal and mutually compelling relationship between the visual and material culture of the period – seen in the form of printed illustrations, caricatures, propaganda and portraiture – and the political events we define as 'history'. In Wollstonecraft's prose, her references to and representations of the body

[3] Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p.6.

evince this. Images by William Blake, Thomas Rowlandson, James Gillray and many others assist in contextualising Wollstonecraft's thinking on bodily issues, irrespective of whether she directly engaged with them in her writings.

From these explorations and contexts, it becomes apparent that the body in the eighteenth century cannot and should not ever be treated as an isolated, monolithic whole, but as an organic, ever-evolving entity that incorporates change, as much as it creates it. There is no single "eighteenth-century body" or "body *in* the eighteenth-century" and therefore no official, static or analytically tangible "Wollstonecraftian body". The corporeal in her work, as I see it, is as much an aggregation of past ideas and experiences, as it is a sharp dismantling of them. For example, the Rousseauian and Richardsonian heart is present, but also dramatically interrupted, denied and discounted in her novels and polemics. The Platonic, Cartesian, Priceian mind thinks, but it is not always above the material for Wollstonecraft. My chapters reflect these, at times desultory, contrary *and* conformist, forms.

Problems with the Body(s)?

If the body is somewhat indeterminate and fruitfully contradictory in and out of her work, then how to itemise parts, delineate chapters and mark out its coordinates in my own? I see it as a strength that chapters overlay and interact, pre-empting and building an interactive foundation for those in subsequent sections. Ideas that have been espoused in the opening chapter – such as affectivity and social constructivism – gain firmer ground and become more substantiated in later chapters on the nerves, mind-body and social bodies that make up the middle segment of the thesis.

Today affluent Western society is often guilty of flattening the body out, treating it as a decorative surface, with the relevant and necessary concealed holes and inlets, belonging to a screen-dominated technological culture. The mind is a computer; the heart a highly monitored expression of "Fitbit-ness" and the nerves are invisible wires carrying necessary impulses to the all-important hard drive central to the machine. But the eighteenth century would have shuddered at such a reductive description, despite its entertainment of Newtonian and then Paleyian mechanism. The inside, with all its grotesquery, emotional gunk and spiritual dis-ease, was frequently pushed out from its "casing"; whether examined in the popular pseudo-science of Lavaterian physiognomy or Cheynian nervous physiology to D'Holbachian materialism and Hartleian psychophysiology, the stuff of *within* always seeps *out* or *up* to the epidermal surface. The body was a text, an index that displayed its internal reflexes, fluxes and radixes, not simply a thing *in* a book or classificatory system – though it was undeniably increasingly classified and categorised as the century progressed. In an age of discovery and great political and industrial tumult, this is hardly surprising, but it needs to be reiterated for us today in a very different era that has lost, in a broader sense, this holistic bodily experience, expression and representation.

This dialectic of inner and outer, to borrow Bachelard's phrase, informs every chapter of the thesis.[4] As evidenced above, Wollstonecraft consciously acknowledges the mutual inclusivity of mind and body in her private letters when reflecting on her own ill health (thus proving her a product of her century's thinking, even in the act of questioning and challenging it), but scholars regularly still elide the body, the "outer", in considerations of her life and work. Much scholarship wants to dwell in an almost Cartesian fashion on the intellectual, inner substance of Wollstonecraft's writing and ideas.[5] For instance, when delineating the concept of freedom in

[4] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (trans) Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

[5] This is not to say that there has not been any excellent scholarship on the body in the eighteenth century. Works by George Rousseau, Roy Porter, Fay Bound Alberti, Heather Beatty and many others cited in my thesis prove that

Wollstonecraft's work, Nancy J. Hirschmann and Emily F. Regier only focus on the social formation of subjectivity alone, not how freedom and unfreedom impact on the body – and certainly not on how socialisation significantly shapes corporeality too.[6] As they conceive it, freedom only exists for and helps to shape the mind. This is a surprising omission when it comes to contemporary feminist and political philosophical considerations of Wollstonecraft's work. As the material side of the dialectic, bodies have been an afterthought and a side note, a cursory remark or at best an interesting digression in the most prominent scholarship by Janet Todd, Barbara Taylor, Claudia Johnson and recently Sandrine Bergès and Eileen Hunt Botting to name a few. Articles by Adriana Craciun (particularly in her sourcebook on *Rights of Woman*), Catherine Packham (on Wollstonecraft, moral philosophy, nervous physiology and vitalism) and Jeanette Ehrmann (on enslavement and abolitionism) have taken a step closer to highlighting bodily issues and preoccupations in Wollstonecraft's ideas.[7] Amy Mallory-Kani and Kimiyo Ogawa have also examined her engagement with medical treatises of the time, specifically those by John Brown and William Cullen, and have written persuasively about Wollstonecraft's 'medico-politics' in light of her unique employment of the body politic trope in her political writing.[8] Taylor has acknowledged the 'fruity disgust' with which Wollstonecraft pays especial attention to female sexuality and the body in *Rights of Woman*, and Todd too has noted Wollstonecraft's 'frequent deployment of the language of the body' in her introduction to this key work, as well as in her writing on sensibility.[9] But curiously no monograph has been written on the importance of the body to her work and central ideas involving the freedom, education and socio-political advancement of women.

One reason for the oversight of the body in Wollstonecraft studies goes back to the dialectic itself. Inner and outer, reason and flesh, male and female all spring from this same dualism and frame philosophy and philosophical discourse, as Grosz and Wilson argue (which will be discussed further in my third chapter).[10] The tendency in academic scholarship is to lean towards the inner 'side' of the dualism; that is, towards the intellect, the soul of the matter, the sophisticated abstract aspect at the expense of outer, bodily, materiality. Recent scholarship on Wollstonecraft has rightly prioritised her ideas over her life, and this is undoubtedly a response to the excessive biographical framing of Wollstonecraft from the early twentieth century right through to the 1970s, but does that mean current and future research should favour those philosophies involving her politics and metaphysics at the exclusion of all bodily issues,

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there is a rich seam of work devoted to body studies in the fields of medical humanities and literary studies. These works have broken major ground in the 90s and early 00s by contextualising the body in relation to the social, cultural and medical transitions and developments of the times. What is more, books like Marie Mulvey-Roberts' *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) show the importance of analysing the written body in works of literature and film in order to uncover the lingering prejudices towards certain corporeal forms over others and how this can cause deep socio-political atrocities towards marginalised bodies. My point is, extended studies on Wollstonecraft and the body have yet to be published.

[6] Nancy J. Hirschmann and Emily F. Regier, 'Freedom' in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, (eds) Sandrine Bergès, Eileen Hunt Botting and Alan Coffee (London: Routledge, 2019).

[7] Adriana Craciun (ed), *Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.75-83; Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.26-52; Jeanette Ehrmann's 'Between Enlightenment, Feminism, and Abolitionism: Mary Wollstonecraft's Thoughts on Women and Slavery' in *Political Ideas of Enlightenment Women, Virtue and Citizenship,* (eds) Lisa Curtis Wendtlandt, Karen Green et al., (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp.189-202.

[8] Amy Mallory-Kani, "'A Healthy State": Mary Wollstonecraft's Medico-Politics' in *The Eighteenth Century*, 56 (Spring 2015), pp.21-40, 21; Kimiyo Ogawa, "An Organic Body Politic: Wollstonecraft's Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and John Brown's Idea of Health" in *Liberating Medicine, 1720-1835*, (eds) Tristanne Connolly & Steve Clark (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.69-82.

[9] Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.118; Todd (ed), 2008, p.xxiii; Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen & Co, 1986).

[10] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies, Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1994). Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

dilemmas and beliefs in her work?[11] How can her ideas on liberation and progress continue to be critically appreciated, and even applied in feminist theories and problems today, if the place of the body is not valued in her oeuvre too? Without valuing the body in her work, there is a danger of doing exactly what Wollstonecraft herself did in her writing when it came to certain bodies, bodily activities and corporeal possibilities: repressing those aspects about which she felt most ambivalent and anxious; eliding over certain bodies and, by extension, ethnic, cultural and national groups, because of a sense of discomfort. This thesis goes some way to ensuring these bodies and areas of discomfort in Wollstonecraft's writing are not omitted or elided, but closely examined and highlighted from the start.

Repression informs an important dialectic in Wollstonecraft's prose, particularly when she presents and engages with the body. Recalling one bodily ideal often involves conjuring that of its "baser" or lesser privileged (by Wollstonecraft) antithetical counterpart into view. I have tried to acknowledge these repressed bodies, especially in my second section (the fourth and fifth chapters of the thesis) where the despised rococo form rises up to challenge its revolutionary republican "superior", and the enslaved African body "speaks back" when exploring the rhetoric of such figures in her writing. Often these repressed or elided bodies – queer forms, sexually exuberant and aberrant figures, colonial or orientalist conceptions of indigenous, Black, brown and Middle Eastern corporeal types – open an exploratory seam in the centre of these chapters which moves away from Wollstonecraft's own ideas in order to give greater nuance and substance to them. This opening up of the repressed challenges monolithic ideas around Wollstonecraft's notions of corporeality, as well as contemporary hegemonic conceptions of bodies established by classical and early enlightenment philosophers and perpetuated by those later in the century. This seam implicitly strives to challenge Western humanistic (colonial) conceptions of man, the human and, therefore, the body, as theoretically identified in the work of Sylvia Wynter, and evinced in the writing of Wollstonecraft.[12] Yet, outside of anticolonial and decolonial frames of interrogation, these seams where othered, elided and derided rhetorical and literal bodies return and subversively speak back, also seek to highlight the problematic attitudes at once covertly and overtly at play in her conception of the body. This interrogation of a Cartesian monolithic form seeks to prove that the "Wollstonecraftian body", much like the "Enlightenment body" is not one, as much as some scholars would like it to be, but many.

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Short Map and Intentions of the Thesis

In light of this multifaceted approach to corporeality, my thesis not only contributes to Wollstonecraft studies, but to those of the body, gender and feminism. As a potential monograph of Wollstonecraft's corporeal ideologies, it allows readers to see how integral the body is to her ideas of socio-political freedom, gender equality and equity, educational parity and intellectual, psychological and spiritual improvement. A monograph devoted to a New

[11] Julie Murray, '1970s Critical Reception' in *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context*, (eds) Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp.57-63, 57, 61; see also, Cora Kaplan, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's Reception and Legacies' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, (ed) Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.246-270. Aside from biographies written and published in the 1790s by Emily Sunstein, Eleanor Flexner and Claire Tomlin (as touched upon by Murray in her chapter), books like *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, (ed) Maria J. Falco (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) and Gary Kelly's introduction to his edition of Wollstonecraft's novels still evince this trend to read her work through her life.

[12] Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument' in *The New Centennial Review*, 3 (Fall 2003), pp.257-337; *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, (ed) Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p.2.

Historicist critique of the human body in her works not only shines a light on how her ideas were inflected by the aforementioned philosophical discourses and medical discoveries of the time, but also reveals the ideals and visions Wollstonecraft harboured for bodies not yet realised. Bodies are often subject to and exist at the intersection of the shifts and advancements of various fields of knowledge, past and present; therefore, a monograph centring Wollstonecraft's response to bodies would be, much like the visual and material culture of the period, a point of mediation between discussions around the formation of spaces of sociability, modes of (gendered) behaviour, fashions, manners and the mores they inspire, as well as the politics, sociological processes and key events of the long eighteenth century. This understanding of the body as a site of aggregation and socio-cultural shaping runs throughout this thesis and, again, subsequently opens it up to areas of research outside of those devoted exclusively to Wollstonecraft.

Split into three sections – Corporeal Parts, Corporeal Strategies and Schemes, and Corporeal Legacies – the thesis successively builds on and interacts with formerly proposed and explored theories about social constructionism, internal-external dialecticism, personal and public space, and any overlaps between Wollstonecraft's life and her ideas. The first section, Corporeal Parts, examines the bodily metaphors in Wollstonecraft's work and asks to what extent they align with or deviate from medical theories and philosophical discussions of the time. Literary texts by eighteenth-century writers like Addison, Blake and Polwhele consolidate or challenge common ideas around bodily parts and their attending gendered emotional and social expressions. The second section, Corporeal Strategies and Schemes offers case studies in certain socio-political bodies that dominated her work rhetorically and ideologically, as well as during the public debates of the 1790s: enslaved bodies and national corporeal types (French and British). The two chapters that form this section build on the literary and intellectual historical analysis found in the opening chapters, but go further in seeking to highlight undermined, omitted and oppressed bodies hidden beneath prevalent cultural corporeal ideologies and figures in and out of Wollstonecraft's work. The second section provides space for these bodies and the attitudes Wollstonecraft held towards them to be known, and does so by using eighteenth-century and twenty-first-century visual and material culture to bring these corporeal identities and experiences into view. The final section, Corporeal Legacies, provides an overview of the visual representations of Wollstonecraft, many of which have brought her reputation and life into public knowledge – but not necessarily her ideas. This chapter evaluates various portraits, especially those by Opie, and considers who they reflect and represent more (artist, sitter, patron or viewer). In doing so, an alternative story of the body and Wollstonecraft's bodily experiences unfold, therefore revealing the aspects of her work that are often elided or celebrated through her repeated visualisation. It also reminds readers that bodies, including representations of Wollstonecraft's own form, are sites of diverse and conflicting, yet time-encoded, expectations and beliefs that transcend any projected image of a constituted whole and our desire for them to be so. It is important to acknowledge this when thinking about bodies from our own historically privileged and specific position.

Section 1: Corporeal Parts

Healing the Cankered Heart

> Having already given an Account of the Dissection of a Beau's Head, with the several Discoveries made on that Occasion; I shall here, according to my Promise, enter upon the Dissection of a *Coqueas Heart*, and communicate to the Publick such particularities as we observed in that curious Piece of Anatomy.[13]

In his essay for *The Spectator* (no. 281, 1712), Joseph Addison recounts a dream in which he witnesses the dissection of 'the heart of a coquet'. Charmingly told, with impressive attention to anatomical detail, the essay lays bare the cultural biases of the eighteenth century. In an earlier number, Mr Spectator had observed an 'operator' open the head of a 'Beau' (no. 275, 1712). Though no less satirized, it is interesting that the beau, the male counterpart of these two cadavers, should be accorded the dignity of the head. Dead, disembodied and laid out on an operating table, the rakish beau, at once alluring villain and recognisable caricature in early eighteenth-century literature, is still understood in relation to the main quality which defined and distinguished men from women: reason. In associating the beau with the head, the bodily equivalent and symbol of patriarchal authority and prerogative, Addison preserves, albeit mockingly, traditional gender binaries. Men were synonymous with thinking, women with feeling; the head and heart are the corresponding figures of this binary. Though it was not without its challengers, this cultural polarity would continue to be reinforced throughout the century, especially in works and discourses of sensibility which became 'firmly connected with women' and the feminine overall.[14]

Of course, the joke these essays turn on is how the beau and coquette, or their respective organs, threaten to traverse and destabilise conventional gender identities. Full of 'strange Materials', 'Ribbons, Lace and Embroidery', the beau's brains resemble a diminutive trousseau more than the spongey folds of grey matter.[15] The Cartesian 'Seat of the Soul', the pineal gland, smells of 'Orange-Flower Water' and encompasses any spirit the beau may have had in a 'thousand little Faces or Mirrours', all the better to 'contemplate its own beauties'.[16] That the reader should find a kind of inner toilette where the most sacred aspect of self was supposed to dwell not only conveys the beau's sense of vanity, egoism and idolatrous solipsism, but also his dangerous (and perhaps fatal) descent into effeminacy. Unable to use his head to contemplate subjects conventionally suitable for men – intellectual pursuits, religious duty, familial and professional responsibilities – the beau wastes his faculties on self-indulgence, illicit lovers and conquests, material frippery and narcissistic self-obsession. Addison's beau is at risk of emasculating himself and, in the process, queerly out-coquetting his coquette.

Like that of the beau, the dissection of the coquette reveals a consumer's love of luxury and cosmetic items. The coquette's heart lives up to its owner's reputation in keeping 'innumerable sorts of trifles' and clothing, whilst the liquor from its pericardium rises at 'the approach of a

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[13] Joseph Addison, 'No. 281, Tuesday, January 22, 1712' in *The Spectator*, Vol. 2, (ed) Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; published online 2014), pp.594-597. Please note, though probably a spelling mistake, 'coqueas' is included in Addison's original text, as edited by Bond, and is included in the original quotation above only.

[14] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London, Methuen, 1986), p.8.

[15] Addison, No. 275, 1712, pp.570-571.

[16] Addison, No.275, 1712, pp.570-571; for a deeper discussion on Descartes' belief that the pineal gland was the seat of the soul, see Gert-Jan Lokhorst, 'Descartes and the Pineal Gland' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (ed) Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2021).

plume of feathers, an embroidered Coat or a Pair of fringed Gloves'.[17] True to her early eighteenth-century characterisation, Addison's coquette keeps all her options open, for as Theresa Braunschneider has observed 'choice' is her prerogative and maximising it remains her goal, even in death.[18] Thus, the coquette's love of outward show and consumer optimisation animates the heart long after her demise, rising and falling according to what is in and out of fashion. Her love of surfaces exceeds the beau, however, when the heart itself is compared to a 'smooth piece of ice'.[19] 'Cold' and 'slippery', 'hollow' and 'light', the coquette's heart is closer to those objects of adornment it greedily covets: vanity and luxurious living has turned a vital organ into one of art.[20] In this, Addison objectifies the coquette's heart, turning it into a thing of wonder and curiosity, an exquisitely designed accoutrement befitting a *Wunderkammer*, jewellery box or shop window. Even when under the microscope and scalpel, the coquette's heart cannot escape being further gendered: the anatomical gaze remains entirely a male one. What is more, the coquette's heart, in all its 'Gordian' knottiness and complexity, still enthrals the surrounding narrator, anatomist and assembled virtuosos. Divested of her body, appearing in actuality a gobbet of flesh, the coquette continues to captivate, court and secure male attention. In this, her excessive and exaggerated femininity, as captured in her heart, realises its lethal potential, and at once fulfils and destabilises gendered stereotypes. Empowered by the male gaze yet overpowering those who set eyes on her, even in metonymic form, the coquette both fulfils and overcomes gendered bifurcations; she is at once the objectified female (specimen) and dominant subject, simultaneously seducing and subversively subjugating those who desire her. Addison's anatomisation, therefore, sounds an alarm as well as provoking laughter amongst his readers.

Addison's essays playfully merge scientific advancements in microscopy, cardiology, pathology and nervous physiology with less "advanced" but culturally accepted ideas. Inspired by Nathaniel Wanley's late seventeenth-century text, *The Wonders of the Little World or General History of Man* (1678), whose chapter 'Of the Heart' conceives the organ to be a 'little cabinet', Addison's use of science reinforces the social normativity and acceptability of the gender binary portrayed, as well as cultural prejudices about personhood and the body.[21] Although he looks back to historical binaries of masculinity and femininity, man and woman, Addison very clearly leans towards contemporary socio-economic types made possible by Britain's rising commercial and consumer culture and burgeoning social spheres. In this historically informed but contemporary outlook, he demonstrates how embedded and pervasive the beau and coquette – or rather man-as-head / woman-as-heart tropes – were in the early 1700s. Witty and diverting as they may be, the scientific and socio-economic contexts and approaches in his essays present a problem for those who would, much later in the century, seriously contest the alignment of gendered identity with bodily and intellectual characteristics.

Mary Wollstonecraft was one such critic who stridently contested such gender binaries. For her, this alignment was socially constructed and did not, as was still being argued in the 1790s, originate in nature. Whether Wollstonecraft had ever read these specific essays remains to be discovered, but she would have been all too familiar with Addison's implicit advocation of gender binaries and the depiction of a feminised heart. In fact, the heart of the coquette not only represented what Wollstonecraft most disliked, but also what she most feared. Throughout her private and public writing, metaphors of the heart abound. In her private letters, the heart is

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[17] Addison, No. 281, 1712, pp.596, 595.
[18] Theresa Braunschneider, *Our Coquettes: Capacious Desire in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p.2.
[19] Addison, No. 281, 1712, p.595.
[20] Addison, No.281, 1712, pp.596-595.
[21] Nathaniel Wanley, *The Wonders of the Little World: or a General History of Man* (London: C. Taylor, 1788; first published in 1678), section XV.

appealed to as the source of social and romantic feeling, the moderator of imaginative flight, and the monitor of conscience and charity. In her polemics and fiction, metaphors of the heart do not so much change as become reanimated, taking on greater significance, especially when challenging prevailing tropes about gendered and individual affectivity. But the threat of the coquette's heart loomed over her work; the anxiety of what excessive sensibility, faux feeling and equating women with affectivity meant in socio-political and familial contexts pervades her writing. In Wollstonecraft's eyes, coquetry was a form of behaviour that resulted from this unnatural and socialised alignment of women with the heart. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), therefore, she set about to explode this overdevelopment of emotion – and subsequent underdevelopment of mental powers – by deconstructing the arguments of theorists Jean-Jacques Rousseau and didactic writers John Gregory and James Fordyce that defined woman as the lesser, more feeling, submissive sex.[22] These thinkers advocated a type of coquetry that, to her mind, was the very tyrannical "power" which debased women and their hearts in the process. Arguing for a new ethic of affectivity, one that would break the cultural binary of 'man was made to reason, woman to feel' (p.133), which underpinned social relations, Wollstonecraft's political and didactic writings set out to reform the trope of the heart and re-envisage what it could mean for both men and women.

By examining the reformist ethic of affectivity proposed in her work, I will uncover what frequently underlies it: repulsion and fear towards the coquette's heart. Wollstonecraft's ambivalence towards sensibility, its bodily antecedents and repercussions, has been well documented by scholars G. J. Barker-Benfield, Janet Todd, Barbara Taylor, Kathryn Temple and Alex Wetmore, to name but a few.[23] However, a fuller consideration of what this ambivalence means when it comes to the heart, both as a cultural symbol and bodily organ, has yet to be written. In considering the contexts – philosophical, scientific, literary, romantic and familial – which Wollstonecraft engaged and in which she sought to reform the figure of the heart, her anxieties and fears, hopes and visions for female affectivity and bodily autonomy will be better understood. Looking at her early didactic and fictional work, chiefly *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and her first novel *Mary, A Fiction* (1788), I will consider Wollstonecraft's concerns about the bodily repercussions women faced when being socialised purely as affective subjects.[24] Here, a consideration of the discoveries in morbid anatomy, as well as the generic, stylistic and commercial pressures women writers endured in the burgeoning literary marketplace will provide evidence as to why Wollstonecraft was ambivalent towards the cult of sensibility and repulsed by the heart of the coquette. In revisiting her personal letters, particularly those to her first partner, Gilbert Imlay, and juxtaposing their references to the heart with those in her public writing, the matrix of anxieties and concerns around the cultural and bodily phenomenon of the coquette, and how it haunts her work in hitherto surprising and overlooked ways, will be more apparent.

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Before Wollstonecraft wrote her own works of the heart, her ideas were shaped by the affective literature of others. In her first published book for Joseph Johnson, *Thoughts on the Education of*

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

[23] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Todd, *Sensibility, An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); Kathryn Temple, 'Heart of Agitation: Mary Wollstonecraft, Emotion and Legal Subjectivity' in *The Eighteenth Century*, 58 (Fall 2017), pp.371-382; Alex Wetmore, 'Sentimentalism and Sensibility' in *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context*, (eds) Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp.257-263.

[24] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, A Fiction*, (ed) Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life (1787), reading and its effects on the hearts and minds of young women is an evident concern.[25] Well before taking other women writers, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, to task in *Rights of Woman*, or arguing against oppressive educational systems as theorised by Rousseau and Gregory, Wollstonecraft was aware of how instrumental reading could be to the psychological and intellectual development of women, and to the overall progress of a nation. This awareness stemmed from her own experience of self-education. For Wollstonecraft's own high level of literacy – and the intellectual and emotional intelligence that ensued from it – was afforded mainly by the practise of private reading and letter writing. Although she briefly attended a day school during her family's stay in Beverley, it was her friendships, first with Jane Arden, and a little later with Frances Blood, that nurtured a love of reading.[26] Todd speculates that the fourteen-year-old Wollstonecraft would have read 'general books, magazines, and newspapers, learning to consider social issues troubling the nation – and Beverley' and notes that the 'usual canon of male literature urged on women in conduct manuals' was mentioned in her correspondence with Arden.[27] When her family moved to Hoxton in 1775, it was an elderly couple, the Clares, particularly Mr Clare, a retired clergyman, who exposed Wollstonecraft to poetry, recommending 'proper books' to her, and, most importantly, introducing her to the genteel and cultivated Blood.[28] Reading for the young Wollstonecraft then was encouraged by friendship, the one sustaining and edifying the strength of the other. Her epistolary communication confirms what Abigail Williams has argued: that reading was 'the foundation of social interaction', particularly for the middle classes.[29] Tellingly, however, there was a noticeable lack of romances and sentimental literature in Wollstonecraft's reading regimen, and this was certainly owing to the fact that such works were considered morally dangerous, even indulgent, for 'solitary female reader[s]', the youngest of which group were at risk of being 'unable to distinguish life from fantasy'.[30] Yet Wollstonecraft was evidently aware of such literature and by the time *Thoughts* was published, she had more than familiarised herself with Rousseau, Oliver Goldsmith, Ann Radcliffe and many writers whose works overlapped with the sentimental genre. If these references were not proof enough of her own sentimental inclinations, her anonymously published anthology, *The Female Reader* (1789), an in-depth follow-up to *Thoughts* regarding the education of young women, included Charlotte Smith, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Caspar Lavater, all of whose writings espoused and engaged with excessive forms of sensibility and matters of the heart.[31] Though Wollstonecraft was not overtly endorsing literature of sentiment, she was not completely rejecting it either, particularly that which, as stated in *Thoughts*, succeeded in enlarging 'the mind' and improving 'the heart' (p.20).

Nevertheless, her fears about what literature of sentiment could rouse in the bodies and behaviour of young people still remained. It was not simply that she saw novels of sensibility as 'flimsy works' (p.273), inferior to those 'superior' (p.272) texts that 'regulate the imagination' and encourage 'exertion of thinking powers', as argued forcefully in *Rights of Woman*. She also

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[25] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Vol.4, (eds) Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989).
[26] Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft, A Revolutionary Life* (London: Orion, 2000), pp.12, 18.
[27] Todd, 2000, pp.12, 18.
[28] Todd, 2000, p.22.
[29] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New York: Yale University Press, 2017), p.10.
[30] Todd, 2000, p.18; Williams, 2017, pp.238, 213.
[31] Quotations by these writers, as well as excerpts from poems, short stories, novels, memoirs, devotional and didactic literature are strewn throughout the compendium. The quotations from Lavater and Goethe are included in a prefatory section titled 'desultory remarks' (pp.67-80) alongside those by moral and didactic writers Barbauld, Hester Chapone, Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis and none other than John Gregory, the writer she stridently criticises in *Rights of Woman*.

believed that they cast women in a particular light, courted a heightened emotional response at the expense of other abilities, reinforced the home-bound littleness of their lives, minds and sense of selves, and glamorised the expectation that they would "become" something socially only in the eyes and through the attention of men – and not always in the context of marriage. Sentimental novels preserved the throb of sensibility without always imparting any moral sentiment in the minds and hearts of readers. Wollstonecraft's section in *Thoughts* entitled 'Reading' prepares us for her future criticism of and personal anxiety over such literature, especially sentimental novels:

> Those productions which give a wrong account of the human passions, and the various accidents of life, ought not to be read before the judgement is formed, or at least exercised. Such accounts are one great cause of the affectation of young women. Sensibility is described and praised, and the effects of it represented in a way so different from nature, that those who imitate it must make themselves very ridiculous. A false taste is acquired, and sensible books appear dull and insipid after those superficial performances, which obtain their full end if they can keep the mind in a continual ferment. (p.20)

One would not assume this to be the opinion of a writer who would go on to be the foremost reviewer of sentimental literature for Johnson and Christie's *Analytical Review* (1788-1798). But it was, and the caution with which Wollstonecraft would review such books and reference them in her more renowned polemics, would remain the same. Here, however, in full moralist mode (elsewhere in the section she alludes to passages from the Gospels and quotes from *The Adventurer*, a journal known for its contributions from Samuel Johnson), Wollstonecraft does not refer to the heart; she is all 'mind' and 'understanding' (p.20). Yet it is the heart and its 'treacherous' impressionability and excitability that most perturbs her (as she goes on to describe in a later section dedicated to none other than 'Love' p.30). Using the vocabulary of the theatre – another cultural pastime she claims has a negative impact on young women in *Thoughts* (pp.46-47) – Wollstonecraft demonstrates how books "act on" the physiology and psychology of young readers. As 'productions', which relate 'superficial performances' and 'wrong' ones at that, works of sentimental and romantic literature are accorded spurious yet physical powers that, like an actor on a stage, are able to manipulate and enthral. Anxiety over literary representation and how it impacts the bodies and imaginations of "unformed" and inexperienced readers, how it may solidify the 'taste' and set the moral understanding and emotional health, is present in this passage. But the faint beat of the coquette's heart, though not directly mentioned, is the real fear here. It is the heart of a young woman who is all too ready to receive these 'superficial performances' and endeavour to 'imitate' them, emulating a morally empty, exaggerated, excessive and performative form of sensibility that renders her, as Wollstonecraft goes on to conclude, 'insignificant'. What is more, the mental 'ferment' achieved by such books, is a heart-inspired eroticism, sexual awakening and longing – the kind of sexuality and affectivity that sets women on the wide path to more overt forms of coquetry. The imagination, and its shaping by the senses and feelings, were of paramount importance to Wollstonecraft. Certain types of books, therefore, had their own coquette-like powers of persuasion, as if they could lure a reader into embracing particular notions and manners of being, without guaranteeing and granting the social fulfilment and reality they promised.

In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft abandons the tentative and cautionary moralistic tone of her earlier didactic work towards sentimental literature, and instead adopts a stridently satirical and bitingly caustic approach befitting a revolutionary text and radical writer. When discussing women's 'confined education' in her final chapter, she describes the relationship between this confinement and women who 'refine their sensual feelings' by reading the 'reveries of…stupid

novelists' (p.271). When education has left them 'subjected to their sensations', women 'plump into actual vice'. Here, the bodily enervation and repercussions are apparent in Wollstonecraft's elaborate lexis. Lured by the 'sentimental jargon' used to create 'meretricious scenes' and 'stale tales', the 'heart', *not* the understanding, is drawn away from 'its daily duties' (p.271). As works which work on and "work up" the body and sensory receptivity, sentimental novels, for Wollstonecraft, are a dangerous business, and part of the problem when it comes to women being unfit to do even what society expects of them: rear children as affectionate rather than affected mothers, and be self-respecting and self-controlling wives of respectable households rather than purely affected beings. Sentimental novels create a dangerously private and emotionally circuitous relationship between the reader and the page, one that diverts women from all that lies beyond the *confines* of their hearts, persons and bodies. Locked into this self-indulgent, rather than self-improving, mode, women are helpless and unhelpfully useless to the world of duty and action. These novels foster a kind of narcissistic introversion, a sensibility-ridden and sedentary state of consumption that admits reflection of no one and nothing other than that which is sensation-based and emotionally stirring.

A few pages later in the chapter, nonetheless, Wollstonecraft relents and concedes that it is better to read them than nothing at all (pp.272-3). No doubt conscious of the fact that literature of this supposedly 'flimsy' cast was helping women of the middle and lower classes to become literate, Wollstonecraft was still firmly of the opinion that texts of this kind would only do so much and go so far to improving the mental capacity and social status of women.[32] Yet passages like those from *Thoughts* and *Rights of Woman* appear hypocritical in light of the fact that Wollstonecraft herself wrote two novels, both of which could be labelled as sentimental. Her first novel, *Mary,* was written a year after her reflection on reading in *Thoughts*, and though the activity of private reading and sentimental literature is criticised in the preface and at various points in the narrative, Wollstonecraft is unable to avoid tropes and language typical of the genre. Tableaux of touch, emotionally stirring scenes of reconciliation and love, endangered or rescued virtue (as evinced in influential sentimental works like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and Frances Burney's *Evelina*), declarations of passion and a heightened linguistic register and syntax (an exaggerated use of dashes and ellipses for instance) were all characteristics of sentimental literature, and ones which Wollstonecraft consciously employed in both her novels.[33] Barker-Benfield notes in his introduction to his key work on sensibility that by the end of the century, women not only dominated as readers of such literature, but as writers of it too.[34] Arguing that they used the genre as a feminist means to explore issues specific to women and as a liberating form that allowed them to fashion their own expression and style, as well as to innovate and direct the literary market, Barker-Benfield also acknowledges that it was 'soon used against women' to defend models of 'sexual difference' and sense-based gender characteristics.[35] All too aware of how sensibility and the culture of the heart had been used to socialise women, and in turn women as authors, Wollstonecraft's anti-sentimental fury, when in moralist and polemicist

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[32] Barker-Benfield discusses this in his work on sensibility, particularly pp.161-173; Vivien Jones also alludes to the importance of literary work (from broadsheets to pamphlets, to cheap knock-off versions and adaptations of novels) by women in improving and increasing literacy rates among them in her introduction to *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, (ed) Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.2-5.

[33] Todd, 1986, p.5.

[34] Barker-Benfield, p.XVII. Recent scholarship has contested these assertions. In *The Social Life of Books,* Williams notes that it is men who are the 'primary purchasers and borrowers of novels', despite the 'gross distortion of the realities of reading by women and men of the time', pp.207-208. More notable is Jan Fergus' *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), which, after analysis involving bookselling records from the Midlands in the eighteenth century, concludes that men were the main consumers of novels and that irrespective of the cultural feminisation of the form, 'novels were not written solely for women and decidedly not consumed by them exclusively', p.41.

[35] Barker-Benfield, pp.XVII-XXVII.

mode, makes utter sense. But her gravitation towards a form and genre she so vehemently decried requires more nuanced consideration, not just of her ideas and politics, but her own position in life as a woman and writer. Were Wollstonecraft's novels the result of yielding to a publishing industry that annexed women writers with the culture and cultural output of sensibility only? Or was she using the genre itself to process, understand and renegotiate what sensibility meant for her and other women, for the heart as well as the head?

I would argue in favour of the latter possibility. Whether consciously or not, Wollstonecraft used the novel form and the sentimental genre to process her ambivalent relationship to sensibility, her complex views on the heart and to begin to construct an ethic of affectivity. That her first novel, *Mary*, was a form of auto-fiction, an early roman-à-clef, demonstrated just how important it was for Wollstonecraft personally to process and crystallise her views on the heart and its contribution to the socialisation of women. It also allowed her to address (though not necessarily overcome) another fear: that of the emptiness of the coquette's heart, the moral centre of which lacked and did not hold. The emptiness – or lightness as Addison quipped in his essay – of the coquette's heart was a painful void that haunted Wollstonecraft. According to her political writings, this heart-based paucity originated in the excessive sensibility women were encouraged to cultivate, show and be associated with. But her novel reveals a deeper root-cause. The emptiness of the heart was not only to do with an overdeveloped sensibility; it was also to do with women's internalised sense of themselves as devalued social subjects. It was this recurring and systemically enforced experience of confinement – whether that be in terms of education, social positioning, opportunities or contribution – that truly impoverished the heart and body, as much as the mind. Of course, these two issues were interconnected, but sensibility was more the symptom rather than the disease itself. Denied access to wider social spheres and opportunities, women looked to sentiment as a form of emotional escape from such confinement, despite it actually re-confining them further in their own limited bodily frame of reference. This is similar to the coquette, who sees coquetry (aided by empty or excessive sensibility) as a type of defence or socio-political power when it actually renders her vulnerable and subservient by it. *Mary* grapples with this impoverishment of the heart through the interconnected stories of Eliza, Ann and Mary, three lonely women whose lives were limited not just by sensibility, but the social limitations placed on them.

Written at a time when work, money and support were scarce for Wollstonecraft, and grief was still fresh after the death of Blood, *Mary* is a novel about scarcity itself. Perhaps an act of sublimation – for Wollstonecraft was all too familiar with scarcity as the eldest daughter of a feckless father and an abused mother – the novel's exploration of the scarcity of affection available to women is just as important as the paradigmatic problem of sensibility. *Mary* opens with the potted backstory of Eliza, the least sympathetic character in the novel, whose brief appearance in the first two chapters verges on Addisonian caricature. Bearing an abbreviated form of the name of Wollstonecraft's own mother, Eliza also bears an uncanny resemblance to Lady Kingsborough, the writer's former employer when she was a governess in Ireland, or the sickly woman of fashion scathingly satirised in *Rights of Woman*. Though Eliza is not integral to the story of Ann or Mary, symbolically she is crucial. By making her the focus of the opening chapter, Wollstonecraft develops a portrait of intergenerational and inherited oppression; Eliza's poor education and exaggerated affectivity leave Mary unable to cope with her own excess of feeling, thus passing on the emotional, social and spiritual dearth that would become the lot of the next generation. Despite implicitly recognising that Eliza is a victim of her circumstances, the narrator still approaches her with cold disdain, repulsed by the model of Rousseauesque femininity she attempts to embody.[36] In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau outlines an educational plan

[36] The life trajectory of Eliza represents the kind of poor socialisation that Wollstonecraft despised and heavily criticised in *Rights of Woman*. The narrator's cool tone filters through in her hotly satirical send up of Eliza's

across five Books for his titular character.[37] Émile's female counterpart, Sophie, was included rather belatedly in Book V, nevertheless what is said about Rousseau's fictional young woman reinforces cultural ideas about what she was and should be in relation to man. Throughout Book V, Rousseau reiterates woman's subordinate role: men 'ought to be active and strong', women 'passive and weak'. He continues: 'when women become robust, men become still more so. When men get soft, women get even softer. When the two change equally, the difference remains the same'.[38] This 'difference' always leaves women on the back foot, and always underscores their essential inferiority, their contingent identity to man in every way. Born to be his helpmeet, to fulfil his every need, the one power Rousseau thought nature bequeathed to woman was her body and how she used it. It was the 'violence…in her charms', a power that allowed woman to 'constrain' man and find his 'strength', that momentarily allowed her to be the dominant partner and sex.[39] Turning coquetry into a type of tyranny, the one method through which woman could tower over man and render *him* a creature of sense alone, was the only form of empowerment nature or the 'supreme being' granted to woman, Rousseau argued. This attitude incensed Wollstonecraft enough to dedicate a whole chapter in *Rights of Woman* to forcefully ripping apart Rousseau's misogynistic philosophy and the 'power' it espoused.

Ire towards this school of thought is evident in Wollstonecraft's treatment of Eliza in *Mary*. Far from being the Rousseauian female coquette who rules over an 'empire' of attraction, befuddling men's wits and enslaving them with her sensuous wiles, Eliza has virtually no sentimental and sensual appeal, despite her attempts to wield this power. Worse still, she has no power over her aggressive and neglectful husband. In a few satirically spiteful pages, Wollstonecraft exposes her as the vain inconsiderate doll she is and puts a pin in the coquette's airily fantastical domain. Living for the 'shew' of 'things' and decked with 'a few superficial accomplishments' (p.1), Eliza's veneer of feminine grace and submissiveness is peeled back to reveal a morally weak and socially unedifying sham, albeit one that has bodily consequences. Ailing under her own indolence and 'sickly-die-away languor' (p.2), this supine lady, a supposed paragon of sensibility and 'delicacy', is reduced to 'a mere nothing' (p.2). Synonymous with the verbs "to languish" and "to vegetate", Eliza's bodily and psychological existence suffers under the social regimen prescribed to gentlewomen of the day. Propped up by a façade of respectability, marital stability and landed security, she slumps behind the scenes, only to become a 'shadow of a sound', another 'nought' in the female world (p.2). Such metaphors of reduction and near-nihilism, aided by the increasingly mocking narrational tone, reiterate the hollowness and existential insubstantiality at the centre of the Rousseauian coquette and woman of fashion. Emptying out the Rousseauesque effigy of femininity, Wollstonecraft lays bare the waste, damage and ultimate lack at the core of this social trope. Or, as she declares confidently in her advertisement, *Mary* is not another fictional endorsement of a 'Clarissa…Lady G…or a Sophie' (XXXI), but rather a decided turn from this female type.

In her bid to tear up the constricting patterns of eighteenth-century femininity, Wollstonecraft continues to debunk the Rousseauian ideal of woman as creature of the heart. Painting her own series of satirical tableau – each one a mockery of the sentimental portraits of "feminine" softness found frequently in contemporary novels – Wollstonecraft scathingly erodes the notion that women are beings of sensibility fashioned for the attention of a gallant male lover. At once we see Eliza at her toilette, hair coiffed, consumed by a novel (p.2); then we turn to see her

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upbringing and her daily routine as a wife. However, this disdain is particularly pronounced when, on page 2, the narrator sharply interjects during a passage relating Eliza's religious beliefs and spiritual fate and coldly concludes, 'I have nothing to say to her unclothed spirit', thus considering her an unworthy subject to approach or address.

[37] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or On Education*, (trans) Allan Bloom (London: Penguin, 1991; first published 1762).

[38] Rousseau, 1762, pp.358, 362.

[39] Rousseau, 1762, p.358.

watering a 'rose bush' with 'her tears', tragically re-enacting the romance at hand (p.3); lastly, we see her sharing a bed with her pet dogs, whilst she lisps to them in 'the prettiest French expressions of ecstatic fondness' (p.3). Denying us the imaginative and sentimental indulgence that such vignettes usually permit, Wollstonecraft's focalised passages prove Eliza's own emotional indulgences to be empty gestures, devoid of true tenderness. Building on her former belief, as touched on in *Thoughts*, that reading has the potential to mould the heart and mind, she connects Eliza's moral insensibility, sterility and true emotional lack to the shallow romances she so readily consumes.

One such romance read by Eliza and cited by Wollstonecraft in the novella is Mrs Cartwright's *The Platonic Marriage* (1787). An outlandish epistolary romance published a year before *Mary*, *The Platonic Marriage* revolves around Clara Villeroy, a young woman defrauded of her family fortune and subsequently compelled to marry for financial security, instead of the love she craves. Subject to the usual vicissitudes that befall unprotected, unmarried women in such novels, Clara's fortune is reversed, her virtue rewarded, when a second opportunity to marry presents itself.[40] After the fortuitous death of her first husband, Clara's desire to marry for love is fulfilled. Gary Kelly sees Wollstonecraft's reference to Cartwright's novel and an earlier romance, *The History of Eliza Warwick* (1778), not only as an attack on the 'socially emulative' sensibility espoused by such works, but also as a mode of redirecting the fate of her own characters.[41] Unlike Clara, neither Eliza, Ann nor Mary will marry for love or have their literal or emotional indigence resolved through a happy marriage. Kelly observes further evidence of Wollstonecraft deriding what she evidently thought was a spurious conception of marital relationships and social opportunities for women in her use of phrases from Cartwright's novel.[42] I would argue that Wollstonecraft's citation of Cartwright's plots and sentimental jargon in *Mary* is a form of embedded criticism, whereby she banishes this exorbitant lexis and structure through her own satirical and detached style of narration. Her intertextuality therefore negates, rather than propagates, the kind of romantic closure and erotic affectivity that Cartwright so readily enjoins to her characters and opens up for readers. Wollstonecraft divests both the language and its supporting generic structural tropes of their emotional potency, as well as their potential to be seen as exemplars of life. Furthermore, in deeming such novels, 'substitutes for bodily dissipation', Wollstonecraft demonstrates, through Eliza, that this representation of romantic love and living holds the opposite potential for women readers: works like Cartwright's could corrupt the mind, defile the soul and corrode the expectant heart. Collapsing the symbolic and material function of the heart to a gendered expectation for 'scenes of love' (p.3) and a love of perusing said scenes, Wollstonecraft expounds how novels like those by Cartwright leave women in an abject position, pathetically pining after a fantasy never to be realised.

There is a further "hollowing-out" of Eliza's heart that does require some of the reader's understanding, despite Wollstonecraft's refusal to show her pity. Whether at her toilette, watering a plant with tears or petting her dogs, Eliza is alone, neglected by her brutish husband and helpless in the face of his adulterous feckless ways. The scarcity of care inside home and hearth is internalised, desolating the heart. Loneliness and longing (erotic and spiritual) tend to go hand-in-hand, and, despised as she may be by the narrator, both intertwined spectres emanate from the solitary Eliza. Placed before her mirror, she only has her pallid reflection as a source of comfort, with the two Elizas mutely reinstating the absence of an amatory other. Wollstonecraft would have us see this vignette as evidence of a cold, narcissistic and sterile heart akin to the Addisonian coquette's, paradoxically replicating and repleting itself in a performance of sensibility and a stubborn insistence of signifying more moral substance than is possessed. Yet

[40] Mrs Cartwright, *The Platonic Marriage, A Novel, in a Series of Letters* (Vol.1-2) (Dublin: W. Watson & Co., 1787).
[41] Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.45.
[42] Kelly, p.46.

this tableau, much like those that precede it, betrays the isolating and stultifying position of the lady of fashion. Unlike the lovers in Cartwright's books, Eliza's husband does not 'love her' and will not 'sit by her side, squeeze her hand, and look unutterable things' (p.3). Aside from Wollstonecraft's satirical rendering of her story, Eliza is a figure to be pitied, since the social reflection she assumes is – like that in her 'glass' – all of her own making. Denied a fuller experience of socialisation – through greater educational and socio-political opportunities – what she embodies and exudes is limited. Of course, Wollstonecraft's satirical mode leaves little room for readerly affection and affinity; our sympathy and sensitivity to Eliza's position are deliberately foreclosed by the narrator's jibes, taunts and inverted sentimental tableaux, so as to make us reflect on the kind of sensibility underpinning books and the moral life their heroines should inspire (and to which we, too, should aspire). Thus we are made to watch her reflexive antics without empathy, despite the loneliness and insipid insularity she suffers. Redundant in her position of wife and mother, Eliza becomes a grotesque of conduct-book femininity, an inversion of the Rousseauian overflowing heart of sensibility, a nugatory being whose feeling begins and ends with herself.

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That Wollstonecraft opens an, in part, sentimental novel with this anti-sentimental figure, or rather a *failed* sentimental heroine, demonstrates how keen she was to critique the genre within its own boundaries and on its own terms. If the novel of sensibility was the main literary form and genre open to women authors and one readily consumed by them, she needed to harness its potential – to entertain, persuade and move; she needed to put a spotlight on women's experiences and stories in order to highlight the weaknesses of the narrative forms available to them, as she did when citing Cartwright. The romantic fortunes of Eliza, Ann and Mary would not end in sighs of pleasure and caresses, but in fatal circumstances that Wollstonecraft believed excessive sensibility brought about in the lives of actual women. Capitalising on the novel's ability to incorporate moral and philosophic themes, she reworked the sentimental novel so that women readers would contemplate their own education (after contemplating that of Eliza, Ann and Mary), their own emotional lives and the moral reform reading – and even novel-reading – could entail. Marrying free indirect discourse with third person narration and reducing reported speech and embedded epistles to the most intimate of moments between Mary and Henry, Wollstonecraft creates a narrative of critical distance, demanding of her readers the kind of reflection her eponymous heroine possessed. Wanting to delineate the 'thinking powers' of her heroine, as stated in the novel's Advertisement, Wollstonecraft draws our attention to the social pressures which inhibit women's mental abilities, or which in Mary's case further isolate her from a world which mocks or overlooks intellectual powers when cultivated by a woman.

One character who does resemble something of the sentimental heroine is Ann. Loosely based on Wollstonecraft's own close friend, Frances Blood, Ann embodies the kind of femininity and affectivity that is celebrated, if not rewarded in sentimental fiction. Yet Wollstonecraft had other intentions for this character; swerving Ann's narrative trajectory away from the satisfactory endings known to a Clara Villeroy or an Evelina, Wollstonecraft uses her to highlight the lived experiences and bodily fate suffered by many women outside such texts. Like Blood, Ann is 'refined' and has 'taste' (p.8), draws landscapes (p.7), plays (p.7) and is adept at letter writing (p.8): in short, she had many of those attractive feminine accomplishments men admired in a woman. These are trivial qualities and talents to Wollstonecraft's mind, because they reflect external, rather than inner, moral refinement, thus remaining true to traditional gender binaries. In Wollstonecraft's subversion of sentimental literary tropes, these social and cultural markers are not enough to secure her a husband, especially when she remains fortuneless. Pining after a past suitor who 'stole imperceptibly her heart' (p.7), Ann becomes silent, dejected and begins to

waste away from unrequited longing. Romantic, with a 'bewitching softness' (p.13), Ann's increasingly waif-like existence is used by Wollstonecraft to examine the needless pain young women encounter when socialised to be subjects and objects of the heart alone.

Through Ann, Wollstonecraft's earlier observations in *Thoughts* are brought to mind. Under a section titled 'Unfortunate Situation of Females, Fashionably Educated, And Left Without a Fortune' (pp.25-27), she observes the 'disappointment' felt by 'artless', 'tender' women abandoned by men who outrank them, but nevertheless do not 'undeceive' them until they have 'anticipated happiness' (p.26). Though fortuneless, the woman's hopes are raised only for 'the heart' to 'receive a wound which does not easily admit of a compleat cure' (p.26). Anticipating the predicament of Jane Austen's Marianne, Wollstonecraft's Anne becomes a victim to such an incurable 'wound', but without the consolatory prospect of meeting an older, more benevolent and wealthy suitor. Left unguarded and once exposed to such fancies and thwarted expectations, the 'treacherous heart' is left helplessly 'sighing after impossibilities' (p.30), as Wollstonecraft notes in the subsequent section, 'Love'. Empty through longing and unfulfilled erotic desire, and obsessively 'engrossed' (p.7) with the idea of her past suitor, Ann's heart is put under stress, both in a symbolic and physiological sense:

> Ann had not fortitude enough to brave such accumulated misery; besides, the canker-worm was lodged in her heart, and preyed on her health. (p.13)

The figure of the heart demonstrates Wollstonecraft's awareness of the link between psychology and physiology. It also conveys an acceptance of the heart as a subject of disease, which was increasingly being developed in eighteenth-century medical thought. Though believed to be impervious to life-threatening disorders in the seventeenth century by Helkiah Crooke and even the proto-cardiologist, physician and anatomist William Harvey, in the late eighteenth century the heart was relabelled a 'seat of disease' instead of a 'seat of life'.[43] With the rise of the anatomical sub-division of pathology, morbid anatomists John Hunter, John Bell and Matthew Baillie (the latter of whom was published by Wollstonecraft's publisher, Joseph Johnson) were devoting their works to proving that 'cankers' actually could 'lodge' themselves in the structure of this organ.[44]

Yet the specificities of this figure move it both towards and away from developments in cardio-pathology. In Wollstonecraft's choice of metaphor, the reader is encouraged to look back towards the amatory and botanical canker worm, eating away at the rose-like heart, which was a familiar image in Renaissance literature.[45] Impossible to ignore the erotic and phallic implications of the metaphor, the reader is reminded of the ultimate worm that buries itself persuasively and predatorily into the heart of Eve; that is, the Biblical or Miltonic serpent, Satan. One could even go so far as to say that Wollstonecraft's 'canker worm' pre-empts William Blake's alternately compelling and disturbing short poem, 'The Sick Rose' (1794), where an insidious 'invisible worm' preys on Rose's 'bed/ Of crimson joy'.[46] A conceit about prejudiced opinion towards the

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[43]Andrew Cunningham, *The Anatomist Anatomis'd: An Experimental Discipline in Enlightenment Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); see also Fay Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart: History, Medicine, and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.41-60.

[44] Matthew Baillie, *The Morbid Anatomy of Some of the Most Important Parts of the Human Body* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1793).

[45] Shakespeare uses canker in multiple plays and sonnets, most notably in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Hermia calls Helena a 'canker-blossom' (3.2, 282) and in sonnet 95 when the speaker says to the fair youth: 'How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame/ Which like a canker in the fragrant rose/ Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name' (L1-3); see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 90; and *Shakespeare's Poems*, (eds) Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Thomson Learning, 2007), p.301.

[46] William Blake, *Blake, The Complete Poems*, (ed) W. H. Stevenson (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), p.223.

creative potential of female sexuality, Blake's worm conjures up the venereal disease of syphilis which was rife and causing a 'howling storm' on the streets of eighteenth-century London.[47] Blake's 'crimson bed' echoes Wollstonecraft's metaphor in subtly conflating the susceptible female heart with her equally vulnerable genitalia. Both writers permit their metaphors to illuminate the literal realities and bodily repercussions of longing and desire. In the case of Wollstonecraft's character, Ann, unfulfilled desire slips from the metaphor and its ill-effects are literalised.

Freighted with associations, this polysemous 'worm' also looks towards the fatal ailment that Ann's love-ruined health succumbs to: consumption. Acknowledged in the OED as an archaic form of the word cancer, 'canker' has a wonderfully strange etymological and rhetorical connection to consumption. In her essay, *Illness as Metaphor,* Susan Sontag notes the literary and etymological 'overlaps' between cancer and consumption.[48] Taken from classical Latin and Old French, "chancre" (the earlier form of canker) meant ulcer, sore, tumour, gangrene and, of course, cancer (interestingly another variant of the noun in French meant venereal disease). Pathologically speaking, consumption and cancer were not quite viewed as the same disease, however, the tubercles embedded inside the lungs of a TB sufferer did resemble and sound akin to those tumours found in cancer patients. Sontag furthers this by observing that the etymology of tuberculosis shows it was 'once considered a type of abnormal extension', since the 'Latin root, *tuberculum*, the diminutive of *tuber*' meant a 'morbid swelling, protuberance, projection or growth'.[49] Extending this synonymy, Sontag relates how 'the early figurative definition of cancer [meant] anything that frets, corrodes, corrupts, or consumes slowly and secretly'.[50] Playing out this figurative definition of cancer, victims of consumption would go through the oscillating symptoms of fevers, manic moments of elation, hysterical fits of coughing (the 'frets' in Sontag's quotation) as well as the 'silent' and *consuming* 'corrosion' of the inner lymph and pulmonary system. Not only does the dying Ann display all of these consumptive symptoms, but the '*canker*-worm' at home in her breast links her consumption directly back to the figurative definition of cancer. This silent, wasting away that both cancer and TB sufferers could experience shares similarities with Blake's invisible worm, attacking under the cover of darkness, burying itself in the body of its victim only to parasitically sabotage beauty, youth and joy. 'Lodged' inside Ann's heart, might not this 'canker-worm', a literary synonym for consumption in Sontag's eyes, reveal Wollstonecraft's belief that amatory passion or unanswered sexual feeling could *literally* prey on the longing heart and bereft body?

When considering the 'canker-worm' in Ann's heart, it is impossible to ignore the 'little Figure' at the centre of Addison's coquette.[51] 'Lodged' in the 'very Core' of the heart, this 'little idol' – none other than the diseased Beau from his earlier essay – may have caused the coquette's death. Despite her mercurial ways, secret contrivances and slippery behaviour, might Addison's coquette have died through pining for the beau? And might he not be another kind of 'canker-worm', albeit one that smells of 'Strong Essence and Orange-Flower Water'?[52] Akin to Alexander Pope's Belinda, from *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), whose similar 'moving Toyshop' of a heart also betrays 'an earthly lover' lurking therein, much to her sylph's disappointment, Addison's coquette becomes emotionally and physically defenceless once hers is vulnerable to love.[53] The coquette's backstory is a curious one, although there are hints, such as the mercurial liquid found

[47] Blake, 2007, p.223.
[48] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp.14-15.
[49] Sontag, 1988, p.15.
[50] Sontag, 1988, p.14.
[51] Addison, 1712, No.281, p.596.
[52] Addison, 1712, No. 275, p.571.
[53] Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* in *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry*, (ed) Douglas Grant (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 43, 53.

in the pericardium, of her dying from venereal disease. Far from wanting to equate Ann's modest yet fragile heart with that of Addison's or Pope's coquette, the cursory comparison does question the relationship between female desire (be it sexual or otherwise), socially acceptable forms of affectivity and the bodily consequences the yearning heart suffers. Does Wollstonecraft kill Ann off, not as a textual device to grapple with her biographical demons or come to terms with her grief, but as an act of punishment? Do women who have been socialised to feel excessively and ineptly, and who long and attempt to fill the sexual 'void', incur the penalty of bodily death in the Wollstonecraftian moral schema? Or, do their canker-ridden hearts and consumptive bodies leave them open to such a demise, as well as testifying to the retrogressive limits society places on female autonomy *and* sexuality? In a novel that implicitly condemns both the affective socialisation of women and the limited opportunities granted to them, in particular the constriction surrounding appropriate amatory attachments, the latter proposition is more plausible. Thus, Ann's lacking, 'exhausted heart' (p.18) not only points to the canker burrowed deep in her own vulnerable breast, but to that at the prejudiced and prescription-corroded core of society.

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By the end of *Mary*, Wollstonecraft's heroine is resigned to never knowing love. After Ann succumbs to consumption and Mary's own romantic interest, Henry, passes away, she is virtually adrift in a sea of melancholia, and the novel ends with Wollstonecraft's heroine in a 'delicate state of health' and with a death wish to 'hasten' to 'that world *where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage*' (p.68). Though Mary's circumstances and fate differ to Wollstonecraft's (her heroine is married against her will, but comfortably provided for through the alliance), the titular character's responses to grief, matters of the heart and marriage mirror those of the author's. At the time of writing the novel and throughout much of the late 1780s, Wollstonecraft grieved the loss of her friend and struggled with what would now be described as depression. Like her heroine, she oscillated between wishing she had a 'husband' and 'somebody to support' her (p.44), to writing off marriage altogether in the belief that she had a 'nobler ambition' (p.180) in living a life of independence.[54] In this, character and author mirror each other, embodying the social lack and psychological desolation to which women's hearts were subject. Yet Wollstonecraft's own experience parallels Ann's too. In her private letters to Gilbert Imlay, the American adventurer she first met during her sojourn in Paris in 1793, the metaphor of the heart is repeatedly employed for a variety of purposes: as an expression of affection and intimacy between her and her partner, as a substitute for physical closeness and proximity, as an attempt at securing his fidelity and as a reminder of his duty to her and their child. But as the correspondence progresses, references to the heart become destabilised, taking on a desperately morbid, even masochistic tone. Eventually referring to a 'canker-worm' in her own 'bosom' in later epistles (p.307), Wollstonecraft's letters to Imlay become increasingly heart-centric and embedded in the kind of vacillations and bodily tremors that only an excess of feeling could produce.

What is to be made of Wollstonecraft's employment of language which, in her didactic and polemical writings, is so vehemently condemned? Barker-Benfield argues that Wollstonecraft 'was aware of what kind of femininity appealed to men' and how, in turn, male attention acts on female sensibility.[55] Framing her in the context of this relationship as one who assumes the lexical prerogative, tone and approach of a sentimental heroine, Barker-Benfield inadvertently fashions Wollstonecraft as a coquette who presents a show of sensibility in order to manipulate and direct Imlay's emotions – or heart – through the medium of romantic epistolary writing.

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[54] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, (ed) Janet Todd (London: Allen Lane, 2003).
[55] Barker-Benfield, p.363.

Though he qualifies this argument by saying that Wollstonecraft had not 'mastered' 'her presentation of herself as a woman of sensibility', Barker-Benfield's analysis still frames her relationship with Imlay as one of psychosexual conflict, emotional and sexual strategizing, and artful though failed attempts at domination and conquest through the metaphor and writing of the heart.[56] Interestingly, Barker-Benfield's own lexis comes straight out of the coquetry and libertinage playbook, where 'controlling' and 'mastering' one's feelings and the expression of one's affective position is of paramount importance to having the upper hand in any situation, especially that of sexual relationships.[57] In the libertinage-inflected vocabulary of his own criticism, Barker-Benfield hints at what was at stake, too, for Wollstonecraft when it came to her relationship with sensibility and its erotic potential: power.

It is, nevertheless, all too easy to say Wollstonecraft succumbed to the very state and type of femininity she pointedly and publicly despised. I would argue that though he highlights an interesting aspect of affectivity and its intersection with erotic potentiality, Barker-Benfield himself gets carried away with the paradigm of libertinage and coquetry, and is mistaken in his notion that Wollstonecraft was attempting to perform the role of female lover and to mimic the coquette to keep Imlay's heart engaged. That is not to say her letters were not playfully flirtatious – the initial Parisian letters of early 1793 clearly were – but that this form of epistolary play was not disingenuous or artful. It was, in fact, quite the opposite. The affectionate tone and occasions of banter were a form of emotional freedom, honesty, intimacy and authenticity, an attempt to share herself on equal epistolary terms with a person she initially thought was of her heart and mind.[58] That Imlay was unable to return her emotional authenticity and fidelity, as indicated by her later letters at Le Havre and during her travels in Scandinavia, is what leaves Wollstonecraft's epistolary expression open to assumptions of coquetry, excessive sentimentalism and the somatic effects of the cankered heart. That is, Imlay's emotional distance, compounded by his physical absence and significant neglect of his partner and daughter, leave Wollstonecraft susceptible to contemporary and critical aspersions, accusing her of playing a part and adopting a debased feminised role. In looking at a selection of her letters, it will become evident that it is Imlay's fecklessness, abandoning the intimate union he had forged with Wollstonecraft, that leaves her, as an unmarried woman, vulnerable to these critiques.

In the early stages of their relationship, talk of the heart is central to the couple's discourse. Happy in her relationship with Imlay, living just outside of Paris but in contact with him frequently, Wollstonecraft feels free and confident to 'obey an emotion of my heart' (p.228). In the same letter, she expresses her excitement and anticipation in 'living together', concluding: 'how many plans of employment I have in my head, now that I am confident my heart has found peace in your bosom.' Her letter, though short and full of expectation, alluding to touch and physical proximity by quoting Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, aligns the heart with the home, with privacy and with the fulfilment of domestic happiness and comfort.[59] The 'warmth' with which she refers to their hearts, not only infers erotic and affective passion, but also the warmth of the hearth, something her earlier heroines never enjoyed. In this brief but hopeful epistle, Wollstonecraft unites their hearts and her own affectivity to ideas of belonging, respectability and to that 'affection' she believed, in *Rights of Woman*, men and women should cherish, nurture

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[56] Barker-Benfield, p.363.

[57] Catherine Cusset, Philippe Sollers and Roger Celestin, 'What is Libertinage?' in *Yale French Studies* (1998), pp.199-212, p.203.

[58] In letter 123, Wollstonecraft flirts with Imlay by referring to Mirabeau and the revolutionary leader's own love letters, again situating their growing love and attachment within the context of French revolutionary culture and language, rather than simply sentimental tropes. See *Letters*, Todd, 2003, pp.222-224.

[59] In her epistle to Imlay, Wollstonecraft writes, 'But, good-night! – God Bless You! Sterne says, that is equal to a kiss…' (p.228). As Todd has observed, this is a quotation from the opening chapter of the second volume of Sterne's novel. For the full quotation, see *A Sentimental Journey* (London: Penguin, 2005), p.65.

and enjoy in marriage. Though only a common-law wife – she had registered as Imlay's spouse as a form of protection at a time when France had declared war with Britain – Wollstonecraft could look forward to living as the equal partner of Imlay. Rather than playing the coquette or sentimental heroine, Wollstonecraft assumes the expressional "rights" of a wife who, to her mind, is in a rational, respectful and lovingly reciprocal partnership. Between herself and Imlay, she could reinvent the heart, away from fears of a corrupting sensibility, and revive feelings of domestic bliss and familial fulfilment she may have once thought were reserved for others only.

Her later letters, however, reveal doubt over their heart-felt compatibility and unity. Reflecting on Imlay's 'continual separations' and asking if they are 'necessary to warm' his 'affection', Wollstonecraft cautiously quips: 'Of late, we are always separating. – Crack! – crack! – and away you go…'. This imitation of the sound of a whip – or the metaphorical heart breaking – betrays Wollstonecraft's fears of what, indeed, will come to pass: emotional and physical distance, infidelity, betrayal, Imlay's inability to commit to her and her alone, and thus the eventual breakdown of their relationship and domestic set-up. The syntactical and grammatical "cracking" in her letter foreshadows what will come to pass in terms of her heart and the ethic of affectivity she believes exists between Imlay and herself. The metaphor of the heart, therefore, becomes a strained point of mediation, synecdoche for their lack of physical proximity, intimacy and trust, an unsteady signifier and expression for what it can no longer contain. If, in Ted Cohen's words, metaphor encompasses a 'concealed invitation' for two or more people to be intimate and should result in 'an achievement of intimacy', a contiguous 'community', then Wollstonecraft's personal employment of the figure of the heart painfully and paradoxically fails to achieve this.[60] A cultural expression of intimacy, the metaphor of the heart here bypasses at once its rhetorical, personal and cultural import. 'I would hide in your bosom, if you would again open it to me,' Wollstonecraft pleads with Imlay in her early letters of 1794 (pp.239-40); 'fold us both to your heart' (p.272) she implores again after another prolonged absence with little correspondence or promise of his return. Under the weight of expectation and hurt, the destabilisation and cracking of this sign becomes complete: 'here are arguments' she reasons which 'carry death to the heart' (pp.292-3); 'a deadly weight of sorrow lies heavily on my heart' she opines in a later letter from Scandinavia; 'my heart' is 'dying' (p.295), 'sinking' (p.296), 'desolated', 'agitated' (p.304), 'oppressed' (p.308), 'troubled' (p.309), 'sunk' (p.314), 'rent' (p.317), 'broken' (p.320) and 'pierced' (p.322), whilst Imlay's becomes closed (p.297), 'contaminated' (p.298) and 'hardened' (p.311). Appealing to the heart as a sure sign and emblem of their love is no longer possible: it, too, must undergo the stress and distress of its writer. Failing to reassure herself that Imlay has a heart, he is branded as being 'heartless' (p.308), given over to impetuosity, senseless gratification and sensual excesses; that is, it is his heart that most resembles the coquette's.

No longer synonymous with the hearth and belonging, but the watery tomb of the English Channel (into which a melancholic and suicidal Wollstonecraft longed to consign it (p.279)), the heart is far from revealing its writer to be one who manipulates, affects or misapplies sensibility. Rather, the extreme violence that this figure undergoes reflects the extent to which Wollstonecraft was emotionally invested in it, transferring onto the heart a level of subjectivity and affectivity that surpassed tired sentimental tropes and jaded coquettish stratagems. In fact, Wollstonecraft's commitment to conveying emotional authenticity and transparency through her epistolary employment of the metaphor resonates with what Fay Bound Alberti identifies as 'the heart of the Romantics'.[61] For Bound Alberti, the 'heart of the Romantics' presented a 'counter narrative' to that of 'science' and revitalised a sign that was in danger of cultural reductionism

[60] Ted Cohen, 'Metaphor and the cultivation of Intimacy' in *On Metaphor*, (ed) Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.6.
[61] Fay Bound Alberti, *This Mortal Coil: The Human Body in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.104-105.

brought about by 'empiricism', 'rationalism' and the 'new industrial age'.[62] Instead, argued Bound Alberti, the symbol of the heart was aligned with 'truth', the 'divine', and 'the natural', and was, therefore, restored to a non-biomedical or non-pathological reading (the latter of which theory considered it a mere organic 'pump' central to the cardiovascular system).[63] It could be said, then, that Wollstonecraft's *private* inscriptions of the heart capture this cultural reclamation and artistic re-application of the metaphor, communicating the 'truth' of her affective state above all physiological, social and dialogical concerns.

Of course, life-to-text transcription of affectivity was frequently associated with epistolary writing, particularly of an amatory nature, in the eighteenth century. Clare Brant notes that the heart was always 'audible and palpable' under the papery 'skin' of love letters, being at once 'a literal place of vital flow and a figurative place of truth'.[64] It was the latter which Wollstonecraft took to a near-literal extreme when writing to Imlay, expecting him to respect her emotional transparency through the sign and to return it in the process. In this, the vicarious and vulnerable nature of letter writing and the inscription of the heart goes beyond any affective containment that the tropes and hallmarks of fashionable sentimentality could hold for reader and writer. It goes beyond any mitigation and relief that the act of writing itself might offer. In marrying her heart to its epistolary sign, Wollstonecraft sometimes approaches a kind of monologic discourse that exceeds and foregoes any response from Imlay. These letters are, to an extent, an attempt to realise and make sense of herself, her needs, her desires, her emotional investments and autonomy: her heart. In this, Wollstonecraft bears some resemblance to sentimental heroines – not so much of the Richardsonian or Burneyesque kind, but rather the radical reformulation that was occurring in her own work and that of Mary Hays.

One aspect of Hays' work which overlaps with Wollstonecraft's is what Tilottama Rajan terms autonarration.[65] In her discussion of the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), Rajan identifies a characteristic of romanticism, 'autographing', which Hays boldly develops in her novel. Whilst Shelley and Wordsworth include a kind of autobiographical persona or sublimated authorial presence in their poems, Hays goes one step further in her autographic or "autonarrative" mode by incorporating actual letters into the fabric of her fiction. These epistles, which form a core part of the novel, are based on those she sent to William Frend, a Cambridge mathematician with whom she was (unrequitedly) in love, and Godwin, Wollstonecraft's future husband and a close correspondent of Hays at the time. Lifting a significant portion of her correspondence with Frend, Hays amalgamates it into the fictional life story of Emma, her problematically passionate heroine. Orphan Emma, whose education largely consisted of voraciously reading romances and fiction of an adventurous kind, encounters her love interest, Augustus Harley, through a surrogate mother figure, Mrs Harley. Belatedly and briefly her father, Mr Courtney, comes into her life and attempts to expose her to more rational works by classical authors like Plutarch.[66] But the damage is done, her moral education solidified, as evinced in her obsessive professions of love made to Harley in Hays' aforementioned letters. The letters themselves are long, philosophically far-ranging and make allusion to works by Claude Adrien Helvétius, Thomas Holcroft, Godwin, Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis and even Wollstonecraft. But it is their repetitive, insistent and torturously intense passion that strikes the reader most.

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[62] Bound Alberti, p.104.
[63] Bound Alberti, p.104.
[64] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2006), p.99.
[65] Tilottama Rajan, 'Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays' "Memoirs of Emma Courtney"' in *Studies in Romanticism*, 32 (Summer 1993), pp.149-176, 158.
[66] Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, (ed) Eleanor Ty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.21.

That this passion should, in actuality, be attributed to Hays, throws the reader into greater perplexity as to how to engage with such profusely sentimental writing. Autonarration here complicates the ethic of affectivity that Hays sets out to promote in her preface. Describing her protagonist as being 'enslaved to passion', though a lover of virtue, Hays requests her readers to suspend their judgment over the 'eccentricity and extravagance' of Emma's 'conduct', and 'look to their own hearts'.[67] Like Wollstonecraft, Hays uses the sign of the heart as a reminder of conviction, a request for readerly transparency, accountability and emotional receptivity. Through her autonarration, an excessive heart is supposed to speak to our own, its fervent beats convicting and reminding readers of what passion has led them to say and do. Coupling this expectation with the pronouncement that 'free thinking, and free speaking, are the virtue and the characteristics of a rational being', Hays' understanding of expressing passion, however torrid, is complete.[68] Emma's ardent and arduous love letters are, therefore, part of a wider ideology of psychological and social authenticity; Hays' autonarration is, in turn, the confirmation and extension of this. That is not to say Hays does not warn readers against excessive emotion; she does, and has Emma continually despair over her own socialisation and the disproportionate cultivation of sensibility it had caused. '[T]he customs of society…have enslaved, enervated, and degraded woman', she exclaims in a Wollstonecraftian fashion to the Godwinesque Francis.[69] Rather, Hays' autonarration, as hinted at in her prefatory writing, attempted to amalgamate feeling and thought, in all their loaded, complex, unvarnished authenticity, and to claim such subjectivity, on the page, for women.

Wollstonecraft's autonarration occurred in a rather more redacted fashion in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796).[70] On returning from Scandinavia, she discovered that Imlay was living with another woman. This resulted in a second attempt at suicide. Fortunately, Wollstonecraft was unsuccessful in the attempt and lived, not only to separate permanently from Imlay, but to create one of her most memorable works of non-fiction out of her epistolary communication with him. In a manner not unlike Hays, Wollstonecraft worked her letters into one of the most notable travelogues by a British woman writer of the period. But this is where she departs from Hays in her autonarration. Wollstonecraft's auto-narratological persona assumes all the emotional literacy, authenticity, vibrancy and complexity that Hays' novel strives to lay claim to, but without those direct epistolary addresses to Imlay which dwelled so fulsomely and dramatically on the sign of the heart. Instead, her sensibility was transposed onto the sublimity of Scandinavia's scenery, sublimated into moments of vitalist contemplation and feminine reverie. Heartache is alluded to, but not addressed directly (as it is in her private letters from the same journey which were not published at the time); grief comes in the form of a colour strewn skyscape or concerned maternal asides. What is more, political and ethnographic commentary curbed the sensibility-strewn and nature-loving divertissements of Wollstonecraft's *Short Residence*. Hays and Wollstonecraft were both aligned in sharing, shamelessly and honestly, the subjectivities of woman on the page, but their methods of autonarration markedly differed, so that, whilst the former 'transgressed public and private spheres', as Rajan notes, the latter carefully omitted and concealed the most personal and private aspects of her heart in her public writing.[71]

Was this omission of the deeply personal evidence of anxiety over her unvarnished professions of pain and love and the strained or straying sign of the heart? Was this further proof of her fear

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[67] Hays, p.4.
[68] Hays, p.3.
[69] Hays, p.39.
[70] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark,* (eds) Tonne Brekke and Jon Mee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[71] Rajan, pp.158-159.

of the reputational damage that could come from being cast as a sentimental heroine or fallen woman (a fate Hays encountered after the publication of her novel)? Or was this redaction of the highly intimate a shrewd action that inadvertently aligned her with that most fearsome of strategizing feminised creatures, the coquette, whose position of defence and priority of self-preservation relied on concealment, a redaction of ultimate truths, a denial of full affective accountability with all those who tried to get close and 'read' her? In striving for full autonomy over her published, narrated and symbolic self, Wollstonecraft may have ultimately and unwittingly mirrored her antithesis, the coquette; though of an entirely different ethic of affect, this suppression in her autonarration indirectly discloses her fear of and unconscious belief in the power of the coquette's heart.

To Nobly Boast the Firm Gymnastic Nerve? Wollstonecraft, Gender & Nervous Physiology

'Oh, but is it not hard, Dear?
Mine are the nerves to quake at a mouse:
If a spider drops I shrink with fear:
I should die outright in a haunted house;
While for you – did the danger dared bring help –
From a lion's den I could steal his whelp…'

From Robert Browning's 'Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli' in *Jocoseria* (1883).[72]

'See Wollstonecraft, whom no decorum checks,
Arise, the intrepid champion of her sex…
"Go, go (she cries) ye tribes of melting maids…
"Soon shall the sex disdain the illusive sway,
"And wield the sceptre in yon blaze of day;
"Ere long each little artifice discard,
"No more by weakness winning fond regard;
"Nor eyes, that sparkle from their blushes, roll,
"Nor catch the languors of the sick'ning soul,
"Nor the quick flutter, nor the coy reserve,
"But nobly boast the firm gymnastic nerve…'"

From Richard Polwhele's *The Unsex'd Females* (1798).

The publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (1798) saw Wollstonecraft's life, work and body come under heavy scrutiny.[73] In disclosing her suicide attempts, her pregnancies outside of wedlock and the nature of her supposed relationships with Henri Fuseli, Imlay and himself, he exposed Wollstonecraft's reputation to scorn and slander. And though, according to Godwin, she made no secret of her private life amongst her acquaintance, the criticism and abuse his disclosures brought would be felt for decades, if not centuries, to come.[74] The *Memoirs* would ensure that Wollstonecraft's name was synonymous with the kind of aberrant femininity she had previously disowned in her own writing. In the immediate aftermath of its publication, innumerable literary depictions, some of which were cruel caricatures in their representation of or resemblance to Wollstonecraft, could be found in the pages of nineteenth-century novels, poetry, philosophical tracts, polemics and life writing.[75]

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[72] Robert Browning, *Jocoseria* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1883), pp.47-9; Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798).
[73] William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman,'* (ed) Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1987).
[74] Godwin, p.260.
[75] Many of these literary depictions are implied through characters that espouse the politics of Wollstonecraft, albeit through a slightly skewed satirical lens, as seen in the character of Elinor Joddrel in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814). For an astute analysis of the afterlives and immediate reception of Wollstonecraft, particularly in relation to the revelations found in Godwin's *Memoirs* and his depiction of her as figure of extreme feeling, please see Harriet Guest's *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.88, 112. Using letters, obituaries, essays, poetry and novels by Hannah Godwin, Mary Hays, Charles Lloyd, Rachel Prescott and George Nicholson, amongst others, Guest discusses the influence of Wollstonecraft's work, Godwin's representation of her life and their relationship, on the ideas, narratives and characters in the aforementioned writers' works.

That is not to say her ideas were not championed by various writers, thinkers and women's rights activists around the world – they were, as the work of Eileen Hunt Botting demonstrates – but in Britain, Godwin's revelations afforded detractors another opportunity to further denigrate her work and use her as an example of why women should be denied educational opportunities and socio-political parity with men.[76] What becomes apparent in the critical representations of Wollstonecraft is the often misogynistic propensity to attack her body; in these portrayals, the dangerous "radicalism" of her ideas is figured on and through her transgressive feminine form. Thus, in the poetry of Richard Polwhele and Robert Browning, Wollstonecraft is depicted as physiologically unstable and psychologically unsound, a defeminised body led astray by its excessive and agitated passions thus paradoxically rendering it a monstrously over-feminised form. What is interesting about their respective portrayals is the reference to nerves. In citing neurophysiology, Browning and Polwhele not only critique Wollstonecraft's own political and philosophical approach to nerves, but also cite it as a reason for her aberrant and abhorrent conception of gender and her own 'unsex'd' – or oversexed in the case of Polwhele – body. Godwin's grief-stricken revelations and their subsequent breaching of boundaries set up between the private and public, or domestic and political, are implicated in these misogynistic rewritings.

In Browning's dramatic lyric, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli' (1883), an overly sensitive and debilitating neurophysiology underpins the speaker's self-reflexive profession of love. The first stanza opens to the voice of Wollstonecraft addressing the silent (or absent?) Fuseli and confessing her lack of nervous strength and stability: 'Oh, but is it not hard, Dear? / Mine are the nerves to quake at a mouse…' (L1-2). The continued self-denigration and self-abnegation which open the first two stanzas begin an argument around a debased embodied selfhood that can only be resolved and redeemed through the emboldening presence of her love and its object: Fuseli. Wollstonecraft's tremulous sensibility, fragility and emotional trepidation border on the irrational when she admits to 'quaking' and 'shrinking' at the sight of harmless diminutive creatures like spiders and mice. Here Browning aligns Wollstonecraft with the exact kind of performative femininity and 'sickly delicacy' she so resolutely denounced in much of her work, not least the *Rights of Woman*, turning her into a neurotic whose only chance at neural strength and fortitude is through assuming qualities and prerogatives associated with men. What follows this neurally unbalanced and syntactically agitated start (the flitting between addressing Fuseli then herself, together with the indented lines, inverted syntax and erratic punctuation, increase this sense of agitation and restlessness) is an even more ridiculous declaration of nervous rigour and courage in the face of impossible and unlikely dangers. For Fuseli, Wollstonecraft's nerves will be roused, sturdy and equip her with the 'daring' to 'steal' a lion's 'whelp' and 'stand stock-still' when ensnared by a serpent. Wollstonecraft goes, therefore, from flight and fright to pure fight mode, a neural response rarely associated with 'passive' effeminised bodies at this time. This transition from pathetic infantile incapacity and impressionable femininity to a comically heroic, overly active and 'valiant' masculinity, creates a problematically gendered body and self, both of which Browning uses to challenge Wollstonecraft's nervous physiology and its implications for gender as proposed in her political and moral writings.

Wollstonecraft's oscillations from a neurally frail feminine type to an actively robust and masculinised one reiterates the problematic inordinacy that characterises the whole poem. The

[76] For analysis about the influence of Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* on women's rights activists in nineteenth-century America, see Christine Carey and Hunt Botting's article 'Wollstonecraft's Impact on Nineteenth-Century Women's Rights Advocates' in the *American Journal of Political Science* (2004), as well as the latter's chapter, 'Nineteenth-Century Critical Reception' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2002), and her introduction to the Yale edition of *Rights of Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). For Wollstonecraft's influence on British political writing and activism see Margaret Walter's *Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.30-45.

abridgement of Fuseli's full name in the title against the inclusion of her full name; the insistent refrain of 'Dear?' which opens each stanza and the stress of 'you' that closes it, along with the obsessive gravitational pull towards dwelling on her passion for the artist in the second half of each stanza, fashion Wollstonecraft into an uncontrollably passionate and consumed speaker, one who will reverse her neural, intellectual, emotional and therefore bodily state if it will bring her closer to her 'dear' Fuseli. Nerves, brain and heart are all examined and pulled on to achieve physical proximity and the psycho-physiological reversal she so ardently desires and needs in order to be worthy of Fuseli, whose physical absence in the lyric corresponds to his symbolic potency and influence. Giving Wollstonecraft over to her possessive, inordinate and unfulfilled heart in the final stanza, Browning completes a portrait of a woman who is neurally complex and emotionally unhinged. Written well after the publication of John Knowles' *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (1831), which also disclosed Wollstonecraft's alleged propositioning of Fuseli and his wife, Browning's poem bears the taint of almost a century of misogynistic mistreatment of Wollstonecraft and her work.[77] Included in a poetry collection devoted to the examination of human desire, in particular amorous heterosexual love, which weirdly marries comedic and tragic elements together, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli' structurally and tonally jars as much as its speaker flits between emotions and their underlying physiological states. Nervous physiology was intrinsic to Wollstonecraft's ideas about the human body and the psycho-physiological potential of women, and this preoccupation is reflected in Browning's poem. Despite its biased, gendered conception of nervous conditions and responses, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli' does reveal the function of the nervous system in the psychology of an individual according to popular nineteenth-century assumptions. In an age when psychiatry was starting to take over from a medical world still rooted in the biased psycho-physiology of classical and enlightenment authorities, Browning's depiction of the relationship between nerves and psychological vicissitudes, the body and mind, sat at the cusp of these older inherited models and the emerging newer theories of Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, Emil Kraepelin and William James, amongst others.[78]

Polwhele's depiction of Wollstonecraft does not so much describe her nervous state as expose the dangerous bodily and social implications it entails. In *The Unsex'd Females*, Wollstonecraft is initially presented as a staunch Marianne emerging from the chaos of the French Revolution and the 'sophistic gloom' 'Reason' threatens to cast on Europe. With a clarion call for 'blushing' virgins and 'melting maids' to abandon their feminine charms and 'vindicate the Rights of Womankind', Wollstonecraft soon falls from Philosophy's 'empyreal heights' and becomes a 'melting', 'love-sick' maid herself, first at the prospect of 'Fuseli', then 'Imlay'. Polwhele wastes no time in seizing on what he deems extreme sexual indiscretions, as divulged in Godwin's *Memoirs* the same year. Wollstonecraft's love for Imlay is branded as 'licentious', her desires 'loose', her former principles not so much forsaken but the sole reason for her downfall. Philosophy alone has deceived and delivered her into the wastes of sexual immorality, leaving her a rash, arrogant and suicidal 'maniac'. Her overreaching and 'unnatural' ambition to set women up against men ('wield the sceptre in yon blaze of day') and have them forsake their essential gendered behaviour and positionality as 'soft', 'coy', 'chaste', 'heart'-devoted beings is, for Polwhele, what causes her downfall, and leaves her vulnerable to irreligious desires. Wollstonecraft's attitude to nervous physiology, her awareness of its role in strengthening mind

[77] Knowles, John, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, Vol.1-3 (London: Henry Colburn & Richard Bentley, 1831). See pp.161-170 for an account of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Fuseli; pp.165-7 relate Wollstonecraft's alleged proposal to live with Fuseli and his wife.

[78] See Matthew Bell's *Melancholia: The Western Malady* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 51-55, and Alan Michael Taylor and Max Fink's *Melancholia: The Diagnosis, Pathophysiology and Treatment of Depressive Illness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), see pp.4-5 for more on how psychiatry rose to prominence in the nineteenth century and its impact on nervous disorders and interrelated illnesses like melancholia, melancholia hypochondria, hysteria and depression.

and body irrespective of gender, is part of this fall. Polwhele's inclusion of her encouragement to women to abandon their 'languor', 'blushes' and 'coy reserve' in order to 'nobly boast the firm gymnastic nerve', is where the gender trouble begins. Stronger bodies, that is, neurally stable and perhaps even insensitive female forms, lead women into indecorous, immodest and unnatural behaviour. Stronger, less impressionable and emotionally receptive minds and bodies obfuscate gender binaries and roles, and, paradoxically, open women up to an excessive and reckless form of femininity and extreme passion (as evinced by Wollstonecraft's manic and suicidal fate in the poem). By highlighting nerves, Polwhele was not just cruelly parodying Wollstonecraft's key beliefs and vocabulary as employed in *Rights of Woman*, but alighting on a debate that had highly gendered conclusions as to the kind of neural responses that were appropriate for women. Wollstonecraft's attempt to overturn this not only had dire physical and socio-political implications, but spiritual ones too.

Although Browning and Polwhele's poems were written over eighty years apart, what they both take umbrage with is Wollstonecraft's attempt to control her own body. For these men, particularly Polwhele, the neurology of women had cultural and political repercussions.[79] Agitation of a political kind was sweeping across France and had the potential to flare up in Britain, making fashionable such ideas as women becoming neurally and physically stronger and subsequently politically autonomous agents and equal citizens in their own right.[80] Wollstonecraft's views in *Rights of Woman* encouraged this destabilisation of gender binaries; she was conscious that the revolution in manners was neurologically anchored as much as it was politically catalysed and socially realised. Furthermore, the poetry of both men reveals a series of biases that were culturally – and medically – espoused. Women's nerves were considered finer and more susceptible, therefore rendering them more sensitive, but also more prone to debilitating illnesses like melancholia, melancholia hypochondria and hysteria.[81] As Matthew Bell notes, at the turn of the century, 'melancholia could become the disease of nervous women'.[82] In refuting or undermining Wollstonecraft's call for women to fortify their nervous systems and bodies overall, Polwhele and Browning are retrogressively encouraging not only physical, but cultural and socio-political debility in women. The 'firm gymnastic nerve' may have been Polwhele's way of scoffing at Wollstonecraft's call for greater physical and mental health amongst her readers, but such a description had real cultural significance and political potential in her eyes. It could be the difference between subjugation and liberty; incapacity of the worse kind and action of the best.

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[79] 'Neurology', a term originally coined by the 'neuroanatomist' Thomas Willis in 1664 and denoted the 'arrangement of nerves' or their 'system' as stated in the OED, now refers to the study of the central and peripheral nervous system, particularly the brain, as well as the disorders all entail (See George Rousseau's "Brainomania': Brain, Mind and Soul' in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30, (2007), pp.161-191, p.165). The terms 'nervous physiology' and its slightly later synonym 'neurophysiology', the latter of which is still in use today, are interchangeable and hold the same meanings. Both refer to the nervous system and its physiological function (i.e. nervous disorders and diseases) in an individual. However, the term 'nervous physiology' is prominent amongst scholars Nima Bassiri and George Rousseau when discussing eighteenth-century neuro-philosophical debates on soul-body dualism (as espoused by and theorised by Robert Whytt) and nervous disorders. Since the chapter spans developments in the gendering of and standardisation of diagnostic tools regarding nervous disorders in the early eighteenth through to the nineteenth centuries, I mostly use the term 'nervous physiology' in observations involving and pertinent to eighteenth-century texts and writings, especially those by Wollstonecraft, and only employ the term 'neurophysiology' when referring to the broad field of the study as it was later known and termed today, and in reference to contemporary scholars who engage or touch on this scientific sub-discipline. This slight distinction applies to other references elsewhere in the thesis.

[80] Agitation and how this translates politically in Wollstonecraft's ideas can be found in Temple's article, pp.371-372; for a discussion on Wollstonecraft's concerns regarding women, the French revolution, radical feminism and agitation, see Adriana Craciun, 'Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson and Women's strength' in *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.47-75, 69-75.

[81] Bell, pp.94-5.

[82] Bell, p.95.

By opening this chapter with Browning and Polwhele's poetic iterations of Wollstonecraft, I want to highlight the prejudices, even mythologies, around women's neurophysiology, and the impact this had on the thought and reputation of Wollstonecraft. In this chapter, I will examine Wollstonecraft's understanding and application of nervous physiology in her works, and what she believed it meant for women. In a less critically prejudiced vein than Browning and Polwhele, I will explore her own experiences of what she and her contemporaries referred to as nervous disorders, as related in her personal letters and portrayed in *Mary*, and consider what this meant for her political vision and posthumous reputation. When juxtaposed against the 'gymnastic' nervous physiology outlined in *Rights of Woman* and supported in *A Short Residence*, do her private letters and novel show a discrepancy, a failure of vision, a personal breakdown and therefore the fulfilment of a gender essentialism she so despised? Or, do they show a woman attuned to the kind of neural, mental and physical health of which she was capable, though it still eluded her in a world ever desirous to see and keep women as 'melting maids' encumbered with nervous debility?

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Wollstonecraft's relationship to nervous physiology and its place in her own philosophy are far more complex than first appears. In the eighteenth century, the study of the nervous system and its role in the process of human cognition became a rich field of interest for philosophers, physicians and writers.[83] With William Harvey's discovery of the cardiovascular system in the early seventeenth century, and Descartes and Newton's mechanical and hydraulic theories being displaced – or at least ameliorated – by neurophysiological-based works by Thomas Willis and John Locke, nerves became the preeminent system through which the human body and mind were understood.[84] Initially, nervous physiology was the preserve of male physicians and philosophers, with its psychological, physical and emotional potential debated across and within European medical establishments, notably by Albert von Haller and Robert Whytt. The size, shape and function of nervous vessels, their solidity or hollowness, their correspondence to and possible sympathy with vital organs, their interconnection with the soul or lack thereof, and the symptoms surrounding their debility were all heatedly discussed in treatise after treatise. But these debates and the works they culminated in were not so readily available to the reading public. The importance of nerves and their manifest medical disorders would not become part of public parlance until George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1733), and even then it would take Robert Whytt's works, *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders which have been commonly called Nervous Hypochondriac or Hysteric* (1765) and *Physiological Essays* (1755) to clarify what a nervous disorder was, who it afflicted and how it could be treated.[85] That's not to say cheaper, more accessible texts on nervous illnesses were not available to literate classes; they were, in the form of inexpensive medical manuals, two examples of which are John Wesley's *Primitive Physic* (1747) and William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1769).[86] Nevertheless, detailed medical knowledge, as outlined in the work of Cheyne and Whytt became, in the words of Heather

[83] Heather R. Beatty, *Nervous Disorders in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Reality of a Fashionable Disorder* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp.7-36.
[84] Fay Bound Alberti (ed), *Medicine, Emotion, and Disease 1700-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.8-9; Beatty, pp.7-36; Bell, pp.70-74. Thomas Willis' *The Anatomy of the Brain* (1664) and *Pathology of the Brain and Nerves* (1667) significantly changed the course of neurophysiology and natural science in general. Willis is attributed with coining the word neurology (from the Greek 'neurologia' in his first work, *Anatomy*).
[85] George Cheyne, *The English Malady: or, a Treatise of nervous diseases of all kinds. With the author's own case* (Dublin: George Risk, 1733); Robert Whytt, *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders which have been commonly called Nervous Hypochondriac or Hysteric, To which are prefixed some Remarks on the Sympathy of the Nerves* (Edinburgh: J. Balfour, 1765) and *Physiological Essays* (Edinburgh: Hamilton, Balfour & Neill, 1755).
[86] Beatty, pp.7-36.

Beatty, 'the mark of a gentleman'.[87] Lockean and Newtonian ideas on sensation and human understanding, together with Cheyne and Whytt's observations of neurological disorders, became available to the public not directly from their own original works, but through these cheaper publications and, of course, the novel. Wollstonecraft's exposure to nervous physiology and her own application of it comes at the intersection of the elite philosophical-physiological discourses and its re-marketization through popular fiction, medical manuals and poetry. What is more, her knowledge of nervous physiology and the dissemination of it in her own fiction and polemics evinces the convergence of a male-dominated medical profession with a literary marketplace increasingly being shaped by the work of women authors. The field of nervous physiology was, then, an opportunity to reconfigure and reconceptualise gender and gendered types, as much as it was a medical and cultural phenomenon dominated by male minds, biases and frequent misogynistic prognostications.

Though Cheyne's writing of nervous physiology was not explicitly gendered, his work did have an impact on its gendering in current and later cultural works. In *The English Malady*, he emphasised that those of 'large, full, and mastiff muscles, and of big and strong bones, are generally of a firmer State of Fibres', whereas those of 'soft…yielding, loose and flabby flesh and muscles, are sure symptoms of weak and relaxed Nerves or Fibres'.[88] Small bodies with underdeveloped muscles and little physical strength, in part owing to a sedentary and /or over-indulged state, were considered neurally delicate and overly sensitive: such a description could not avoid being encoded as gendered when it came to middle and upper-class women. Furthermore, in Cheyne's reflections on actual disorders of the nerves, overt gender biases did emerge: hypochondria for instance, saw the physician classify men as 'Epileptick' – drawing on ancient Greek connections between melancholia and epilepsy, and ushering in Aristotelian and Renaissance notions of (male) melancholy genius – and women as 'Hysterick'.[89] Under Cheyne's classificatory gaze, women's bodies, or more specifically women's pain, was undermined and derided with archaic notions of wandering, moisture-craving wombs, God-given debility and inferior psychophysiology. These gendered judgments regarding the neurological make-up of women proved a double-edged sword: they reinforced the belief that middle-class white women were physically inferior and prone to an excess of sensibility whilst also ratifying and formalising the social and cultural capital of such "feminine" feeling. As Barker-Benfield notes 'the potential for women in sensational psychology seemed to be short-circuited.'[90] Instead of opening up 'revolutionary possibilities' for 'women's consciousness', its neurophysiological roots continually justified their subordination, with this 'naturalized on the basis of their finer sensibility.'[91] That nervous debility could find cultural cachet as sensibility, in an increasingly feminised culture, was a strange gift derived from a curse. It was this kind of argument involving nervous physiology, which reinforced oppressive social constructs around what women were and could do, that Wollstonecraft disliked.

Cheyne bolstered the cultural allure attached to nervous disorders amongst women by creating a kind of historicist analysis and indirect justification of them. In the first chapter of *The English Malady*, Cheyne outlines how each great civilization – from the Egyptians and Greeks to the Romans – after much innovation, progress and prosperity, fell into a period of complacency, 'laziness' and indulgence, which resulted in an increase of and further medical interest in nervous disorders.[92] Nervousness highlighted, therefore, the end of empires – and perhaps even the

[87] Beatty, pp.7-36.
[88] Cheyne, p.69.
[89] Bell, p.94.
[90] Barker-Benfield, p.3.
[91] Barker-Benfield, p.3.
[92] Cheyne, p.36.

beginning of new ones or the urgent need for reformed political structures. Since luxury – specifically excess eating of rich foods high in salt and fat, excess drinking, a lack of exercise and over-stimulation in crowded environments – enhanced the chance of nervous debility, English society, with its growing appetite for imported produce and amassed colonial wealth, stood a higher chance of succumbing to the fate of their classical forbears. Cheyne's analysis, however, was not received as a warning; rather, the historization of nervous distempers became a barometer for civil progress and accomplishment: to have a nervous affliction was a sign of class, fashion and, for women, a proof of femininity. Wealthy and aristocratic individuals were cited in Cheyne's work as being amongst those patients who experienced the most severe cases of nervous debility – and they were those who could afford a physician to treat them.[93] In a sort of weird symbiosis, Britain's wealth and imperial power not only encouraged nervous distempers but they, in turn, reinforced the nation's socio-political status and moral superiority. This, together with Cheyne's observation that the 'fair sex' suffered from nervous disorders through the over-consumption of 'Coffee, Tea, Chocolate, and Snuff', most of which were imports from British colonies and produced off the backs of enslaved African and indigenous peoples, demonstrated how women's nervous physiology and supposed claim to sensibility had more oppressive and violent roots than first appears.[94]

Wollstonecraft was aware of the socio-political implications that this fashionable construct presented for women. Sceptical not of nervous physiology itself, but the widespread popularisation, misuse and misrepresentation of it, she explored both its importance and the damaging effects its popular iteration entailed in *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, and her novels, *Mary* and *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). In *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft attacked Burkean emotionality, monarchism and primogeniture; in doing so, she exposed Burkean sensibility – or its fashionable faux nervous physiology – as one of the contributing factors to the continuation of a corrupt social system and the oppression of the poor. She even went so far as to examine the psychophysiological effects of what she described as Burke's 'pampered sensibility', which appealed to the 'imagination' rather than enlightening the 'understanding' (pp.6-7). This theorisation owes something to Cheyne's *The English Malady*, where those with weak nerves have a 'great degree of sensibility' and 'are of the most lively imagination'.[95] Such neural deficiency, one which saw an overactive imagination justify a tyrannical system rather than compassionate with and understand the labouring poor subjected to it, was a problem in Wollstonecraft's eyes, as it encouraged a dangerous feminisation of actual and socio-political bodies. Here Wollstonecraft was subtly subverting the false civility of fashionable nervous distempers, as highlighted in Cheyne's work, exposing the real cost of luxurious living and the unfeeling self it produced. With *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft went one step further in bringing this deficient nervous physiology and its many consequences for women into the foreground of her political philosophy.

Ostensibly written as a response to Bishop Maurice Talleyrand-Périgord's proposals for the education of French women under the new republic, *Rights of Woman* incorporates ideas on nervous physiology in Wollstonecraft's initial examination of monarchic states and civilisations. This is done to such an extent that the physiological health of the body politic exceeds its usual metaphorical function. Using nervous physiology, Wollstonecraft not only reiterates the corruption and oppression that befalls women through the neural deficiency of (majorly male-constituted) bodies of state, but also the republican virtues France's new republic fails to live up to when denying *citoyennes* the same educational opportunities as men. Wollstonecraft sets this up in the first chapter of *Rights of Woman*, where to be 'nervous' is to be healthy, strong, possess

[93] Barker-Benfield, p.25.
[94] Cheyne, p.34.
[95] Cheyne, pp.70-71.

greater ratiocination, moderation, prudence and fortitude, to feel but not inordinately so and never at the cost of reason; whereas, to be 'nerveless' is to be immoderate, physiologically and psychologically weak, socio-politically unfeeling and uncaring. Nerves became, therefore, the measure of a healthy state and individual, and proof of a mutually beneficial and sound relationship between the individual body and the wider socio-political corps of which it was a part.

Wollstonecraft begins this psycho-physiological binary (of the nervous and the nerveless) figuratively when condemning the voluptuous ineptitude of 'nerveless' monarchs (p.80). Though it could include anyone, 'the nerveless', for Wollstonecraft, chiefly consisted of aristocratic individuals who lived luxuriously, had little empathy for the lower orders, and lacked affectivity and activity in equal measure. Unstimulated, inert and without a strong psycho- and neuro-physiological centre, the monarch, at the head of this aristocratic group, is rendered inhuman and defunct. Moral lack is thus projected onto or manifested in his unregimented, useless body. How, Wollstonecraft implicitly asks, can such a figure serve and support a nation, let alone be the divinely appointed (in the case of France) head of it? Wollstonecraft's imprecating metaphor paradoxically produces more figures of nerveless fatuity, with 'millions' of subjects 'supinely' lying inactive under the monarch's oppressive, 'ensanguined' rule (p.80). The transmissibility of indifference, insensibility and debility is just as likely in this political figure as it is between nervous, feeling, agitated and sensibly receptive bodies; the state shapes its subjects in a physiological sense as much as it does politically and socially. And yet, even in his polemical representation, even in his fractured figuration, the nerveless-limbed king has a kind of rhetorical and imaginative forcefulness all of his own. As a kind of synecdoche for the corrupt and ailing body politic, the king's state extends to every titled man who drags 'from one scene of dissipation to another the nerveless limbs that hang with stupid listlessness' only to prove 'that there is no mind at home' (p.222). Nerves, in Wollstonecraft's rhetorical currency, indicate not only the social organization and political health of a nation, but the spiritual condition of all. The language of nervous physiology, even when called on figuratively, implies the state of the human mind, body, and, in the Wollstonecraftian schema, soul. The nerveless king, a figure that France disposed of during its bloodiest revolution, becomes, in his neural defunctness, a warning of what a monarchic system will do to *all* its subjects without philosophical intervention, political reform or revolution.

This attack on nerveless kings paves the way for a more strident assault on the sensibility-driven form of middle-class white women. The lady of fashion was not so much a "nervy" or nervous individual – at least not in the original etymological sense of the adjective, which was to be robust and vigorous. In Wollstonecraft's opinion, she was the exact antithesis of sinewy strength and invigorative feeling. Lying on a sofa, in the manner of a Lady Bertram, lisping epithets of love to a lap dog, the 'weak woman of fashion' luxuriated in her physical enervation and mental insipidity much like the aforementioned king (p.111). Reclining with 'self-complacency' and boasting of 'her want of appetite as a proof of delicacy that…arose from, her exquisite sensibility…', the 'genteel' woman of fashion literalises the position of a nerveless monarch whilst owning her neural and affective deficiencies to be a source of feminine power (p.111). In such a state, Wollstonecraft scathingly condemns her as an 'irrational' materialistic 'monster', another 'slave' to matter (p.111). Mixing a personal attack (evinced in her use of the first person pronoun 'I once knew', 'I have seen her') with a political one, this famous passage from *Rights of Woman* reveals the neurally active and strong mind of the writer critically scanning the unexercised, inert body and consequently vapid being of a woman. For Wollstonecraft, this woman's show of 'delicacy' and 'exquisite sensibility' is, as observed by Catherine Packham, a farce, since such feeling is rooted in a purely corporeal being, as opposed to a mentally-rooted,

neurally-synced, soul-governed one.[96] The woman of fashion, much like the nerveless monarch, pays lip service to sensibility or neural sensitivity without it transpiring in any moral or compassionate action. Inverting the mind over matter dichotomy, such women fell short of the Wollstonecraftian rule of bodily and mental strength. Reduced to their bodies, or rather their exteriors, these women forfeited mental virtue and, consequently, the capacities of their immortal souls.

There was, of course, another reason why Wollstonecraft used nerves as a signifier for mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing. Physicians like Cheyne and Whytt were considered the top of their profession and had the kind of clout that kept surgeons, apothecaries and quack doctors at the opposite end of the professional ladder.[97] As "nervous doctors" and authorities in physiology, Cheyne and Whytt would have been in the innermost circle of medical professionals, hence the latter's position as the king of Scotland's personal physician and the former's host of high-profile patients including Samuel Richardson.[98] Since nervous disorders were extremely hard to diagnose, deciding whether one suffered from a nerve-related issue or not was understood to require great knowledge and experience. This meant that experts like Cheyne and Whytt were in demand, by both patients and less learned doctors. Nervous complaints were inevitably associated with those who could afford their services: the wealthy middle and upper classes. Subsequently, to be in a nervous condition was to be at once emotionally and socially refined. It became a truism amongst fashionable women that a sickly, spasmodic constitution not only revealed a sensitive and receptive self but announced that one could afford to be so. And not only were the causes of these disorders marked by class and gender, but their treatments and advised remedies were too: women were often politely prescribed a more restricted, less indulgent diet that omitted the drinking of 'sugar-laden' tea, as well as encouraged to refrain from any strenuous activity; men, on the other hand, were encouraged to increase their exercise, socialise more and also modify their diet.[99] Such medical practice was a remove away from the gruesome and invasive procedures of surgeons and the placebo potions of quacks, and it was this remove that reiterated the refinement of having a nervous disorder, and the refined disposition and status of the patient. It was this social posturing and class appropriation of feeling that Wollstonecraft denied; and it was this modish approach, this 'sophisticating' and aping as she would put it, of ill health that prompted her to adopt a vituperative tone when addressing the neurally inept frame of a fashionable woman.

To counter the social aggrandisement and aestheticization of "nervous" disorders, Wollstonecraft appealed to the original sense of the adjective. Derived from the classical Latin

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[96] Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.55.

[97] Beatty, pp.59-62. Beatty observes that though *The English Malady* would have an impact on the general public's perception of the importance of nerves and nervous disorders, 'realistically, [it was] only within the means of the wealthier classes', p.59. Roy Porter considers Cheyne a 'fashionable physician' who became notable, 'made his fortune in London' and whose views grew 'influential' after the publication of *The English Malady*; see Porter's *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp.237-239. Barker-Benfield also notes Cheyne's popularity in Bath, particularly for 'propagating his regimen', which 'made his fortune' (p.15). Roger French has outlined the key works and appointments that solidified Whytt's reputation as an important thinker and medical authority in the Scottish Enlightenment, specifically when it came to European-wide debates about the soul and sentience, and Whytt's advocacy for the centrality of neurology. Whytt was the physician to the king of Scotland, was elected to a fellowship of the Royal Society in 1752 and became president of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1763. See Roger French's *Robert Whytt, The Soul, and Medicine* (London: Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1969) and his entry 'Whytt, Robert (1714-1766) in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[98] Beatty, p.74.

[99] Barker-Benfield discusses in some detail the prevalence in medical thinking for assuming women were avid tea drinkers and that their 'finer nerves' were readily affected by caffeine more than men (p.26).

nervosus, which meant to be 'sinewy', 'vigorous', 'energetic', 'to have tough fibres' and later 'sensitive', the modern derivative retained most of these meanings well into the early eighteenth century. It was not until the second half of the 1700s – after Cheyne, Whytt et al made their mark on nervous physiology – that its pathological sense gained prominence. To be 'robust', 'strong' and to have 'vigour' were qualities, bodily and mental, that were frequently associated with men, yet they all rise to the syntactical surface of Wollstonecraft's prose repeatedly in relation to women. Implicit in her dualistic refrain of strengthening 'mind and body' was a call for nerves that possessed 'a healthy tone', a 'constitution' that 'retained its natural strength' (p.95) and an intellect that had 'vigour' (p.88). Without such neurally-based strength, how were women supposed to discharge 'the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother'? How were women supposed to have power 'over themselves' (p.133)? Emptying out the supposed sexual allure of a feigned 'sickly delicacy' (p.95), Wollstonecraft read nerves, in their original etymological and neurophysiological function, as a sign that woman was able to break from confinement and achieve what only an 'immortal soul' (p.115) could: to have more in this world and the next. In nervous physiology, she saw an opportunity for women to break free from the 'gilt' cage (p.112) of social construction around bodies and overturn the weakness that had been bio-medically and culturally associated with the feminised form.

Polwhele was correct in underscoring the political roots of Wollstonecraftian nervous physiology. What he misconstrued in his parodic retelling was the *private* significance the political held in Wollstonecraft's thought. This was, to an extent, a point they shared in terms of the familial function of womanhood, though admittedly to very different ends. If her employment of nervous physiology was inspired by French revolutionary events, discourse and ideals, it was done with an eye to rectifying the specifically *domestic* plight of women on both sides of the English Channel. The future vision for neurologically stronger women in *Rights of Woman* rarely exceeded the limits of hearth and home. What piqued detractors like Polwhele was that Wollstonecraft, quite literally, had the nerve to suggest that women should publicly express themselves against a cultural norm, one which worked for current socio-economic and political structures. In using nervous physiology (and, in particular, knowledge supposedly reserved for the consideration of men) to undermine this construct, she threatened its hegemonic power in and out of the home. She risked raising a storm, a small radical innovation, in the domestic lives of women, by connecting them with the potentiality of their bodies. It was the first step to wider freedom, within and beyond the private sphere, and this was, for Wollstonecraft, a political gain.

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If Wollstonecraft's polemics established that the personal was the political, how much more so her private writings? Her early letters and autofiction represent a schism between the physical realisation of her political philosophy and the psycho-physiological reality she laboured under. Early letters to her sisters and a family friend, George Blood, the brother of her beloved late friend Frances, reveal Wollstonecraft struggling with what she believed to be numerous symptoms indicative of a nervous ailment. At times, her self-diagnosis is read within the context of reflections on the mutual influence of the body and mind, and her conclusions are later echoed in the punctuating refrain of the *Rights of Woman*: 'to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body' (p.73). On other occasions, Wollstonecraft's musings are evidence of unrelenting grief over the loss of Frances Blood. Some of these instances, however, bear a resemblance to melancholia hypochondria, an illness and term still in vogue at the time, and, towards the end of the century, increasingly associated with women patients with nervous debility.[100] That Wollstonecraft's personal writings ostensibly linked her with a type of

[100] Bell, p.95.

femininity she firmly eschewed in her public political works appears in line with her fraught personal relationship with the coquette's heart, as introduced in the previous chapter. Again, as with the type of affectivity Wollstonecraft publicly espoused and privately battled with, her public and private relationship with nervous physiology was not as dissonant as it appeared – her personal struggles with possible nervous disorders may even have prompted her to read about them, thus influencing her inclusion of nervous physiology into her later political works.

Personal letters from 1784 to 1792 reveal a writer attuned to her own body and its physiological fluctuations. Ever aware of the grief and immediate needs of her close friends and family, Wollstonecraft lived and worked to support all around her: nursing her dying mother, protecting her siblings from the aggression of a frequently intoxicated and volatile father, helping her young sister, Eliza, flee an abusive husband, placing her sisters in employment and rushing to the aid of her pregnant consumptive best friend, Frances, before her death, were just a few of the incidents that marked the beginning of her young adult years. It is little wonder that depression and low moods were to be the lot of Wollstonecraft throughout the late 1780s. Body and mind had both absorbed and tried to deflect intergenerational and recurring familial traumas; such loss and violence would eventually have psychosomatic consequences. With a natural tendency to turn inwards and survey herself, letter writing became a way to self-examine and express; a simultaneously disembodied and embodied mode through which to come to terms with the interrelationship between body and mind. Letters written to her sister Everina in 1786 (pp.79-117) divulge such self-ruminations, hint at the mutual influence of mind and body, and self-prognosticate disorders of a nervous nature. Before taking up a post as a governess in Ireland, Wollstonecraft relates a bout of illness. Depressed and feeling isolated, she states that 'a whole train of nervous disorders have taken possession of me – and they appear to arise so much from the mind…' (p.80). Subsequent correspondence during her residence in Ireland details a relentless nervous complaint, which results in 'fever' (p.107), 'spasms' (p.111), 'violent' fits of 'trembling' and 'fainting' (p.104). Believing her nerves to be 'injured beyond *possibility* of receiving *any* aid from medicine', and having increased her 'natural sensibility to such a degree', Wollstonecraft concludes that 'body and mind both contribute to weaken each other' (pp.111-112). Hardly novel in her confirmation of their interconnectedness, her thoughts do, nonetheless, show an awareness of changing attitudes in the field of nervous physiology around rigid notions of mind-body dualism.

What strikes one about Wollstonecraft's admission of nervous ailments is their manifestation. Instead of listing the less attractive and socially inadmissible symptoms of nervous disorders like flatulence, poor digestion, hiccups, wandering thoughts, frequent urination and bowel problems, Wollstonecraft shares those nosological signs – fits, fainting, trembling – that are culturally sanctioned and attractive.[101] They are also symptoms listed in novels of sensibility, like Richardson's *Clarissa* and Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771) (both of whose nervous disorders prove fatal), and thereby more easily encoded as feminine and indicative of middle-class sensibility. Does Wollstonecraft prove the hypocrite for her public criticism of those "aping" nervous disorders and excess sensibility when in her private writings she was complaining of the same? Or, is it more the case that her own experiences of nervous disorders – in addition to the socialisation that left women liable to succumbing to *and* feigning them – inform her later public attack? Wollstonecraft's letters when in Ireland confirm something of the latter. In fact, her own socialisation and social position – as well as that of other young women and girls – were at the forefront of her mind during this time. Early letters to Everina, which are some of the first to cite her nervous complaints, feature snide descriptions of Lady Kingsborough's behaviour and Wollstonecraft's own disconcertion over the liminal position she

[101] Beatty, pp.7-36.

occupied as a governess in the new household. Several sentences before discussing her fear of sinking into a 'state of insensibility', confessing to feeling 'melancholy and alone', and concluding that her 'misery arises from disordered nerves' (p.85), Wollstonecraft remarks on Lady Kingsborough's behaviour:

> Lady K. is a shrewd clever woman a great talker – I have not seen much of her as she is confined to her room by a sore throat – but I have seen half dozen of her companions – I mean not her children, but her dogs – To see a woman without softness in her manners caressing animals, using infantine expression – is you may conceive very absurd and ludicrous – but a fine Lady is new species to me of animals. I am however treated like a gentlewoman by every part of the family – but the forms and parade of high life suit not my mind – I am in a land of strangers – I am too worried about fancy works &c &c [–] you may perceive how unwel I am by my confused style I cannot collect my thoughts… (p.85)

The precursor to lisping Eliza in *Mary* and the woman of fashion in *Rights of Woman*, Lady Kingsborough is reduced, by the slight of Wollstonecraft's pen and assumed scientific eye, to the animals she ardently caresses. Beginning with an ambiguous statement and half-compliment about 'Lady K's' loquacity, Wollstonecraft then undermines such an accomplishment by following it with the coarseness in her manners and 'infantine' expressions relayed to her dogs. Michèle Cohen observes how, towards the end of the century, "blunt, manly' language', the 'reticent tongue' and 'taciturnity became emblematic of English masculinity', whilst 'sprightly conversation represented the shallow and inferior intellect of English women'.[102] Though Wollstonecraft does not overtly make this distinction, something to this effect is implied by her snide comment concerning 'Lady K's' volubility and conversational skills, particularly when such 'great' sociability extends rather bathetically and ludicrously to her pets. Here, Wollstonecraft indirectly pronounces judgment on the authenticity of 'soft' manners associated with being a 'Lady', especially one who, to the writer's mind tends more to her pets than her children. What is more, the letter suggests that the Kingsboroughs' family dynamics and roles are in a state of disarray, as a grown woman who should be mothering her children fusses more over her canine 'companions'. But this social and familial discord also extends to Wollstonecraft herself, who, though not a 'fine Lady' like her employer, is 'treated like a gentlewoman' by all. Where does Wollstonecraft fit in this new world, as employee-cum-honorary gentlewoman, a governess who is one rung above that of a 'companion' herself? And is she even interested in belonging to such a family, when 'the forms and parade of high life suit not' her 'mind'? Again, Wollstonecraft differentiates and alienates herself from her new hosts by claiming mental superiority above their bodily and affected show. Despite her disjointed syntax and grammar, Wollstonecraft hints at physical superiority next to Lady Kingsborough's confinement with a 'sore throat'. There is a sense in the letter that, though she suspects she is struggling with a severe nervous complaint, hers is an authentic disorder, a political complaint in effect, brought about through the confounding social position she is forced to occupy. The rigours of social custom and socialisation – the belittling positions women of small means but great minds are compelled to adopt in a world that will not cater for them – has very real psycho-physiological repercussions, even more so for those like Wollstonecraft who see the alienating unjustness of it all. 'I am treated like a gentlewoman – but I cannot easily forget my inferior station…' Wollstonecraft relates in the same letter to Everina. This 'awkward' 'betwixt and between' state, as she described it, could have contributed to the psychosomatic conditions that preoccupy her Irish letters.

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[102] Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.3-9.

The exact nature of Wollstonecraft's psychosomatic illness is never medically confirmed, but one letter addressed to Everina sheds some light. In an epistle written less than a month since her initial remarks on Lady Kingsborough, Wollstonecraft confides in Everina once again of an 'almost' broken 'heart' and impaired 'nerves' and 'health' (p.90). The letter continues in a similar vein to that written in October; however, this time she admits to 'drinking ass's milk' and signs off with an extremely melancholic ('pity a miserable wretch') and suicidal ('I almost wish my warfare was over') tone (p.92). In a footnote, Todd identifies asses' milk as a contemporary remedy for consumptive, hypochondriac and hysteric disorders.[103] As Todd relates, manuals by Frederick Hoffman, William Buchan and others recommend ass' milk for such ailments, despite it being an unusual and hard to come by curative. What is of interest here is that this prescription, together with Wollstonecraft's repeated lamentations about her social environment and relationships, suggest she was suffering from hypochondria or melancholia hypochondria. Both nervous diagnoses were prevalent in the eighteenth century, especially amongst women, though this may have been owing to gender biases amongst physicians.[104] One of the underlying causes for these nerve-based illnesses was the patient's environment. Even in Cheyne's preface, environment and the overstimulation that comes with urbanised populous cities was a contributing factor to nervous conditions.[105] But environmental factors had always been a consideration dating back to Hippocratic writings on the disease.[106] The relation of the body to the environment was, according to Bell's analysis of Hippocrates, a key aspect of the derivation and development of melancholia as an illness. Climate also played a part, as did diet and 'empirical observation'.[107] This evidently prepared the ground for Galen's humoral theory – in which temperament and bodily constitution are formed by a combination of environmental and climatic factors in correspondence with the body's inherent humoral disposition – to take root. Wollstonecraft's nervous disorder may not have been owing to variation of climate or the no longer ubiquitous ideas of the four humours in medicine, but the social environment she was exposed to could have contributed to her psycho-physiological ordeal.

In *A Short Residence*, social, natural and material environments certainly play a part when it comes both to the individual and national constitution. Customs and climate go hand-in-hand in the formation of mind and body, whether that be the Swedish winter rendering its citizens 'sluggish' (p.22) or the lack of intellectual refinement evinced in Swedish men who live near 'brute creation' (p.7). Given her belief in environmental impact and conditioning, it is not such a large leap to see how a change in stations, situations and countries could have taken a toll on Wollstonecraft's own physical and mental health. She went from being an independent teacher, founder of a school and an emerging writer of didactic literature, introduced to some of the radical set of Johnson and the Unitarian community of Newington Green, to being an isolated governess with lower middle-class pretensions on a country estate in Mitchelstown, Ireland; from having family and friends close by, to being, as she repeatedly described herself, a 'stranger' amongst an upper-class circle of women, whose society she found 'silly' and intolerable (p.91). All the while, Wollstonecraft was supporting her brothers and sisters, paying off personal and familial debts, grieving the loss of Blood and trying to educate the young Kingsboroughs according to the wishes of their mother rather than her own. These 'betwixt and between' social and material states that many poor lower and lower-middle-class women found themselves in was enough to trigger a nervous ailment such as melancholia hypochondria.

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[103] See Todd's footnote in *Letters*, p.91.
[104] Bell, p.75, pp.93-6.
[105] Cheyne, p.i.
[106] Bell, p.40.
[107] Bell, p.41.

This term may have never been pronounced in her letters, but its symptoms repeatedly occurred. Dejection and a bleak outlook were cited in much of her correspondence of this time; unable to escape the 'gloom' and 'despondency' which daily stole in upon her (p.90), she began to lose interest in life ('life has lost its relish,' she complained to Everina). Before Christmas, she complained to George Blood of a 'melancholy langour', a 'lassitude which is creeping over' her (pp.92-3), both of which were attributable to melancholia. Citing 'slackened nerves' and 'physical as well as mental causes' as the deciding factors in her 'weak state', she later concludes that 'I have fostered too great a refinement of mind, and given a keener edge to the sensibility nature gave me' (p.93). This admission appears to contradict all of Wollstonecraft's subsequent arguments about the cultural construction of sensibility, and could even be counted as a belief in essentialist notions of gender and biology. What does, nevertheless, challenge this possibility is the opening clause of the statement, one where mind comes before passion, though the latter qualifies the former. This prefixing of mind and suffixing of passion – or the pre-eminence of mind and its subsequent effect on the body's psycho-physiological responses – sees Wollstonecraft align herself with the genius of the (usually male) melancholic. This again echoes her former spatial and intellectual relationship to Lady Kingsborough in the above passage, where the genius mind, however perplexed, will always rise superior to the emotionally and neurally fallible body. In the midst of misery and her own increasing introspection over it (another symptom of melancholia), Wollstonecraft starts to reach for the trope of the melancholic genius, rarely extended to women, as the perfect explanation and cause for her own nervous state.

Scholars and biographers of Wollstonecraft have framed her ill health differently. Almost in tones similar to that of Browning and Polwhele, Todd takes a rather cynical eye to Wollstonecraft's suffering, as relayed in her letters to Everina and George Blood at this time.[108] She describes her 'moaning' when struggling with depression and 'deluged with hypochondria', always reverting to 'the usual expression of misery and needs'.[109] Later Todd terms her ill health as 'continuing vapourishness', a heavily gendered term employed increasingly in the pejorative sense by the late 1780s and 90s, stripping it of the neurophysiological associations it originally held for physicians like Cheyne.[110] Several synonyms of contemporary neurological disorders are employed interchangeably here, albeit with the inclusion of the modern term depression (which did not gain ground and replace melancholia or hypochondria until the late nineteenth-century, when psychiatrists were beginning to redefine and reclassify psychological disorders).[111] The ambiguity surrounding Wollstonecraft's own ailing physical and mental health, as well as the disregard of how she was attempting to define or fashion it in her letters, leaves space for more gendered readings to creep in. In a short chronology to Wollstonecraft's life preceding her novel, *Mary*, Kelly sees Wollstonecraft as suffering from 'depression and neurasthenia' (xxvii), the latter of which had implicit connotations of gender and is here anachronistically applied to Wollstonecraft considering the term has its origins in nineteenth-century developments of nervous debility. Indeed, the OED confirms Bell's observation that neurasthenics, typically seen as women from the early-to-mid nineteenth century onwards, were, regardless of their wishes and the true cause of their ill health, prescribed the rest cure and confined to bed (as is the case for the heroine of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*).[112] Such is the gender bias in this diagnosis that even as late as the 1960s, which saw the second wave of feminism kick into action, the OED quotes Ephraim Rosen and Ian Gregory, authors of *Abnormal Psychology* (1965), as a defining example of this term. Rosen and Gregory state that

[108] Todd, 2000, pp.90-92.
[109] Todd, 2000, pp.90-92.
[110] Todd, 2000, p.92.
[111] Bell, p.55.
[112] Bell, p.95; "neurasthenia, n." in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

'neurasthenia is observed with such frequency in housewives who are bored and feel neglected by their husbands that it has often been called the housewives' neurosis'.[113] Neither a housewife nor one who could be assumed to experience 'boredom' and ill health triggered by male neglect – at this point in her life – Wollstonecraft's true condition remains as ambiguous and steeped in gender bias as the history of neurophysiology.

The slightly later biography by Lyndall Gordon further problematizes the gendered implications of Wollstonecraft's psychophysiological state. Aside from remarking, like Todd, on her initial 'moaning', Gordon gives scarce attention to Wollstonecraft's protracted epistolary descriptions of nervous disorders.[114] Instead, in a manner reminiscent of Godwin's comparison of Wollstonecraft to Goethe's Werther in the *Memoirs*, she focuses on her inherent 'genius', gestating and unfolding during this period in Ireland, and fashions Wollstonecraft into another 'Hamlet'.[115] Without citing anything remotely connected to neurophysiology or melancholia other than mentioning 'Mary's gloom', Gordon claims for Wollstonecraft the trope of melancholic genius in a manner befitting her biographical subject.[116] This comparative melancholic type is first introduced when Gordon relates Wollstonecraft's relationship to Lady Kingsborough:

> Lady Kingsborough was charitable, more so than most, but had not the remotest notion of the interior drama – soulfulness crossed with Hamlet – in which her governess specialised. It upset the latter, in the way it embittered Hamlet – and she was always quoting Hamlet – to have to hide her true self. Without losing her professional effectiveness, Mary nursed 'that within which passes show'. There were, anyway, no exact words for her drama of imprisonment and invisibility. Here again is a glimpse of a new form of life, sprouting apart from the flower of the Ascendancy, in the concealed ground of Mary's gloom.[117]

Here, Gordon's contrast between Lady Kingsborough's lack of psychological insight and intellectual penetration with Wollstonecraft's singular, acute sense of self reminds us of the latter's letter to Everina quoted above. Placed at an ontological, as well as sociological distance from her governess, Lady Kingsborough is firmly outside of the 'true' theatre of selfhood in which Wollstonecraft was an artless player. Of course, Gordon does not compare Wollstonecraft to Hamlet without some critical distance herself. The biographical passage is a kind of pastiche of Hamletesque references and citations ('that within which passes shew' is a gloss on Hamlet's exchange with Gertrude in Act 1.2), which send up the drama of Wollstonecraft's 'gloom' and 'bitterness'. And the repetition of the word 'drama' and semantics of theatre in general cast doubt on the authenticity of Wollstonecraft's highly prized interior life. Gordon at once acknowledges Wollstonecraft's melancholic genius as represented in Shakespeare's own melancholic Prince of Denmark, whilst depriving it of its supposed synonymity with truth, authenticity and contemplative superiority. Freud saw Hamlet as the archetype of melancholia, one who in the words of Maud Ellmann 'lashes himself with 'words, words words'' – akin to Wollstonecraft's supposed 'moaning' and ceaseless complaints to her correspondents – but who has 'uncanny perspicacity' and self-knowledge when doing so.[118] Wollstonecraft herself must have been aware of Hamlet's significance as a potent and troubled sufferer of melancholia, since

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[113] Ephraim Rosen and Ian Gregory, *Abnormal Psychology* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1965), p.250.
[114] Lyndall Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), pp.84-85, p.84.
[115] Gordon, p.84.
[116] Gordon, p.85.
[117] Gordon, p.85.
[118] Maud Ellmann's introduction in Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, (trans) Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005), pp.xix-xx.

it is the play she most quotes from during her time in Ireland.[119] Though Hamlet works as a kind of proxy for Wollstonecraft's wronged and stifled authenticity under the Kingsboroughs' ignorant and socially sanctioned 'seeming', he also highlights the possibility of performance and "inauthentic" expressions of self. The implication for Gordon is, therefore, that 'true' melancholic genius is as performative as those minds and bodies that 'remotely' lie outside it.

Of course, Gordon's dramatized gendering of Wollstonecraft's implied melancholia still claims the 'genius' of a Hamlet. In fact, Gordon's casting of Wollstonecraft as another Hamlet lays the philosopher open to all kinds of connotations, not least Polwhele's transgressive 'un-sexing' or, put without his derogation, the queering of Wollstonecraft's own body. If melancholic genius is a performance, in that it is a culturally embraced process, position and prerogative of studious, philosophically-inclined men, then Wollstonecraft's transition into this mimicry should see her inherit its full cultural codes of behaviour and psychophysiological consequences. This, however, is not the case; being a cis-gendered woman she is barely entitled to the trope's full advantages that its cultural and medical history permit. She is Hamlet on the page only, not the stage of life. Far from being rewarded with this queering of self, Wollstonecraft is derided for it, denied the cultural capital it entailed for men (the Cowpers and Johnsons of her time), and posthumously seen as a freak of nature, too monstrously female or too dangerously and degenerately male to claim the performative value of Hamletesque genius. Writing herself as a melancholic genius, writing herself *out* of being pathologically portrayed as another passive, nerveless, superficial Lady K – whether in her personal or private writings – was the closest she would come to transcending the culturally encoded female body.

In their work, scholars Claudia Johnson and Ashley Tauchert have focused on the narration and depiction of the transgendered body (which from henceforth I classify as the queer form) and self in Wollstonecraft's fiction.[120] Looking at the semi-biographical novel *Mary*, Johnson and Tauchert have each presented compelling arguments on the masculinization of Wollstonecraft's heroine next to the passive, feminised bodies of Eliza, Ann and even Henry, the hero of the illicit heterosexual love plot that comes to dominate the latter half of the text. For them, this queering of its heroine springs from the contemporaneously 'unclassifiable' (Tauchert) and 'indiscursible' (as Johnson defines it) Sapphic or proto-lesbian love plot involving Ann.[121] Encountered more at a subtextual level and evinced in the text's spaces, lacunae, elisions and, as Tauchert notes, 'disavowals', the queer desire Mary, in particular, feels towards Ann, increasingly manifests in and reinforces the former's masculine encoded body or embodied masculinity. This is expressed by Mary's mental and physical fortitude ('she did not fear bodily pain' p.32), her taste for philosophic and religious works as compared to Ann's more elegant and sentimentally inclined ones, her connection to the sublime (p.4) over Ann's interest in 'the beautiful, or the pretty' (p.13), her determination to learn physic (p.17), her love of exercise around the countryside and her near-marital-like commitment to Ann in the wake of her illness.[122] All such

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[119] See pages 103, 116 and 156 for evidence of the influence of *Hamlet* on Wollstonecraft's ideas and writing during her time in Ireland.

[120] Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp.48-73; see also Johnson's 'Mary Wollstonecraft's Novels' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft,* (ed) Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.189-208. Ashley Tauchert, "Escaping Discussion: Liminality and the Embodied Couple in Mary Wollstonecraft's Mary, A Fiction' in *Romanticism on the Net*, 18 (May 2000), sections 1-20. I have chosen to change Tauchert's employment of the term 'transgender' to 'queer' in this section, as the latter broadly reflects contemporary understandings of the blurring of gender roles, behaviour and binaries, and it is these aspects that are relevant to my argument about nervous physiology and gendered bodily representations, rather than the modern debates around transgenderism or, indeed, its older definitions, in which, I believe, Tauchert's use of the term is grounded.

[121] Johnson, 1995, p.54.

[122] Tauchert, 2002, section 1.

marked differences are rendered not so much to make Ann the feminine foil to Mary's increasingly masculinised picaroon-of-a-protagonist; rather, these mental and bodily characteristics unsettle gender and generic binaries, unravel expectations concerning sentimental heroines and the novel of sensibility, and allow repressed desire – the Sapphic plot Johnson and Tauchert highlight – to come to the surface early on in the text at points when a heterosexual love plot threatens to take over or heteropatriarchal control looms. Queer *Mary* is, therefore, a radical departure from heterosexual and heteropatriarchal conceptions of female encoded bodies, socially encouraged feminised affectivity, and the neurophysiological implications these entail. In the Advertisement, the generic radicalism found in the novella and oblique queering of Mary are both directly proposed and indirectly alluded. Here, Wollstonecraft reneges against the patriarchs of sentimental heroines and bodies past and presents 'the mind' of her extraordinary heroine, whose 'thinking powers' shall be displayed in the pages of *Mary*. But even in this, Wollstonecraft is aware that such an 'unsexed' or queered 'being may be allowed to exist' in fiction only. Prejudice surrounding 'female organs…thought too weak for arduous employment', can only be challenged and surmounted by presenting a hypothetical thinking woman, who is both fictional and 'drawn by the individual from the original source'. Again, the 'betwixt and between' state of her heroine – part fantasy, a paper body, therefore disembodied of cultural codifications of gender *and* a figment of truth, an auto-fictional being, who originates in the mind of her creator – further complicates the embodied queerness and queered positionality of Mary's desirous self.

What this queer body and self implies – not just for Mary, but for her author's neurophysiological state – adds another layer to an already complex (auto)fictional representation. Like her creator, Mary similarly claims the trope of melancholic genius when nursing and then grieving for Ann, and conversing with Henry. In fact, her creator, through the medium of third person narration, claims it for her, by delineating Mary's neurophysiological constitution to be made of 'black bile' (p.16). This bizarre reversion to a humoral system, especially by an author who was highly literate in the developments of nervous physiology, cannot be ignored. Wollstonecraft's decision to embed her heroine's physiology in the humoral system is as subversive as it is symbolic. Black, a colour that permeates the novel much like the dejection and disappointment experienced by its titular protagonist, comes to signify the extreme emotions of dysphoria, grief, and the thwarted (illicit) desire she feels towards Ann, then Henry, as the entwined love plots 'collapse' into each other.[123] But as Bell observes in his historiographical study of the disease, melancholia has a historic connection to the colour, not least because of the Galenic humoral schema it later became known for from Greco-Roman medical writings. The word melancholia is a composite of *melainē* (black) and *cholē* (bile); Bell continues to note that 'the term designates the fluid bile (or gall) which is produced by the liver' and was one of a 'number of fluids or symptoms considered important by the Greeks'.[124] Unlike its later Galenic formulation, the Hippocratic understanding of humours denoted not black bile itself, but healthy yellow bile turned black, therefore indicating an unhealthy humoral balance.[125] It was not until Galen, however, that the black bile of melancholia was firmly associated with one of the four psychological types which made up his humoral theory.[126] By the early Renaissance, 'black bile' was associated with an introspective and despondent (melancholic) temperament, owing to cold and dry physical qualities, environmental and climatic changes, and various organs in the body. Melancholia subsequently went from being a pathological state and sign of bodily morbidity to being a psychological character in the cultural sphere, one which

[123] Tauchert, 2002, section 2.
[124] Bell, p.39.
[125] Bell, p.40.
[126] Bell, p.43.

became synonymous with the metaphorical implications of its prefix: *melainē*, black.[127] For Bell, it is this conceptual diffuseness and overlapping between pathology, psychology and the cultural appropriations of both, that would eventually undo melancholia as a diagnostic label.[128] Yet, for Wollstonecraft, it is this very conceptual ambiguity together with melancholia's rich cultural and medico-historical connotations that make it ideal for her heroine. Wollstonecraft reaches back into its psychopathological history to express the excess of feeling – and repressed desire, as highlighted by Johnson and Tauchert – with which Mary experiences the world and her relationships. And still, the queering of body and mind makes it possible for Mary's 'black bile' to align her with the trope of the melancholic genius, with which it was associated from the early Renaissance onwards.

Mary's queered and melancholic state of genius is momentarily challenged when the love plot transitions from a proto-lesbian to an ostensibly normative, heterosexual one. The presence of Henry, a sufferer of consumption, whose 'rather ugly' face displays 'strong lines of genius' (p.22) to Mary, initially signals a rival for the status of melancholic genius. Henry is described as a 'pious' 'man of learning', whose 'rational religious sentiments' receive 'warmth from his sensibility' but which he keeps in 'proper bounds' (pp.29-30); so far, a typical masculine role that errs on the side of the (measured) man of feeling. When his clandestine relationship with Mary begins properly, however, rather than strengthening his masculinised role, it weakens it. Tauchert has argued persuasively about the feminisation of Henry, his psychophysiological and romantic mirroring of Ann, and how the Sapphic plot that marks the first half of the novella is reinscribed into and actively embodied in the slightly more socially accepted heterosexual one.[129] That is, rather than suppressing Sapphic desire and Mary's status as a queered, melancholic genius, the heterosexual plot and relationship gives reign to both, opening up the heroine's embodied masculinised nervous physiology more and leaving Henry in an increasingly feminised and emasculated role. As Johnson pithily states, 'Henry is Ann resexed', but that sexual reassignment comes about because Mary has previously assumed and embodied male prerogatives with Ann.[130] An overlay of bodies and plots creates a mis-en-abyme effect in the narrative and with Mary's gendered self and the neurophysiological and psychological imperatives it entails. Thus, the more emotionally and erotically embroiled Mary and Henry become, the more she assumes the male prerogative of supporting and nursing him (p.64, paralleling her role with Ann), administering physic, retaining fortitude in the face of his adverse health and eventual death (p.65), and quietly grieving the loss of both (pp.67-8) without fulfilling her "duties" as wife to her actual husband. Transferring embodied gender roles through entwined or reinscribed love plots is, possibly, the most quietly subversive achievement of *Mary*.

Tauchert has speculated about Wollstonecraft's own 'love plot' with her close friend, Frances Blood.[131] Reflecting on Wollstonecraft's similarities to Mary – her love of 'masculine writing…as the Sublime, as 'history', as Philosophy' which aligns her with a 'female embodied intersubjectivity represented by the female-embodied couple that remains indiscursible…' – Tauchert posits the possibility of her unclassifiable and indiscursible queer desire manifesting in other forms of writing and areas of her work, whether it be in her assumed proto-feminism, the mother-daughter exchanges in her letters and novels, or envisioned female-centric futures (such as that consisting of Maria, her child and Jemima in one of the hypothetical endings to *The*

[127] Evidently this presents problems for future pseudo sciences (phrenology and physiognomy) and medical developments (eugenics) when it comes to race as well as gender, some of which will be explored in Chapter 5.
[128] Bell, p.54.
[129] Tauchert, Section 2.
[130] Johnson, 1995, p.57.
[131] Tauchert, section 14.

Wrongs of Woman).[132] Though it is hard to confirm whether these or any such materialisations of female embodied couplings and intersubjectivity are attempts at voicing her own indiscursible desires, it is possible to go back to Wollstonecraft's grief at the loss of Blood and examine its psychophysiological significance to her and her posthumous reputation. In fact, Wollstonecraft inferred, in one of her own letters to George Blood, the brother of Frances, the correlation between her grief and neurological position. Written during the formation of *Mary* and while residing in Bristol under the employment of the Kingsboroughs, the letter opens with Wollstonecraft's usual nervous complaints – her 'melancholy languor' and 'injured' nerves – only to give way to a long and painful rumination on Blood's death ('About this time last year I closed my poor Fanny's eyes', p.93), her subsequent 'vanished hopes' and the 'ghost of former joys', and her longing for a 'friend' since her 'poor heart cannot be filled by mere commonplace affections' (p.93). Written in syntax befitting the hand of one who is clearly distressed and exhausted (the dashes and lacunae Tauchert and Johnson saw as the syntactical condensations of unspeakable Sapphic desire in *Mary*), it is hard to confirm if these are admissions of non-'commonplace', queer desire or simply inordinate grief, not just for Blood but a way of life cruelly curtailed at the death of her friend and loss of a business.[133] Though her strength of feeling for Blood corresponds to that expressed by Mary for Ann, is it enough to affirm her erotic love for her deceased friend? Freud would argue that it was. As Ellmann notes, Freud attributed the disorder of modern nervousness to 'excessive sexual restriction'.[134] Wollstonecraft's nervous complaints, which have indeed been fed and, in part, caused by the loss of her former life with Blood, could also be owing to 'excessive' restrictions on her erotic yearnings, ones which cannot be assuaged or fulfilled by 'commonplace' affection.

In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud conceives the melancholic as one who experiences pathological grief for the lost libidinal/love object that has been internalised.[135] Sleeplessness, possible somatic effects, excessive introspection and talking, and the regression of the libido to avoid the 'abolition' of love (or love object) are some of the traits that differentiate the melancholic from the mourner – who mourns the lost object and experiences the ambivalence that comes with this loss, but less so the libidinal 'warfare' that attends those suffering from melancholia.[136] In his theory of melancholia, Freud sees the illness as a process that needs to be worked through, one where the ego renegotiates and overcompensates for the loss of its love object, until the sufferer effectively relinquishes or renounces ('kills') the love-object, and chooses her own ego.[137] Until then, these melancholic egoistical battles act like an 'open wound' – perhaps the broken heart and irreparably strained nerves Wollstonecraft repeatedly cites in the midst of her despondent state. It is a stretch to apply this twentieth-century psychoanalytical theory to Wollstonecraft's melancholic state, let alone her possible repressed desire for Blood. Freud virtually divests this once neurophysiological illness from its physiological origins, focusing specifically on its psychopathology. Yet, the process of egoistical libidinal investment – indeed *any* emotional investment – in another, whether it be a person, idea or way of life, that Freud outlines, and the dramatic rupture of this, offers us a clearer portrait of the internal struggles experienced by a sufferer of melancholia, one less blurry than that found in eighteenth-

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[132] Tauchert, Section 20.

[133] After Blood's death, Wollstonecraft returned to find the girls school she had founded in Newington Green with her late friend and sisters in ruin. For an account of Wollstonecraft's grief and management of the school in the wake of Blood's death, see her letters (pp.64-83). See also Todd's biography (pp.79-83), which details Wollstonecraft's depression, her 'mounting' debts (p.79) disappointment over the 'break-up' of the school and the friendships it 'erased' (p.80), her antipathy towards her time working at Eton (p.82) and her prospective occupation as a governess in Ireland (p.83).

[134] Ellmann, p.xix.

[135] Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, (trans) Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005).

[136] Freud, pp.212, 213, 216-217.

[137] Freud, p.217.

century nervous physiological works of the time and its contemporary typologies and cultural inscription of the disease. Rather than serving as an illustration and diagnosis for Wollstonecraft's psychosomatic ailments or repressed desire, Freud's theory of melancholia takes us back to her novel, to Mary's repression of unfulfilled and illicit longing for Ann and Henry, to an internalised loss already encountered before the deaths of these two intertwined love objects because of the impossibility of that desire to properly and permissibly exist. Instead of being a map, an item of proof and assurance of Wollstonecraft's own neurophysiological or libidinal state, *Mary* walks us through the possible and impossible futures a woman could envisage for herself, and the nerve-implicated gendered realities experienced, subverted and denied in the pursuit of futurity itself. Both Wollstonecraft and her heroine knew that internalising the loss of futurity was a melancholia-inducing prospect. How best to style, fashion and achieve freedom – queer or otherwise – within this state, was the only liberty available to them.

It was, nonetheless, exactly this taking of liberties that Polwhele and Browning objected to in their poetry. Positing queer formulations of nervous bodies in her public work and disclosing her private subversion of them, was a step too far, and threw gender roles and the essentialist ideologies they were built around into disarray. This public disclosure not only threatened to challenge binary conceptions of gendered identity, but daringly exposed the neurophysiological premises that permitted such gender trouble; whether appropriately sensible or debilitated, neurally strong or weak, woman, as a neural being, proved she had the potential to transcend the medical and socio-politically constructed gender biases limiting her. In her auto-fiction and polemics, Wollstonecraft seized on the paradoxical ability of nervous physiology simultaneously to conform and disprove gender constructs, embody and disembody the neural subject, and reveal the interconnectedness of self and soma. Wollstonecraft did not fulfil, therefore, Polwhele and Browning's satirically styled versions of her neurophysiological self; instead, she traversed them, pre-empted the gender biases behind their derision and embedded in medical history, and envisioned new embodied gender realities for women. The possible neurological complaints she suffered from herself only served to push her to reflect on the nature of embodiment and how this is a cultural, rather than biological, process of becoming.

Wollstonecraft and the Soul/Mind-Body Problem

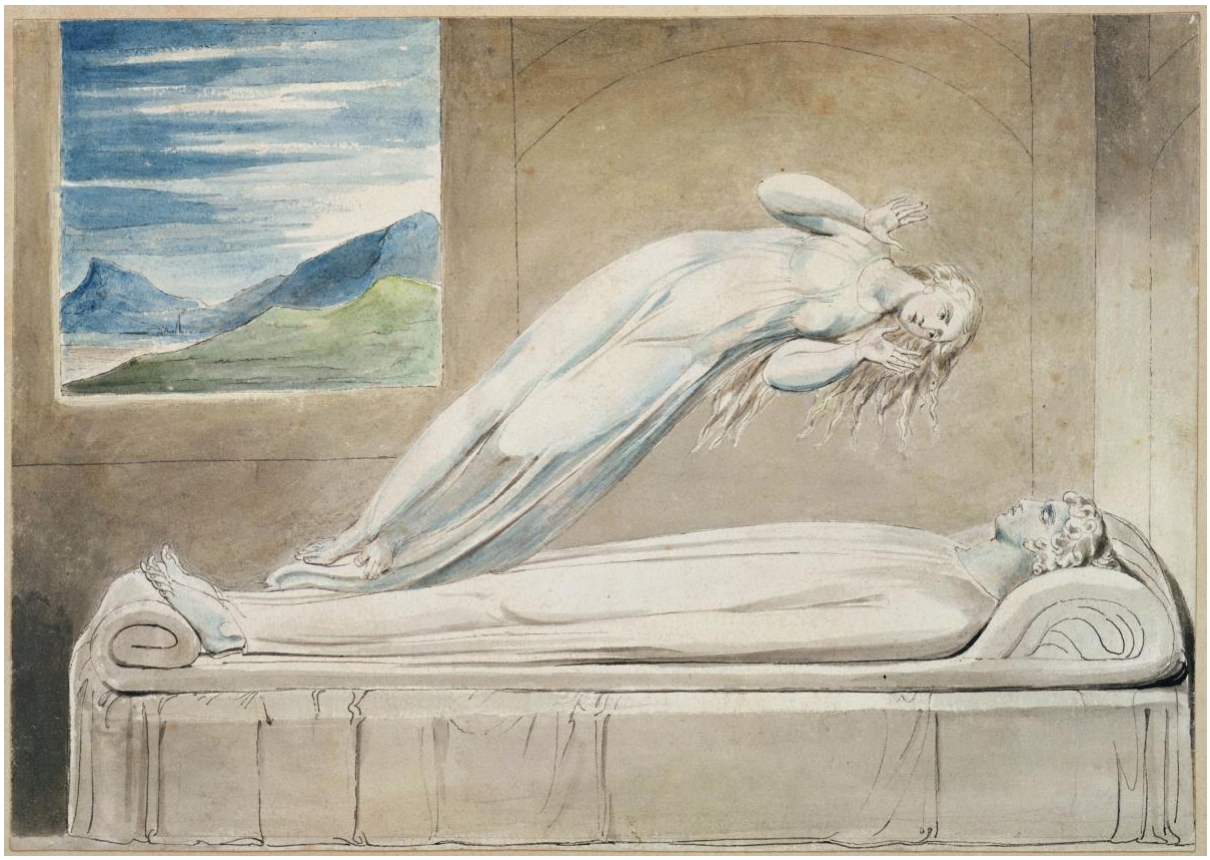

Fig.2. William Blake, *The Soul Hovering over the Body*, c.1805, pen, ink, water colour over traces of pencil on wove paper, Object 9, 16.0 x 22.7cm. Courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

In their introduction to *The Languages of Psyche: Mind and Body in Enlightenment Thought*, historians George Rousseau and Roy Porter grapple with the 'problem' that is soul-body duality.[138] Offering a colourful but potted history of key natural philosophers who shaped this conceptual phenomenon (from Socrates and Plato through to Descartes), Rousseau and Porter pause when they arrive at the eighteenth century: 'It would be a mistake to speak of the mind/body *problem* as if it were a conundrum that has always existed…rather [it] became pressing in the guise of [a] *problem* only recently,' they argue.[139] For Porter and Rousseau, this 'recent' shift from conceiving the relationship between soul and body as a cultural given, to one that is problematic and even tests the bounds of logic, occurs in the 'intellectual movement' that is the 'Enlightenment'.[140] With European thinkers moving away from, but by no means discarding, religious orthodoxies about self, nature and god, and with dialogues between contemporary European intellectuals being published for wider consumption, it is small wonder that this historically complex and much theorised aspect of man should come under greater scrutiny during the eighteenth century. This moment of the period saw the soul-body problem as a tipping point, an axis, an inherited yet contextually vulnerable and varied vocabulary through which contemporary and future thinkers could posit new theories.

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[138] *The Languages of Psyche: Mind and Body in Enlightenment Thought, Clark Library Lectures, 1985-1986*, (ed) George Rousseau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp.3-44.
[139] Rousseau & Porter, p.19.
[140] Rousseau & Porter, p.21.

One example of this developing 'problem' is seen in the slippage between terms. Soul is often singled out, particularly in a religious context or when one denotes innermost personhood, but it is also treated as a near-synonym to "mind", "reason", and later "brain" in medico-philosophical contexts. In his *Meditations* (1641), René Descartes deliberately slipped from soul to mind when delineating the finer points of his controversial dualism and philosophy of the self.[141] On the title pages of the 1641 Latin and 1642 French editions, the 'immortal soul' and 'human soul' ('anima' and 'esprit') are included respectively, despite 'mind' ('mens' and 'esprit') being the favoured referent throughout the actual treatise.[142] In fact, instances where the soul is mentioned are scarce and it is not until his extensive 'Objections and Replies' that the term resurfaces, both as a synonym of and contrasting element to the mind. It was the mind, this 'thinking thing', that concerned him, not so much the animating principle often equated with the soul, which 'walked', 'sensed' and kept the body 'nourished'.[143] Sublimating 'mind, soul, intellect or reason' to a 'thinking thing' or rather the dictum of modern selfhood and consciousness, *Cogito, ergo sum*, Descartes placed all emphasis on thought as the distinguishing feature of disembodied immortal existence.[144] What is more, with the *anima* subsumed into the *animus*, he could discard all unresolvable, conflicting theoretical strands of a tripartite soul inherited from Plato and Aristotle, and still discernible in the atomistic ideas of his contemporary, the French mathematician Gassendi. By highlighting Descartes' somewhat reductive slippage, one sees the eventual replacement of soul for mind (and in due course, the brain) that was put into motion in the seventeenth century.[145] Far from wishing to propose that Wollstonecraft's own slippage was a resurfacing of Cartesian terminology or a conscious return to Descartes' ideology, I would nevertheless argue that her own very deliberate overlaying of soul with mind anchors her writing in this tradition, demonstrating the philosophical exchange in the interchange of these terms and the advancement of the mind over the soul throughout the next two centuries. An awareness of substantial dualism, questions concerning consciousness, selfhood and the residence of the soul, the developments in nervous physiology and cardiology, the study of mental and physical pathology, and the possibility of life dormant in matter and how this may affect established eschatological ideas – all such queries and evolving fields of knowledge relative to soul-body dualism laid it open to being problematized, revealing the 'problem' to be one that encouraged fruitful debate, progress in thought, and, depending on your philosophical position, a deeper claim to the limitations – or limitlessness – of the physical and metaphysical.

That is not to say that orthodox ideologies concerning the cultural and socio-political value and significance of soul-body dualism did not prevail; nor is it to claim that the soul was completely disposed of in the growing usage of "mind" and eventually "brain". In fact, soul-body relations

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[141] René Descartes, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, (trans) Desmond M. Clarke (London: Penguin, 2003).
[142] Descartes, 2003, p.5; Descartes uses the Latin noun 'mens' and French term 'esprit' for mind throughout much of the respective Latin and French versions. In Latin, 'mens' is used interchangeably with 'animus', 'intellectus' and 'ratio'. 'Animus' denoted the rational part of the mind; 'anima' meant 'soul' in Latin, and is now considered the feminine part of the mind in Jungian theory. Soul is, therefore, etymologically synonymous with mind in Latin. In French 'esprit' is employed alongside 'entendement' and 'raison', but, of course, the French translation for the English word 'spirit' (another overt synonym for 'soul') is 'esprit'. There is a circularity in the terminology alone that complicates not only the soul-brain issue, but the soul-body problem too. See Descartes' *Meditations* – Trilingual Edition, (eds) D. B. Manley and C. S. Taylor, (Wright: Wright State University, 1996), for a cross-textual comparison of these terms.
[143] Descartes, 2003, pp.24, 26.
[144] Descartes, 2003, p.25.
[145] There are many books of intellectual and cultural history that trace this gradual exchange of soul for mind and then the brain. See John Barresi and Raymond Martin, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal identity in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.49-79, 110-148. See also their *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp.142-170. In addition to Rousseau's work with Porter cited above, see his article "Brainomania': Brain, Mind and Soul in the Long Eighteenth-Century' in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30 (2007), pp.161-191.

were being actively and unorthodoxly problematized within 'official orthodoxies', to use Rousseau and Porter's phrase, upheld by political, religious, philosophical and cultural institutions and production.[146] One such instance of heterodox attitudes appearing within orthodox ideologies of the soul-body problem is seen in the repertoire of William Blake. Now famous for his radical vision, wide-ranging influences (spanning Neoplatonism through to Swedenborgian thought), eclectic beliefs and idiosyncratic style, Blake's representation of the soul and body perfectly encapsulates this cultural rupture into the problematic. In a commission for Robert Hartley Cromek's 1808 edition of Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1743), a mortuary poem appreciated more for its melancholy ruminations than its protestant theological and eschatological vision, Blake's illustrations pose a challenge to the Cartesian dualism present throughout the poem.[147] In one of his preparatory sketches, 'The Soul Hovering over the Body' (c.1805), he captures the moment the soul leaves a post-mortem body. Such a scenario may not sound problematic, particularly to a predominantly Christian readership, but Blake's immaterial spirit has a significantly material aspect (see fig.2 above). Whether entering or exiting its mortal mould, the Blakean soul has a voluptuous corporeality to rival that of her actual bodily counterpart.

Fig.3. William Blake, *The Reunion of the Soul & the Body.,* c.1805, watercolour sketch, Object 15, 23.7 x 17.5 cm. Courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

[146] Rousseau and Porter, p.22.
[147] Gerard Carruthers, 'Blair, Robert,' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

In a later illustration for the edition, the Blakean soul flies down towards her resurrected (male encoded) body, locking into a fulsome embrace that would have shocked Georgian sensibilities (fig.3).[148] If the bodily nature of the soul had not registered as erotic or immodest with certain readers, the composition of the two figures would have: entwined in each other's arms, the soul balances above the body in a verticality that is undeniably phallic (a pictorial gesture and eroticised semblance that would not have been lost on Blake, nor hidden by him). The body's arms open towards the soul in a womb-like scoop of an embrace, a V-shape position which recurs in Blake's illustrations, notably in his first plate for Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* (1788; 1791 for the illustrated edition), and which further complicates and accentuates the eroticised arrangement and gendered appearance of soul and body. In the former illustration where the departing soul looks back at her sublunary host (fig.2), there is again a phallic physicality and positioning of both forms which undercuts the seeming serenity and solemnity of the scene (fig.2). Blake's rendering of soul and body problematically depicts their "relations", their similarities, their intrinsic connection rather than their differences. Flight is the only distinguishing, aggrandising feature throughout this commission, as it was in Blake's designs for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, but there again the immortal soul, for all its 'ceaseless flight' above its 'gross companion', has a mortal frame (fig.4).[149] Levitation, flying, sky-soaring – all such capabilities are invested in earth-bound forms and substances, like Thel's anthropomorphised cloud and Blake's mythological heroes, Orc and Los, from his Illuminated Books (fig.5). Open to heterodox and dissenting theories, Blake's depiction of soul and body, his very figuring of them both, veers into the unorthodox and problematic even in the very act of illustrating orthodox opinion and a Protestant narrative arc.

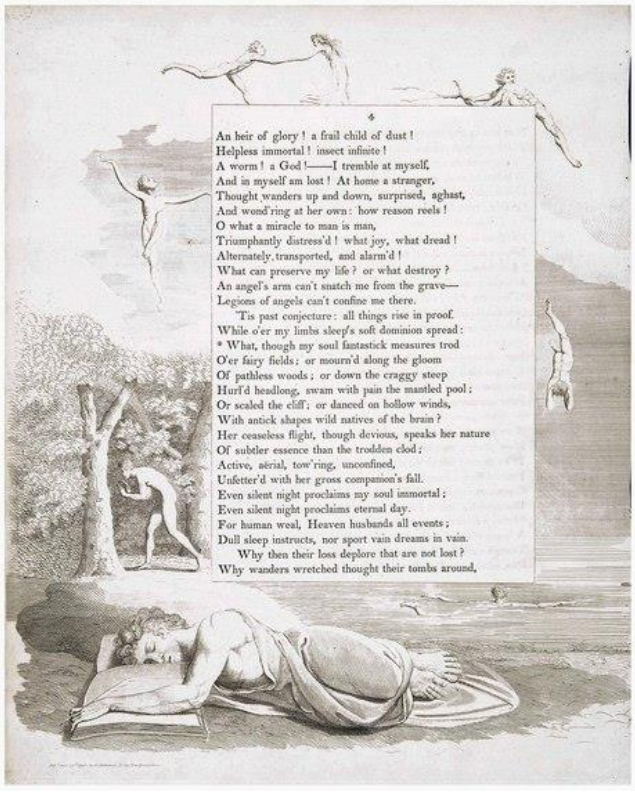

Fig.4. William Blake, illustration for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts,* 1797, engraving, Object 3, 41.0 x 32.1cm, 1797. Courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

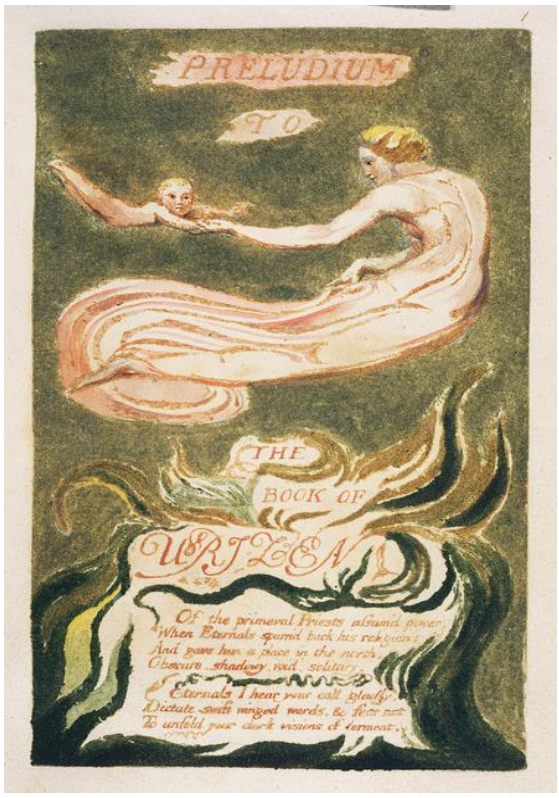

Fig.5. William Blake, *Preludium to The Book of Urizen*, 1794, Object 2, (Bentley 2, Erdman 2, Keynes 2), 16.8 x 10.3 cm. Courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

[148] See the 'Image List' for full citations of all images used throughout the thesis.
[149] Edward Young, *The Complaint, and the Consolation; or Night Thoughts* (London: J. Dodsley, 1768), L99, 102.

Looking closely at the preparatory watercolours for Cromek's edition, it is evident that Blake not only courts but embraces all such "problems" in soul/body dualism. Designed with a classical simplicity reminiscent of contemporaries like John Flaxman and indicative not so much of an orthodox aesthetic as of a fashionable one of the 1790s, the illustrations deceptively pander to what is tasteful, modest and acceptable for late eighteenth-century consumption. The purity of line, particularly in 'The Soul Hovering over the Body' (fig.2), which is characteristic of Blake as a draughtsman and engraver, but which is also typical of a neoclassical aesthetic, therefore works dialogically in conveying the problematic and unproblematic, the unorthodox and orthodox framing of soul and body. Hidden within the clean and characteristically flowing lines are details that classic, and certainly Protestant, notions of the soul would usually not accommodate. The soul, though designed with the same fluid line as the body, has a weight, a solidity and a heaviness about it; this is at once suggestive of the sharp pull towards her former bodily shell and a physique alive and full of erotic potential. This is accentuated in the soul's feminised, full breasted and curved shape, particularly when set against the rigid, flat and prone male body, the austere draped bier and grave-like walls. Initially this could be read as the said Cartesian difference of body and soul, furthered by the latter being swathed in a light blue watercolour wash that echoes the otherworldly landscape beyond the window. Yet does not the fleshy vitality, slight eroticism and overt gendering of the soul suggest otherwise? Does not the soul have some kind of synonymity with the body from which she has just departed? What is more, any possible subtleties of tone and shade used to differentiate the two were further eclipsed by Louis Schiavonetti's fashionably formal etching technique, which saw the elusive and hallucinatory quality of the preparatory drawing lost to the hard, sculptural exactitude of chalcographic transcription (fig.6). In print, body and soul are indistinguishable in their joint solidity, yet the former's inert fleshiness gives greater prominence to the active rotundity of the latter. Use of line, as well as the stylisation of figures, speaks dialogically, highlighting ideologically conventional notions of soul-body duality and, at the same time, heterodox theories of material sameness and symbiosis. Blakean linearity and composition thus feeds into the problematic, pushing it further into sight and forcing spectators and readers to question the conceptual potential, existential significance and substantial similitude of spirit and matter.

Fig.6. William Blake (engraved by Louise Schiavonetti), *The Soul hovering over the Body reluctantly parting with Life*, 1808, engraving, Object 7, (Bentley 435.6), 19.3 x 22.7 cm. Courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

One who took issue with Blake's highlighting of the soul-body problem was Robert Hunt.[150] In his extended review for *The Examiner*, Hunt critically picked, clawed, and gnawed at the 'bones, flesh and drapery' that made up the Blakean soul.[151] From beginning to end of his scathing, reputation-miring review, Hunt lambasts Blake for his 'absurd…literal representation' of the soul. In fact, Hunt's virulent response to Blake's 'contrary' fusion of 'spirit and body' peaks at the possibility that this full-bodied soul borders on the salacious (as suggested in fig.3). To Hunt's mind, Blake's 'libidinous' soul had the capacity to intrude 'itself upon the holiness' of the reader's 'thoughts' and promote the kind of 'obscenity' that countered the 'lessons of religion and morality' originally intended by Blair's 'manly poetry'.[152] Hunt's derision of the semi-clad and occasionally naked soul, with its rollicking rounded lineaments, not only betrays a dislike for heretical religious notions such as enthusiasm or heterodox philosophies like materialism, but attaches a kind of puritanical disgust and guilt to the body, especially when it is inscribed as female. In Hunt's view, to transpose this onto the soul, albeit allegorically, was iconoclasm of the highest kind; a sacrilege only the most 'licentious' mind could commit to paper.

Blake neither subscribed to materialist views nor to religious enthusiasm, and he did not intend to prostitute or pornographize the soul. Instead he was challenging binaries of thinking, implicitly critiquing Cartesian assertions of difference, and Anglo-Protestant assumptions and sensibilities surrounding spirituality, futurity and all that was bodily. His problematic envisioning of the soul-body problem was unproblematic to him and went beyond what Blair or, indeed, Hunt, understood. He attempted to depict the divine essence in its 'spiritual body' or 'imaginative form' (again a characteristic muddling of two substances).[153] Perhaps only a visionary such as himself could envisage such a thing as a 'spiritual body', but his response to the soul/body dilemma, unlike Hunt's, demonstrates how this problematic terrain opened up new ways of considering and realising not just body and soul, but what duality and certainly embodiment meant for women. Whilst Hunt railed at the feminisation, erotization and corporealization of the soul, Blake's illustrations encapsulated the beauty of the dilemma, the relational and individual prospect of duality, and the unashamed aspects of gendered or sexualised forms. His sketch formalises the very real problem and ambivalence facing women in the 1790s. Since women were often associated with corporeality and sexuality – their bodies and minds sexualised and gendered whilst men's were the biologically superior standard of which they fell short – could freedom from both only come in the form and process of disembodiment? Was the body a prison (doubly so with the cultural stigmas of the sexually and corporeally abject being projected onto them) from which only the Christian afterlife could offer liberation? Or was it possible to be "rebodied" in this life, not just the next, and achieve a form of embodiment that freed women from all that held them back socio-politically and physically, psychologically and spiritually? Were souls, as Blake had unintentionally suggested, sexed, gendered, regardless of whether they occupied their mortal frames?

His illustration captured these anxieties and the problems facing eighteenth-century women. Suspended above the corpse, the female inscribed soul was caught in a physical and ontological dilemma, literally hanging between eternal life, as symbolised by the open window, or an effigy-like existence within the grave. On the cusp of inner and outer, the liminal space opened up by the dilemma of soul-body duality, could she find freedom, an opportunity for change, a radical

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[150] G. E. Bentley Jr (ed), *Blake Records* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.258-261. For more on the reception of Blake's illustrations of *The Grave*, see *Blake Records* pp.222-289, as well as Hazard Adams, *William Blake on his Poetry and Painting, A Study of a Descriptive Catalogue, Other Prose Writings and Jerusalem* (London: McFarland, 2011), pp.1-60.
[151] Bentley Jr, p.259.
[152] Bentley Jr, pp.260-261.
[153] Adams, pp.11-15.

dislocation and reconfiguration from a spiritual and bodily life that previously had not been entirely her own to define?

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Blake's preparatory sketch of the hovering soul provides a gateway into Wollstonecraft's own response to dualism. She did not use the soul-body problem to arrive at a position about whether the two entities had a dichotomous or sympathetic relationship. In keeping with Blake's dialogic conception, Wollstonecraft's neither confirmed nor denied specific religious theories – dissenting or otherwise – about spiritual futurity, the Last Judgment, bodily resurrection or desecration. Instead, the soul-body problem gave her various discourses through which to consider the positionality of marginalised bodies, in particular middle- and working-class white women, and their possible spiritual afterlives. Vitalism, Lockean empiricism, Hartleian and Whyttian nervous physiology, Pricean millennialism, Lavaterian physiognomy, Platonic, Cartesian and Kantian philosophy: all held sway and surfaced in her discussions around body and soul, embodiment and disembodiment. In *Rights of Woman*, post-mortem portraits and figuratively caged, abject bodies rival neuro-physiologically fortified and spiritually healthier ones. Women's minds either become shaped by or control the body in a Cartesian relationship returned to by Wollstonecraft in later works. In other writings, like *A Short Residence*, the discourse of vitalism allows the soul to transcend its body, encouraging a bodiless state to the point of pure dissolution amongst natural surroundings. Yet the mode of epistolary writing re-figures and repositions the body before the reader, drawing the surmounting soul back towards its most human form and this most social of activities.

What unfolds throughout Wollstonecraft's work, therefore, is a simultaneous process of disembodiment and embodiment. That is, an unbodying of soul perpetually re-bodied through language, discourse, acculturation and physiological experience. Oscillating between hope and disillusionment, when it comes to perceiving and reconceiving women as embodied subjects, Wollstonecraft discovers the problematical terrain of dualism in her work. Working with and against theoretical conclusions around the soul-body, to the extent that aporia or fissures of anxiety appear in her prose, Wollstonecraft creates fictional female figures whose destinies, akin to their existential and socio-political states, remain worryingly inconclusive. Using theories by Michel Foucault, Elizabeth Grosz and Elizabeth A. Wilson, I will explore this ambivalent and dialogical response to the soul and body, and the dialectical processes of embodiment and disembodiment. Though theories on the history of psychiatry have been criticised and developed since *Madness and Civilization* was first published in 1961, Foucault's observation of confinement in the 'classical' period (Porter and Rousseau's era of Enlightenment), his positioning of psychiatry as a developing European institution that moved across the problematic axis of soul-body dualism, and his philosophical rumination on the rapid repression and literal carceration of all that was unruly and unreasonable by the state, offer important analytical tools with which to assess Wollstonecraft's own understanding of women and the soul/body relationship.[154] Contrary to Grosz's dismissal of Wollstonecraft's framing of corporeality as purely Cartesian, the female encrypted body in the Wollstonecraftian text – polemical, personal, fictional or otherwise – is not only culturally constructed as a carceral entity, but is subject to Foucauldian conceptions of carceration. While corporeality, as already articulated here and in previous chapters, prompts anxiety in Wollstonecraft's thought, it is by no means completely written off or solely seen as *the* problem in the soul-body, embodied-disembodied, dialectic. Body, as much as soul – or mind, which is knowingly employed as a synonym by Wollstonecraft in a fashion not unlike that found in Porter, Rousseau and Foucault – is still part of a liberatory project of proto-feminist reform in

[154] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London: Vintage Books, 1988).

her work. Thus, through short readings of *The Wrongs of Woman: or Maria. A Fragment* (1798) and *A Short Residence*, alongside analysis of the *Rights of Woman*, I will consider the soul-body problem as expressed through the carceral corporeal experiences of the Wollstonecraftian woman.

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Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* cuts right into the soul-body dilemma.[155] Examining Western philosophy's 'conceptual blind spot' towards corporeal form and its relegation of the body to a negated, inferior 'mode' of epistemological enquiry, Grosz sets out to reverse this by challenging the dangerous dichotomies that spring from and are predicated on soul-body dualism.[156] Form-matter, sense-sensibility, reason-passion, temporality-spatiality, psychology-physiology, culture-nature, male-female: all such polarizations have been, for Grosz, unwittingly absorbed, unquestionably accepted and unfavourably applied, not just by male philosophers, but by feminist theorists too. This indiscriminate absorption and reapplication have maintained – in the field of philosophy at least – a steady hierarchy whereby one of the polarized pairings is denoted the privileged term while the other is its 'suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart.'[157] For Grosz, body has been that derided, discarded and reluctantly engaged subordinate. Furthermore, it is a term often uncritically enmeshed with the feminine. This relegation, despite attempts by feminist scholarship to centre and redefine corporeality, thereby decentring and challenging its historically misogynistic theorisation, still exists and carries with it serious repercussions for the everyday life of women and other marginalised peoples.

Elizabeth A. Wilson, writing in her more recent work *Gut Feminisms* (2015), similarly identifies the continual relegation, both in philosophy and feminist thought and scholarship, of the bodily to an inferior position.[158] Anchoring her ideas in the thought of Joseph Litvak, Wilson discusses how much feminist theory has 'forged its analytic sophistication' in 'distinctions' between 'things that are complex and things that are reductive, things that are political and things that are conventional, things that are theoretical and things that are empirical.'[159] Using Litvak's reading of oppositions between 'the sophisticated' and the 'vulgarly literal', Wilson discusses the distance between the sophisticated, which is usually parsed as complex, politically minded theory, with the vulgar, mainly defined through 'corporeal events' (particularly the 'appetites'), which are deemed more literal and 'less cultured' and 'symbolic'.[160] Wilson's identification of this binary in feminist philosophical thought echoes Grosz's frustration with an antithesis which has been historically ascribed to mind-body relations and unwaveringly accepted and reabsorbed into feminist thinking, much to the detriment of its own political campaigns. Prioritising the 'finesse' of theory and regarding 'biology as peripheral to…political interests', feminist scholars run the risk of ignoring the 'intra-action', 'embeddedness' and 'patternment', to use Wilson's terms, between mind and body, nature and culture, the political and biological.[161]

Both Wilson and Grosz have their own theories of how to overcome or 'reformulate' such binaries. Wilson focuses on the periphery system, specifically the gut, to highlight the 'intra-actions' between the neurological and the biological, and the impact pharmaceuticals have on both. In doing so, she asks what this could mean for feminist visions of future bodies and minds – or bodied minds and mindful bodies. Grosz, on the other hand, explores the history behind

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[155] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
[156] Grosz, p.3.
[157] Grosz, p.3.
[158] Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (London: Duke University Press, 2015), p.32.
[159] Wilson, p.32.
[160] Wilson, p.32.
[161] Wilson, p.13.

the mind-body binary, spot-lighting the theoretical departures or challenges to it. Looking at the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Lacan, Callois, Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva, amongst others, Grosz departs from this destructive and reductive dichotomy, and tries to create a feminist corporeality that embraces all that is biologically ascribed 'feminine' (experiences like menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, menopause etc.). She seeks to centre the messiness of the body with the 'finesse' of the mind, using the mathematical concept of the Mobius strip, the twisting of which stresses the mind-body's interrelatedness, its objective inextricable synonymity but also subjective interfacial relationship and mode of relating through sensory experience.[162] In other words, Grosz problematizes soul-body dualism – indeed all bifurcations that form culture and inform material existence – divesting it of hierarchal thought or association in order to expose its process of mutual implication, its fruitful and disruptive indeterminacy, its coordinated inscription on a body that is at once mind and vice versa. Whilst Wilson examines the biological and psychological through the paradigm of pharmaceutical examples and with evidence of biological data, Grosz goes back to Western male philosophers whom she sees as having had a definitive hand in solidifying this dichotomy in Western thought.

It is in relation to these works, rather than those by contemporary feminist theorists, that Grosz situates her argument about 'embodied subjectivity or psychical corporeality'. In doing so, she sets herself apart, and adrift, from important feminist voices and views of the body – and is very much at risk of doing exactly what prominent male philosophers have done for centuries: excluding the ideas of women, *on* women. When setting out her aims for a new corporeal feminism, she creates categories of diverse feminist theorists and philosophers who, for her, have denied the kind of feminist corporeality she envisages in her book. She lists three groups: 'Egalitarian' feminists, 'Social Constructionists', and those whom she groups into 'Sexual Difference'.[163] If those categorised as feminists of 'Sexual Difference' (the group most contemporary and influential to Grosz's ideas, consisting of Butler, Cixous, Spivak, Schor and Wittig to name a few) see the body as a 'social and discursive object', then the thinkers included in the first group, which consists of the most early proto-feminist voices, see it as an issue, an obstacle in the way of political 'rights and privileges'.[164] Into this group of 'liberal, conservative, humanist, eco- feminists', Grosz has placed Wollstonecraft. At first glance this does not seem odd given the feminists she has been grouped with: Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone. But when reading Grosz's reasons as to why the ideas of these thinkers fall short of her corporeal feminism, it begs the question as to whether she has actually read the work of Wollstonecraft.

According to Grosz, feminists that make up the 'Egalitarian Feminism' group see the female body as 'an inherent limitation on women's capacity for equality.'[165] This includes the biological 'specificities' of the female-encoded body (menstruation, pregnancy etc.). But in both de Beauvoir and Wollstonecraft's key works, it is not the female body that inherently lacks or betrays any limitation, but the culture which reads it as such, inscribing onto the said form its own limited and limiting value system, and constructing around it a world which actively treats it as inferior. Wollstonecraft's anxiety about specific bodily experiences, in particular sexuality, is certainly present in her work, but, like any limitation imposed on the biology, psychology or intellectuality of women, these anxieties are not essential to the female body itself. As evaluated in the previous chapter on neurophysiology and gender, Wollstonecraft's refrain 'mind and body' demonstrates the importance the latter has in the liberation of women from socio-political subordination. She not only calls for the improvement of the mental, but also the physical health

[162] Grosz, p.36.
[163] Grosz, pp.15-19.
[164] Grosz, p.15.
[165] Grosz, p.15.

of women, and with increasing understanding of how one impacts on the other. Regardless of her high regard for reason – the mind is still the superior term in the dichotomous pairing, that much Grosz has right – it is still patently untrue that Wollstonecraft sees the body as 'biologically determined and fundamentally alien to cultural and intellectual achievement', or that the female body's 'vulnerability or fragility' is partly to blame for 'women's social subordination' and justifies their 'oppression.'[166]

Chapters from *Rights of Woman* on Rousseau, Gregory and Fordyce prove that Wollstonecraft is well aware of how cultural and intellectual achievement interacts with and impacts on the female body – indeed any gendered and racialized body. Her discourse proves that she sees it as a culturally vulnerable and shaped organism, one that needs education or a (reworked) process of socialisation, in order for the body – in all its neural, biological, sexual, social, cultural and political complexity and capacity – to be the best and freest possible for women and society. In Chapter Five, Wollstonecraft despairs over the sexual character young girls are given in Rousseau's *Émile* ('In short, they were treated like women almost from their very birth', p.154); and she decries Fordyce's 'declamatory periods' (p.167) and repackaged Rousseauian 'eloquence' when producing didactic literature that encourages women to be 'lovely', 'graceful' and like 'angels' (p.169). For her, conduct books and pedagogical treatises by these writers as well as works by contemporary women authors Hester Thrale Piozzi, Germaine de Staël and Genlis 'enervated' the 'understanding' (p.170) of women, pandering merely to their 'person' and leaving the body insufficiently constituted for both earthly (and spiritual) life (p.158). As for Grosz's argument about her denigration of 'natural' specificities unique to the 'female body', none can be found, especially when it comes to lactation and pregnancy, both of which she championed by encouraging breast feeding (as evinced in her private letters and in Chapter Nine of *Rights of Woman*, p.227*)* and framing motherhood not so much as a hindrance to accessing the 'public, social sphere', but as a way into it. Dysphoria for what these bodily specifics leave women open to is definitely evident across Wollstonecraft's polemical, fictional and personal writing, but again, the "mess" of the female encoded body is, when fleetingly addressed in her work, never deemed as flawed or the flaw in her plan to secure political rights and parity.

Before presenting detailed analysis of Wollstonecraft's relationship to the body in light of Grosz's remarks, it is important to note how the latter views the former as a philosopher. In an explanatory note to her introduction, Grosz observes, via the thought of Michèle Le Doeuff, how some women have 'gained access to the discipline of philosophy…largely through a theoretico-amorous relationship to a "great" male philosopher rather than to the discipline of philosophy itself.'[167] She continues to list 'Eloise and Abelard, Wollstonecraft and Mill, Beauvoir and Sartre' as examples of such 'philosophical couples' where the 'female "partner"' may be presumed to take on the 'role of body to the male philosopher's position as mind.'[168] There is much that perplexes about this statement, not least that Grosz presumably mistakes Godwin for John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth-century philosopher, whose work *The Subjection of Women* (1869) would not have been written were it not for his correspondence with Harriet Thompson – *not* Wollstonecraft.[169] Mill, writing three quarters of a century after Wollstonecraft, fails to consider or reference her in his work. Even more pertinent is the fact that Wollstonecraft wrote her own political philosophy before marrying Godwin – or, indeed, before being a part of any 'theoretico-amorous' relationship. All of these facts remain unaccounted for by Grosz and cannot account for her arguing along these erroneous lines in the first place. To then place the female in the partnership – a dichotomous one again, according to Grosz's own emphasis – solely in the 'role

[166] Grosz, p.16.
[167] Grosz, p.211.
[168] Grosz, p.212.
[169] Walters, p.45.

of body' is unsettling considering the arguments made so persuasively and researched so rigorously earlier in *Volatile Bodies*. Here, in the small type of Grosz's endnotes, the historical misogyny inherent to the problematic soul-body bifurcation, dogs her own thought.

Rights of Woman may go into fierce debate with philosophical patriarchs but in no way is it a result of a 'theoretico-amorous' tryst with one of them. Contrary to Grosz's reading of the soul-body problem in Wollstonecraft's work, it is the acculturation or socialisation of the female-encoded body and its significant ramifications for the minds or souls of women that Wollstonecraft critiques throughout much of her repertoire. Contemporary scholars Barbara Taylor and Sylvana Tomaselli have acknowledged the place of socialisation in developing this female-inscribed corporeality in Wollstonecraft's work. Defining Wollstonecraft as a 'dualist' in her latest book, Tomaselli nevertheless moves away from Grosz's 'Egalitarian' theorisation of the Wollstonecraftian body.[170] Instead, she cogently observes how bodily and mental ineptitude are inextricably linked to inadequate education in much of Wollstonecraft's polemical and didactic writing. When outlining Wollstonecraft's opposition to the physically prohibitive socialisation of young girls, Tomaselli observes that false 'conceptions of their nature and beauty' – that is, the false cultural and pedagogical theories about women's bodies – underlie this denial of exercise, resulting in 'weakened bodies and minds'.[171] Similarly Taylor alights on Wollstonecraft's understanding of the social construction of bodies throughout her scholarship. Although she draws close to agreeing with Grosz's 'Egalitarian grouping', Taylor recognises, as does Barker-Benfield before her, that the culture of a 'feminine' associated sensibility had serious consequences for women.[172] In her chapter on the religious roots of Wollstonecraft's philosophy, Taylor claims that the latter's adoption of a religio-philosophical and proto-feminist approach of disembodiment, one where 'profane bodily distinctions' were exempt and the sexlessness of the soul was incontrovertible, was a direct response to the processes of acculturation and socialisation to which women's bodies and minds were subject.[173] The 'soul destroying' form of 'fashionable femininity' that Taylor traces in Wollstonecraft's writing takes us back to the body, but also the 'fashions' and cultural fashioning that forms it. What both scholars highlight in their respective responses was Wollstonecraft's awareness of how the body often bore the brunt of dominant cultural thinking, expectations and overall conditioning. A new corporeality and intellectuality, which Tomaselli defines as a 'harmonious whole' and 'totality of mind and body', would subsequently emerge in Wollstonecraft's work, as a direct response to and contravention of this 'fashionable' yet poorly socially constructed form.[174]

In *Rights of Woman*, therefore, two contrapuntal forms of corporeality are presented: the body and mind of a woman almost literally held hostage to a reductive cultural ideology (by way of Rousseau, Fordyce, Gregory et al) that deems women little more than affective and affected, intellectually weak and disease-prone, bodily creatures, and the concordantly balanced and autonomous body and mind of a woman who nurtures both, first to the empowerment and benefit of herself, then for the greater good of society. These two forms are presented rather antagonistically on the page, a kind of oppositional pairing of types to borrow Grosz's phrase, where the acculturated female form – that is, one whose body and mind has been subject to cultural degradation and carceration – is the lesser of the two. An example of this comparative competition between the two corporeal types can be seen in Chapter Eight of *Rights of Woman*, where Wollstonecraft sets up the carceral type against her reformed, vindicated version. In one

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[170] Sylvana Tomaselli, *Wollstonecraft: Philosophy, Passion, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), p.100.
[171] Tomaselli, p.101.
[172] Taylor, p.98.
[173] Taylor, p.98.
[174] Tomaselli, pp.101, 103.

paragraph she disparagingly describes the female-inscribed carceral body as an enervated form, wasted away by 'luxuriousness' and excessive 'pleasure' through wealth, restricted to her 'person' because of the opinions and desires of men, and, through a 'tottering' though judicially endorsed dependency on her husband, reduced to little more than a 'cypher' (p.226). Within this paragraph alone, the carceral body betrays its abjection and continual subjugation, and is whittled down to a virtual and inconsequential nothing. Immediately beneath this description, Wollstonecraft responds with a counter figure, a reformed bodily type who is self-respecting, 'independent', 'rational' and discharges her duties both as a private and political subject, especially in the role of 'mother' (p.226). Absent from this second description is the corps of manhood, whether in the guise of husband or court of law; rather, there is a politically active subject, who is morally and intellectually upright in her commitment to the virtue found in herself, her child and the surrounding society. The status of citizen renders this body both public and private (p.226); she redoubles outwards in the socio-political sphere by paradoxically focusing inwards on her own 'duty' to God, self, home and nation (p.226). Thus, two psychically corporeal and corporeally psychic types emerge. Naturally, anxiety about the culturally incarcerated form accrues and the carceral body is passionately attacked as a result. But in no way does Wollstonecraft fail to understand the crucial interrelationship of body and mind/soul, or the susceptibility that both betray to cultural pressures and strictures, despite Grosz arguing otherwise. If anything, the soul-body dialectic that operates in *Rights of Woman* is proof of her processing, interacting with and against, and reworking (for herself and her readership) past and contemporary theories of this problem and what it meant and could mean for women.

What holds our fascination is the bodily or embodied aspect of both psycho-corporeal types in *Rights of Woman*, especially that which is detrimentally acculturated. Using carceral metaphors, references and descriptors, Wollstonecraft underscores how current culture – through fictional and didactic literature, philosophy and neurophysiology, and in turn the social customs, legal dictates and political precedents that inform and are informed by them – shrinks, belittles, curbs, confines and, in effect, incarcerates women's minds and bodies, and quite often imprisons the former through the latter. *Rights of Woman* is peppered with such carceral figurations; from her letter to Talleyrand-Périgord outlining the 'coercion' (p.68) involved in denying women equal educational and political rights in France, and subsequently 'immuring' them in the 'dark' of domesticity (p.67), to her problematic and culturally resonant return to the slave-tyrant binary, carceral metaphors and descriptions abound. Frequently these descriptions expand to actual spatial metaphors of carceration that involve cages, mirrors and domestic interiors. Early in the *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft complains of the 'corrupt state of society' contributing to 'enslave women by cramping their understandings and sharpening their senses' (p.88). Initially it is the mind that suffers a kind of carceral compression or 'cramping' to use Wollstonecraft's exact verb, which immediately conjures manacles or irons fastened around the mind, furthered again by the verb 'enslave'. It is the mind that undergoes a very bodily form of repression, punishment and pain at the hands of a corrupt society, but it is the bodily senses that take the lead, grow and gain mental attributes in being 'sharpened' as a consequence. As she complains in the same chapter: '…in the education of women, the cultivation of understanding is always subordinate to…some corporeal accomplishment…' (p.88). This inversion and reapplication of mind-body attributes and experiences not only demonstrates Wollstonecraft's interactionist conception of soul-body duality, the 'harmonious whole' as described by Tomaselli, but conveys her concern around the imbalance of the two when women lack proper education. Here, mind becomes the de-emphasised term to the emphasised body, a realignment and redistribution of power Wollstonecraft is not comfortable with and which cannot, in her own mind, result in liberation or a disposal of the tyrant-slave dialectic that springs from such an inequality.

Far from being anti-corporeality, however, Wollstonecraft is critical of the over-association of women with the body. She criticises a body that is sexed or a culturally engendered and gendered form, as well as the overly-sexualised body 'only designed by sweet attractive grace…to gratify the senses of man' (p.84). She condemns the infantilised and subsequently physically weaker and dependent body by which men attempt to keep women 'in a state of childhood' (p.85). She also censures an ostensibly "over sensitised" but really desensitised form that inhibits the development of the mind: women's 'senses are inflamed' but 'their understandings neglected…' (p.130). She fully cautions against and confounds the culturally prevailing and gendered notion that '…man was made to reason, woman to feel…' (p.133). Her denouncement of this acculturated body – the psycho-corporeality she wishes women to liberate themselves from – is not without its problems. It reveals Wollstonecraft's anxiety about sexuality and appearance, about women who knowingly subscribe to and thrive under cultural and socio-political oppression, and about a classed, racialized, gendered body that paradoxically gains power, a "semblance" of freedom, through its own subordination. These concerns, which will be explored at greater length in subsequent chapters, are underpinned not just by what the mind suffers as a direct consequence of such a culturally saturated and shaped corporeality, but by what the body physically experiences too. Culturally developed to be 'pleasing' yet inferior to men, the female-encoded body runs the risk of physiological underdevelopment. Even when the understanding is 'subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment' and 'enervated by confinement' the body 'is prevented from attaining that grace and beauty which relaxed half-formed limbs never exhibit' (p.88). Denied an appropriate education (or one at all), encouraged to focus narrowly on the attributes of appearance rather than their intellects or their physiological health, women's minds and bodies suffer.

This is the crippling circularity of the mind-body conundrum to which women are condemned. To focus on the body – or rather to adhere to what your culture projects onto and expects of it – results in mental and physical regression and repression:

> Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison. Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give a character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the hour. (p.112)

Here Wollstonecraft metaphorically frames the body as a 'gilt cage', a 'prison' only fit for an animal. A frequently employed trope across philosophy and literature, from Plato and Socrates to contemporary authors Laurence Sterne and Blake, the 'body as cage' figure is not only reanimated by Wollstonecraft with characteristic wit and satirical verve, but united to the understanding that through socialisation the corporeal *becomes* a type of captivity.[175] Regression and repression are taken to an extreme and re-emphasised through the spatial parameters of

[175] The episode of the caged starling crying "'I can't get out – I can't get out'" in front of Sterne's auto-fictional protagonist, Yorick, became an iconic example of moral feeling in the late eighteenth century, with authors from Wollstonecraft to Jane Austen (in *Mansfield Park*) referencing this moment. In his edition, editor Paul Goring notes that the word 'starling' plays on the dialect of 'starnel', 'starn' and 'Sterne', thereby demonstrating the connection between the bird and the author himself, as exemplified through the author's family heraldry. This suggests the caged starling episode is a re-enactment of the age-old dilemma between spirit and body, as much as it is a warning of the oppressive perils of state violence and imprisonment. See Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, (ed) Paul Goring (London: Penguin, 2005), pp.69-73, 129. Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' similarly plays with the metaphor of the body as cage, though with quintessential Blakean esotericism and ambiguity; and Plato's triadic soul is a prisoner of the body (head, heart and stomach specifically) in both his *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus and Critias*, (trans) Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.34, 28-9, which I discuss more below.

corporeality itself. The 'cramping of the understanding' mentioned earlier in the chapter by Wollstonecraft has taken a dramatically pessimistic turn, with the 'mind shaping itself to the body', thus rendering the latter a tyrant torturously inflicting its "will" upon the former. Intellectual growth – thanks to a poor education and a cultural over-emphasis on bodily appearance – leaves the mind not only closed and cowed, but isolated, insular and incarcerated. Unable to rove or 'soar on the wing of contemplation' (p.84), unable to benefit from the kind of external (political and professional) 'pursuits' that take man out of the domestic domain, the minds of women are 'confined' and curtailed to temporal concerns. There is a sense that woman has become her own gaol and gaoler in one, even though both she and society have the keys to unlock and reverse such conditioning, thereby releasing her from a reductive and reducing condition. And there is a sense, once again, that mind-body relations and power dynamics have been inverted and that this is inhumanely yet all too customarily connected to a wider imbalance and inversion amongst the genders – and gendered bodies. Man here is a complete and autonomous whole, one whose mind is open because his prospects and aspects are; woman, as a kind of monstrous and malfunctioned division of psyche and soma, is both intellectually and physically stunted, because any prospects or varying aspects are denied.

Of course, Wollstonecraft's denouncement of this culturally constructed body evinces signs of female misogyny and what Joyce Zonana has termed 'feminist orientalism'.[176] Power, when not granted in the form of equal opportunities and rights, must be secured through other means, and for women whose bodies are that means of social currency, the body-as-gaol turns into the body-as-theatre, the body-as-zoo, the body burlesqued in every sense of the word:

> …confined…in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch (p.125).

Strutting and flitting around niche spaces – their own bodily spatiality as well as their domestic domains – women resemble something akin to rare and radiant foreign birds, to those imported parrots, cockatoos or parakeets whose bright and decorative plumage thrills the onlooker and owner, charms the fee-paying spectator, but denies the very liberty the bird yearns for and the liberties it has been taught to emulate. There is a sense in the phrase 'feathered race' that Wollstonecraft could be invoking indigenous Americans too, some of whom visited Britain before and after the American Revolution and whose presence was problematically visible in the form of objects (weapons, clothing, musical instruments, even human scalps) in private and public collections (for example, those by Sir Hans Sloane as well as Mrs Salmon's Waxwork).[177] In this light, the carceral female body is at once conflated with and implicated in the treatment of colonial conceptions of indigenous bodies. But initially the extended metaphor leans towards evoking literal exotic birds, rather than the exoticised forms of indigenous peoples. That such birds were often associated with the menageries of the rich and aristocratic, particularly the French Sun-King Louis XIV, earlier in the century, would not have been lost on Wollstonecraft.[178] That caged animals were a figure of conspicuous consumption, a signifier of

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[176] Joyce Zonana, 'The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*' in *Signs*, 18 (Spring 1993), pp.592-617. See my bibliography for the URL to this article.

[177] Troy Bickham, '"A Conviction of the Reality of Things": Material Culture, North American Indians and Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39 (Fall 2005), pp.29-47, pp.29-30, p.31-34.

[178] King Louis XIV was renowned for installing the Royal Menagerie of Versailles in the palace's gardens. A recent exhibition explores the King and his subsequent dynasty's connections to animals through historical documents, paintings, the decor of the palace and more. Jean Cotelle's painting *Vue de l'entrée du bosquet du Labyrinthe avec des nymphes des amours pregnant des oiseaux dans leurs filets* (1688-1693), captures the exotic birds both associated with and kept there. Peter Sahlins' book, *1688: The Year of the Animal* (Paris: Zone Books, 2017), goes into extraordinary detail about the year the King officially installed his menagerie and its impact on court culture and France as a whole (the menagerie was built in 1664 but populated with animals in 1668). See his Introduction and Part 1 of the book

status and power, was well established and mocked by satirists of the time.[179] Exotic animals occupied an unusual position on a spectrum of access: on the one hand, they were considered foreign and strange, particularly to the fee-paying visitors of zoos, who would see an exotic entity emblematic and celebratory of Georgian imperialistic power and might. On the other hand, these animals were familiar to those who could afford to own and home them; another luxury and indicator of their own direct admittance to or control of colonially embedded and enforced economies. In satirising women as caged animals, specifically caged birds, Wollstonecraft highlights the political and cultural economy women's bodies were implicated in and subject to. She mocks the supposed superiority that these rarities symbolically encapsulate and enunciate at the expense of physical autonomy and political liberty, and she parodies the economy of marriage, showing it to be tantamount to that of foreign commerce and trade. Caged in a body that is deemed socially alluring and lucrative to the owner, women are exotic and quixotic fantasies, feathered fetishes whose only cognitive and bodily capacities reside in their limited and mimetic abilities.

That this bodily cage stalked the line between familiarity and unfamiliarity was not incidental. Much like exotic animals, the carceral female body is tamed, domesticated, subjugated by the male *because* it is perceived as inherently other, monstrous, and in turn dangerous, deficient, delinquent – yet, in that otherness, alluring. Like a foreign bird, the body in all its outer and sensory evocative apparel captivates, stirs, and possibly inspires; but it is because of this very difference that it must be overcome, trained and contained lest *it* overcomes, trains and contains the dominant other and (male) owner. In this and the colonial associations of exotic birds (most of which were acquired from South Asia and Africa in the 1700s), Wollstonecraft's delineation of the carceral body draws close to the feminist orientalism Zonana persuasively describes. It is implied, in the parodic and figurative overlay of an exotic non-human animal body, that foreignness is also part of the carceral problem. It is not only the metaphorical proximity to consumed foreign goods, bodies and values that renders the carceral form deeply problematic, but also the consumption of and economic dependency on them.[180] Stalking in mock majesty from perch to perch, women are problematically and inversely at the top and bottom of this tainted economic and politically endorsed hierarchy. Carceral bodies, in their social constructivism, are as much ideologically inscribed as they are economically enmeshed.

At once symbolically invested with, yet politically divested of, these powers, the carceral body mimes, parrot-like, the freedoms and prerogatives it is, in actuality, denied. Like othered and colonialized bodies from foreign lands and seas, the carceral body is only able to imitate decarceration – or the behaviours and powers it denotes – through uncanny mimesis. Perceived and constructed under the lens of the (male) social, the carceral female-encoded body imitates power without ever fully inheriting or embodying it. It is this imitation, which Wollstonecraft satirically mocks, that poses a threat to the social and political order and wider body. As Homi K Bhabha argues in his renowned essay, 'Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' (1984), mimicry may be evidence of colonial socialisation and subjugation; of the coloniser's effort to enforce cultural and ethnic codes at the erasure of others, and of the

(pp.11-47, 49-51) for an overview of this cultural and scientific phenomenon. It is possible Wollstonecraft would have been familiar with this through the work of physician and First Painter Charles Le Brun by way of Lavater, whose work she had translated from the German at the time.

[179] See Christopher Plumb, 'Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Britain', PhD thesis submitted to The University Manchester, 2010, for more examples of satirical depictions of exotic animals, pp.13, 18.

[180] In *The Spectator*, Steele and Addison satirise women's involvement in Britain's commercial activity through their consumption of imported goods: 'The Single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of an hundred Climates…' See 'No.69, Saturday, May 19, 1711' in *The Spectator*, Vol. 1, (ed) Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Also, see Bond's note to the same piece, where Addison writes for *Tatler* describing 'Woman as a beautiful Romantick Animal' because of her elaborate dress.

coloniser's paradoxical inability to accept the colonised other because of the 'slippage' of their "otherness". However, it also points towards and creates a 'strategy', an 'excess', a 'difference' that actively threatens to destabilise the inculcated culture and system of colonial powers.[181] In its doubleness – its avowal of one culture whilst in the presence of a reappearing repressed other – mimicry appears a threat to those who violently enforce it. Without erasing the groups and bodies that have been subjected to the violence of colonisation, Wollstonecraft's carceral female-encoded body – as an exoticised orientalist form which approximates majesty and significance without properly attaining it – shares something with Bhabha's mimical other. In being denied her status as a whole, same, sane or an acceptable subject, Wollstonecraft's incarcerated female body shares something with Bhabha's subjugated colonialized one. Oppressed and imprisoned, she still leans beyond the bars and assumes an air of power; though fettered, in Wollstonecraft's mind, the carceral body still suspiciously wields a sceptre, even if it's a false and fantastical one. In this assumption of cultural and social power, her otherness, her excess, her unauthorised imitative appropriation of this very significance, authority, supremacy, is a threat *and* a farce. In its very farcicalness lies the threat not just to undo the hegemonic culture and power structures it imitates, but to expose them as the real farce. What could be more farcical and threatening than an oppressed woman aping the male-defined powers and methods of control she herself is oppressed by? What could be more of a threat than this travesty of power actually overpowering those that seek to overpower her? Unable to acknowledge the subversive power of this inverse force (the mimical trace that at once evinces sameness and difference), Wollstonecraft's misogynist and orientalist-tinged satire rhetorically cages the encaged body she ultimately desires to liberate. Like the heart of the coquette, Wollstonecraft is not interested in the political strategies or potentiality of the carceral body. Similitude does not approximate cultural, moral or spiritual verisimilitude.

Yet it is the potential of the travesty posed by the carceral form that threatens to destabilise Wollstonecraft's own prose. Using colourful rhetorical tropes and orientalist figures such as the woman as caged exotic bird or body, Wollstonecraft attempts, like the colonial writers of Bhabha's essay, to distinguish and extinguish the feigned power of female encoded carceral corporeality by highlighting its mock speciality. In doing so, her feminist orientalist tone and purpose buckles; the rhetorical power of the trope flares up and the seduction of the other, in all her deviant ability and plumped up, plumed potency, inspires in the reader the very interest and appeal Wollstonecraft cautions against. The bodily excess and difference of this disempowered carceral form evades the satirical carceration of her prose and slips through the curtailment of her caustic and cautionary words. That the carceral body still has signifying power is seen in the problematic employment of further orientalist tropes in *Rights of Woman*. This is seen in Chapter Two, when she argues that a feigned 'sickly delicacy' and weakness are some of the 'arts' befitting women who are part of a 'seraglio' (p.95). Again, in Chapter Five, Wollstonecraft returns to this trope when quoting Rousseau's statement encouraging women to cultivate their 'talents' like a 'Circassian cultivates hers to fit her for the Haram of an Eastern Bashaw' thereby rendering her pleasing to her 'future husband' (p.159). And later in the same chapter, she carries through Rousseau's orientalist line of thought when interrogating his misogynistic theory of socialisation for women (p.164).[182] Such tropes, though clearly widespread amongst European thinkers and writers, are continually used by Wollstonecraft not to denounce their use of them

[181] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' in *October*, 28 (Spring 1984), pp.125-133.

[182] On p.100 of *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft also cites 'the vulgar tale of Mahomet's coffin', a European myth dating back to the early medieval era, in which the prophet Muhammed is said to have filled his coffin with loadstones before his death and requested a magnet to be suspended above so that it appeared to float – or that the coffin levitated because neither the heavens nor the earth would accept it. Again, such citations surrounding Islamic culture and history demonstrate the extent to which Wollstonecraft was aware and all too ready to consume European tropes and orientalist myths.

but to interrogate their endorsement of the behavioural, bodily and social positionality erroneously associated with female bodies. Of course, her denouncement and debunking of this type of body when citing orientalist and Islamophobic tropes – whether in argument with Rousseauian ideas or when putting forward her own – is not always successful. Such is the persuasive and pervasive capital and sway of this trope which Wollstonecraft cannot avoid in her own satirical and feminist orientalist deployment of it. This paradoxical and problematic employment of socially and culturally constructed bodies – which will be examined in depth in the next section – disrupts authorial intentions, further problematizing, complicating and, of course, disrupting soul-body duality.

What Wollstonecraft finds truly disconcerting about the carceral body is the risk it poses to the soul. Cited above as a 'mind' 'roaming' and 'adorning' its 'gilt cage', in the figure of subaltern bodies and "exotic" entities the soul is virtually absent. Imprisoning yet aggrandised spaces are synecdoche for and catalyse a state of soullessness. Wollstonecraft's orientalist trope goes beyond allusive exotic birds to an imagined middle eastern harem, one where the carceral female-inscribed body is pure frivolity, vanity and decoration, the sparkly surface strata without the spiritual substratum:

> …they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures. – Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio! (p.74)

Here the seraglio is configured as the culturally and politically incarcerating space of the female-encoded body. Physically and morally weak – Wollstonecraft's equivalent of soullessness – the carceral female form conjures and approximates an imagined area seen by the British orientalist imaginary as one of corrupting and stultifying patriarchal pleasure. The mention of animals not only infantilises the female form, but degrades through its associative bodily qualities of touch, smell, size and objectification (the antipathy to the vulgar, of which Wilson writes, is present here). The paradox of the pet – again an indicator of wealth and fashion in the above quotation through its conjuration of the image of the lapdog – is that its rhetorical citing demeans and diminishes the owner, aligning her body with its own when it is supposed to symbolically and metonymically elevate her (the character of Eliza from *Mary* and her former employer Lady Kingsborough, both of whom lavished an almost extravagant amount of affection on their pet dogs whilst their own children remained neglected, confirm this too). Of course, the fact that this quotation is syntactically adapted from *Hamlet*, where the wronged Prince of Denmark feigns madness in front of Ophelia and spouts all manner of misogynistic aspersions about women, would not be lost on an eighteenth-century reader. 'You jig and amble and you lisp, you nick-name God's creatures and make your wantonness ignorance…,' Hamlet accuses Ophelia and women in general.[183] Bathetically referring to Eve's inability to name creatures – unlike Adam – Hamlet highlights the pseudo forms of authority women assume, and indeed, the mockery they subsequently make of divine order and power itself. In both quotations, there is a sense that women are not only play acting at empowerment through its commodified, bodily accoutrements (dress, paint, pet; jig, amble, lisp) but acting out a certain kind of womanhood (coded as Eastern in Wollstonecraft's formulation). This redoubles the aforementioned ideas of mimicry as slippage, as a travesty of "authentic" markers of bodily autonomy, personhood, national identity and political subjectivity to the colonising and orientalist mind-set. This too-much body that is also a not-enough body, becomes enshrined in the carceral construction it aims rhetorically to strike down. The orientalist's seraglio as a corporeal form and a corporeally forming space is thus overlaid with white genteel carceral female forms to signify what is as much absent as the body is present: the soul.

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[183] Act 3.1, 144-5 in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, (eds) Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

Wollstonecraft's proto-feminist orientalism reminds us of Wilson and Grosz's argument concerning the kind of structurally definitive dichotomous pairings springing from mind-body dualism. No doubt influenced by Rousseau (as discussed on p.159 of *Rights of Woman*) and Johnson's *Rasselas* in her understanding of the harem and its inhabiting brown bodies, Wollstonecraft feeds into widespread and misconceived dichotomies of East and West, and their respective associations with the body and soul, pleasure and reason, regression and progression, and barbarism and civility. Though her orientalist formation of the white female-encoded body (overlaid by an Eastern one) looks back to an inferiority stemming from cultural and socio-political forces – and not biology per se – Wollstonecraft's occidental carceral form is, in this light, racist, marginalising and erasing of the lived reality of brown female bodies for rhetorical gain. Wollstonecraft cannot conceive of the harem – a space devoted to and ruled by female-centred, matriarchal-led communities – as one where soul and body potentially thrive in a harmony uncommon to Eurocentric thought and reductive distinctions. Historically, in Islamic cultures, 'harem' not only means separate or private 'living quarters' for women and children, but also refers to those women living in these spaces.[184] Space and bodies and the behaviours they mutually foster, collide in the term.

The conflation of women, space and behaviour is also evinced in the etymological history of the word 'harem'. Originating from the Egyptian word 'harim', which meant 'women', and hermeneutically and phonologically linked to the Arabic word 'haram' meaning 'forbidden', 'harem' simultaneously defined the corporeal culture of Middle Eastern women (and, in turn, men) and was defined by them.[185] It was a space forbidden to men other than the patriarch (a male leader, husband, father) and only for the female relatives of any household; it was a space that enshrined its own rules upon bodies and vice versa, and it was a space that demarcated outer and inner to men, and was eternally internalised and embodied by women whenever they left the physical premises of the harem. It was also a term denoting a bodily and moral culture also shaped by and for women, and evidently practised by them through its broader and more universally ascribed rules of haram (what not to touch, eat, do, say) which applied to all genders. As the etymological history and connotations suggest, this may have originated in an autocratic or aristocratic patriarchy, but it also implicitly opens up a certain amount of liberty, autonomy, collective self-definition, collaboration and regulation amongst the women who were part of a harem and kept 'haram'/ 'harem' customs. As Catherine Cartwright-Jones has asserted, the Western orientalist imagining of the harem as a 'private brothel' where women 'lounged in perpetual competitive lust for one man' was a 'popular trope' in literature, art and even music, but it was and 'is entirely false'.[186] That Wollstonecraft also subscribed to this orientalist conception of the harem and the brown bodies it denoted demonstrates just how widespread and widely accepted it was amongst progressive-thinkers and philosophers. Her acceptance of Enlightenment thinkers wholesale employment of the figure is nevertheless surprising, especially when she is able to take to task these same philosophers to task for their representation of white women. Subscribing to a false vision of exoticisation, sexualisation, and restriction in the term harem/seraglio, Wollstonecraft ignored its bodily and spiritual potential.

Wollstonecraft's inability to investigate beyond this trope has been a source of frustration for scholar Samara Anne Cahill. Questioning why women writers and thinkers of the eighteenth

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[184] Catherine Soanes, 'harem' in *Oxford Dictionary for Society and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[185] Anne Abichou, 'harem' in *The Oxford Companion to the Body*, (eds) Colin Blakemore and Sheila Jennett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); John L. Esposito (ed), *The Islamic World: Past and Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[186] Catherine Cartwright-Jones, 'Harem' in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*, (ed) Natana J. DeLong-Bas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

century relied so heavily and uncritically on orientalist tropes in their writing, Cahill composes her theory of 'misogynistic mortalism', which offers a kind of modified off-shoot theorisation of Said and Zonana's arguments.[187] Geographical distance, a genre of travel writing spearheaded mostly by male writers, and a lack of access to literature about Islam, including translations of the Quran (for instance, that by George Sale in 1737), are reasons cited for the perpetuation of orientalist prejudices and occidental mythologies around Middle Eastern cultures in the work of women writers.[188] Still, these reasons do not fully account for the severity and frequency of attack aimed at Middle Eastern women, societies and brown bodies, especially when employed by significantly literate, if not well educated, white middle class women. Investment in such tropes went deeper than ignorance and critical oversight. For Cahill, women writers 'leveraged' such tropes for 'religiopolitical' power, to signal alignment with certain religiopolitical attitudes and renounce anti-trinitarian belief systems (such as Islam but also variations of dissent).[189] What brought the threat of these tropes home in the discourse of writers Catherine Macaulay and even Hannah More was the association of male oppression with the position and behaviour of such "infidel" religious bodies. In making Islam the 'negative ideal', as Cahill frames it, English women writers were able to 'displace their critiques of patriarchy' onto the bodies and spaces of the Middle East, therefore creating a covert but acceptable form of critique to patriarchal systems of government. Whilst Zonana formulates such an argument to assert how writers like Wollstonecraft placed the onus on brown bodies to preserve national character and values, Cahill sees it more in terms of the soul. Using the brown middle eastern body as a site upon which to pose her anxiety about soullessness and the spiritual fate of white English women, Wollstonecraft becomes a prime example and practitioner of Cahill's misogynistic mortalism.

Whether Wollstonecraft truly believed that Islam denied the souls of women remains to be confirmed. She does, however, cite this Eurocentric misconception of Islamic doctrinal thought, in order to, as Cahill argues, highlight the spiritual imperative of universal education and the peril that would befall women when treated as mere bodies (akin to supposed practises and beliefs in Islam). In the initial paragraphs of her introduction to *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft uncritically leans on the idea that 'Mahometanism' considers women as less than second-class citizens and 'treats them as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species' (p.71). Outlining her intention to critique conduct books and instruction manuals designed for and aimed at women, Wollstonecraft uses this misconception of Islamic doctrinal ideas to demonstrate how European and English philosophical, literary and didactic thought had degraded itself and women in the process. In adopting the 'true style of Mahometanism' (p.71), European thinkers were straying into unchristian territory and mocking their own tradition of thought and values in the process. Orientalism in this case proved a useful tool in castigating not so much the minds and bodies of women, but those of men. Priding themselves on rational thought, Rousseau, Fordyce, Gregory and Milton threw their own rationalism into doubt when they drew close to 'Mahometanism' in denouncing the equal reason and intellectual capacities of women. Ultimately, Wollstonecraft archly implied, through successive orientalist tropes, that men were devaluing and imperilling their own souls in denying women proper educational rights and opportunities, and, therefore, the cultivation of soulfulness. One such overt example of this is evinced at the beginning of her second chapter, when she interprets Milton's 'soft' depiction of Eve to be akin to the 'Mahometan strain' of 'depriving' women of 'souls' (p.84). She concludes this with a rhetorical question: 'how insignificant is the being—can it be an immortal one? who will condescend to govern by such sinister methods!' (p.85). Mary Poovey has discussed in detail how Wollstonecraft cannot give full reign to her indignation at Milton and the

[187] Samara Anne Cahill, *Intelligent Souls?: Feminist Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2019).
[188] Cahill, pp.7-8.
[189] Cahill, p.2.

English literary and philosophical tradition, and it could be said that her quickness to return to an orientalist myth softens the blow dealt to such an authority, and obscures the full extent of her attack.[190] However, by book-ending this telling question about the ironically 'unphilosophical manner' (p.85) and attitude of men and what it exposes about their soulful or *soulless* state with a quotation by Francis Bacon about mankind's proximity to the kingdom of 'beasts' through the body, Wollstonecraft acerbically and philosophically outlines the personal and spiritual repercussions in store for *all* those who seek to 'govern' another in the first place. For, as Wollstonecraft outlines throughout *Rights of Woman*, a rational system that favours and sees reason as God-given is no divinely endorsed system unless it admits reason is given equally to all. Returning to her dialectic about hierarchy, where domination and submission oppress the oppressor as much as the oppressed ('slavery will have its constant effect, degrading the master and the abject dependent', p.67), Wollstonecraft positions European thinkers and thought in close proximity to that of the Middle East and Islam, thereby exposing all schemas that discourage the development of reason to be fundamentally flawed, an issue at stake for humankind. The deprecation of reason (and the subsequent endangerment of the soul), irrespective of religious laws, observances and creeds, is her main concern.

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Wollstonecraft's misogynistic mortalism goes beyond taking down patriarchal systems in the construction of carceral bodies and soullessness. It is the whole seam of thought across religion, politics and culture that, in the 'true Mahometan strain' (p.84), deprives women of 'souls' through physical, doctrinal and, above all, intellectual circumscription. Although Cahill is right to detect Wollstonecraft's feminist orientalist and misogynistic "mortalist" intentions behind her figurative use of the harem, her assertion that it is employed to favour trinitarian Christianity or traditional Anglican belief is misplaced. In all its problematic iterations and resonances – from the monstrosities of mimicry and the threatening appeal of travesty through to its seductive yet soul-destroying seclusion in/as a seraglio – the carceral body jeopardises the afterlife of the soul as much as it supposedly gives greater prominence to sublunary drives and fleshly appetites. In this, Wollstonecraft's misogynistic mortalism is a defence of an "ensouled" life, a soulful body, that is as spiritually undefined as her rhetorical Islamic corpus is mistaken. Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity are not mentioned in *Rights of Woman*; neither is a description or vision of an afterlife. What is mentioned and defended, however, is reason, and, more specifically, the 'Supreme being', a term favoured amongst French revolutionaries and their sympathisers, as well as Rational Dissenters. Wollstonecraft's understanding of reason as God-given, the 'stamen of immortality' (p.121) and the essence of woman – the synonymic soul and sole quality that qualified an individual for educational opportunities in this life and continuance in the next – is what is at stake when the body is forced into a carceral state.

An unusual exploration of ensoulment and the eschatological effects of the carceral body can be found in Wollstonecraft's unfinished short tale, 'Cave of Fancy' (1798).[191] Purportedly written in 1787 – the same year as the aforementioned *Thoughts* was printed – the story was published posthumously by Johnson amongst other incomplete writings like 'Fragment of Letters on the Management of Infants' and 'Hints', an outline for the second volume of *Rights of Woman*. Unlike these distinctly didactic and polemical works-in-the-making, 'Cave of Fancy' is a philosophically and generically hybrid form of fiction that encompasses issues around education, futurity and deiformity. Blending gothic and sentimental romance with Pricean theology, Rousseauian and Platonic philosophy and Lavaterian physiognomy, as well as experimenting with multiple

[190] Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.73.
[191] Mary Wollstonecraft, 'Cave of Fancy' in *Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. William Godwin (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798; written c.1787), pp.99-155.

narrative techniques which would eventually be finessed in her later novels, 'Cave of Fancy' is Wollstonecraft at her most startlingly strange and playfully morbid. Issues around ensoulment and the eschatological effects of the carceral state then are not so much touched on or discussed as physically mapped across the body of landscapes, characters and their indirectly focalised and directly delivered monologues. Moving between the craggy exteriority of a sea-swept isle to the interior proper of its eponymous cave, and switching between the internalised examination of one living character to the externalised reflections of a dead and disembodied one, the narrative of 'Cave of Fancy' not only flits between inner and outer, thought and word, soul and body, life and death, but captures their complicated interaction and interdependence even at the point at which one may inhibit or inspire the fate of the other. That is not to say that reason is no longer a pre-eminent, God-invested quality here; rather, the three chapters of 'Cave of Fancy' explore the connections and tensions between reason and matter, and how both are integral to spiritual salvation.

What extends this interrogation of the carceral state and its impact on the futurity of the soul is the inclusion of Lavaterian physiognomy. According to Godwin in *Memoirs*, Wollstonecraft was preparing a translated 'abridgement of Lavater's physiognomy, from the French', which was 'never published', supposedly because Thomas Holcroft's edition pipped her to the publishing post.[192] Further proof of Wollstonecraft's engagement with Lavaterian theory is found in the descriptions of faces and gestures in *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788) and *A Short Residence*. Still, it is in the 'Cave of Fancy', a possible companion piece to her lost translation, where she really grapples with Lavater's physiognomical ideas. From its outset, Lavaterian principles (deciphering the soul through one's facial features and outlines) are on show through the main character, Sagestus, an aptly named ninety-year-old hermit who is the only living human inhabitant on the isle. Though somewhat reminiscent of a kind of Blakean Urizenic persona, the sage's own countenance reveals facial features Lavater himself readily associated with genius: a prominent forehead, 'whitened, scattered locks' and noticeable eyes 'sunk in their orbits' (p.100). No longer able to 'view vulgar objects', Sagestus turns 'inwards', like a Homeric seer or Old Testament prophet, and overleaps 'the boundary prescribed to human knowledge' (p.100). This focus on the eyes as an indicator of profound reason whilst omitting descriptions of his nose or mouth – some of the most sensuous bodily loci in Lavaterian physiognomical theory – renders Sagestus' face as one ruled purely by intellect; a being whose own corporeality exhibits signs of the soul's proximity to God. In this character, reason is first and foremost, whilst the body, much like the surrounding land, lies neglected.

This is not, however, Wollstonecraft's way of dismissing the spiritual importance of the corporeal altogether. Far from it, since it is the embodiment of wisdom himself, Sagestus, who, when searching for survivors from a recent shipwreck, 'scrutinises' (p.110) the outlines, proportions (physiognomy) and probable emotional expressions (pathognomy) of the dead. Whether this is a morbid satirisation of the credibility of the pseudo-science or Wollstonecraft's own attempt to give Lavaterian physiognomy the textual space it deserved is beside the point. What is significant about this prolonged physiognomical assessment (pp.110-126) is the emphasis placed on the body both to reveal and conceal soulfulness, to encourage or discourage deiformity and ultimately futurity. Sagestus' reading of the dead exposes Wollstonecraft's own belief in the legible body as well as the "ensouled" and deific one. The fact that the story transitions from soulless embodiment to actual soul-surging disembodiment – a state belonging to an actual notably gendered female spirit who passes through the purgatorial waters and confines of the cave only to reflect on her earthly embodied life before Sagestus and the one surviving child passenger of the ship – further underscores the relationship between mind and

[192] Godwin, p.226; see Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.105.

matter, the afterlife and a sublunary one. In the 'Cave of Fancy', Wollstonecraft asks the reader to learn from the body, via Lavaterian physiognomy, lest it hinder the future of the soul.

But Wollstonecraft's sense of soul and ensoulment in *Rights of Woman* really recalls that of the Unitarian minister and philosopher, Richard Price. When running a school in Newington Green during the mid-1780s, Wollstonecraft attended the Unitarian Chapel, and it was here that she was introduced to Price, the surrounding community of rational dissenters, and, beyond this, the extended circle of radical publisher, Joseph Johnson. Price, who was staunchly against orthodox Trinitarianism (and had been since his early education), was devoted to rationalism and libertarianism.[193] Influenced by a Christian Platonic rationalist tradition stemming from Middle Platonism to the Cambridge Platonists, Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, Price's religious rationalism was complex and debated in dissenting and trinitarian forums alike.[194] In her scholarship, Louise Hickman has noted how his letters and writing exhibit Platonic ideas (as presented by both Cambridge and earlier Middle Platonists), the most important of which to Price's theology was deiformity (where the soul's ultimate endeavour is to become like God). Price's belief in the perfectibility of the human soul through the development of reason – not one's affections or passions – is overtly propounded, as Hickman observes, in many of his sermons and indirectly in some of his renowned philosophical works.[195] It is clear from Wollstonecraft's letters to George Blood that she certainly had read some of Price's sermons and theological works, particularly his *Four Dissertations* (1767) and *Sermons on the Christian Doctrine* (1787).[196] Whether she read any of his writings written in exchange with other theologians and philosophers – particularly those with his long term friend, the natural philosopher, theologian and fellow dissenting minister Joseph Priestley, from whom Price differed considerably concerning ideas on motion, matter and the body – is unclear.[197] From her use of terminology in *Rights of Woman* and the emphasis on 'understanding' in terms of human progress, freedom and spiritual futurity, it *is* clear, however, that she too was influenced by Pricean notions of the soul and deiformity. Where they differed was in Price's attitude to the body and its role in this process of development and gradual deiformity. To what extent, then, did Pricean ideas shape Wollstonecraft's framing of the soul-body problem and fuel, if at all, her apprehension of and indignation towards the carceral body?

In an early sermon, Price stridently differentiates between body and soul. *The Nature and Dignity of the Human Soul, A Sermon* (1766) predates some of his more influential inquiries on toleration, patriotism and religious rationalism, but it does, nevertheless, lay bare his attitude to soul-body dualism.[198] Opening with quotations from the Old and New Testament Books of Job, Ecclesiastes and Matthew, all of which highlight the God-given state of man's 'spirit', and interspersed with qualifying and exploratory foot-notes justifying the resurrection and the eschatological destiny of the human soul, *A Sermon* does much to keep the soul and body at opposite ends of the ontological, material and teleological spectrum.[199] Slipping between mind,

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[193] D. O. Thomas, 'Price, Richard (1723-1791)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See my bibliography for the full entry and URL. Taylor also talks about Price and the influence of the dissenting community on Wollstonecraft and her work in *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, pp.103-8.
[194] Louise Hickman 'Godliness and Godlikeness: Cambridge Platonism in Richard Price's Religious Rationalism' in *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 24 (2008), pp.1-23, p.2; see also Hickman's *Eighteenth-Century Dissent and Cambridge Platonism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
[195] Such key works by Price as *Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (1758), *Four Dissertations* (1767), *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789).
[196] See *Letters*, pp.146-147, and also Taylor, p.103.
[197] Though there is evidence that Wollstonecraft read Priestley's own writings and may have even met him; see p.105 of *Rights of Woman* for an example of the former and her letter to Mary Hays (p.210 in *Letters*) for evidence of the latter.
[198] Richard Price, *The Nature and Dignity of the Human Soul, A Sermon* (London: A Millar, 1766).
[199] Price, pp.1, 9.

spirit and soul, Price immediately determines that 'there is in man, something that is distinct from his body…that there is in man a spirit or soul'.[200] Dismissing materialism and any purposive and qualitative affinity between soul and body, Price contends that, although the soul needs the body to exert certain motions, its 'powers and operations…are not only far *superior*, but entirely repugnant to any thing that the nature of [the body] admits…'.[201] Price goes on to rhapsodize on the soul's distinguishing superiority and intelligible powers:

> What? Are all our high faculties, our thoughts which wander through eternity, our imaginations which can take in the universe, our wills by which we can order as we please our perceptions and actions, and our understandings by which we investigate eternal truth and discover the self-existent deity; are, I say, all these nothing but qualities which may reside in a clod of earth, or the motion and figure and arrangement of the parts of a system of senseless matter?[202]

In this quotation, Price's platonic conception of the soul and its alignment with the mind in all its variations – 'high faculties', 'thoughts', 'imaginations', 'understandings' – are on full display. Air, flight and the upward extension, reach and vision of the star-gazing, ensouled philosopher (akin to that found in Plato's *Timaeus*) are employed to separate the soul from that which is low, base, earthly, immovable and unconscious. The 'clod of earth' which Price contrasts with his near-airborne, near-disembodied, interstellar soul recalls Wilson and Litvak's recognition of philosophy's distinction and continual separation of the vulgar from that which is deemed sophisticated, showing that at the core of this philosophical tradition and bias exists the soul-body conundrum. Cartesian as well as Platonic in thought, Price unapologetically frames the soul as the sophisticated – 'superior' – element. Expansive and straining towards the heavens, Price's 'thinking, judging, willing' spirit is 'independent' and 'naturally immortal' next to a body that is 'nothing but a machine, fitted up for the convenience' of its superior resident, 'the soul'.[203] Even those sensory tools celebrated by philosophers Locke and Condillac – the 'eyes and hands' – are demoted and disregarded by Price as being contingent to the spirit, mere aids and unworthy apparatus, rather than existentially essential to the soul's nature, survival and command.[204] 'The body is only an appendage to our souls,' Price continues, in his relegation of body to the earthen scrapheap; 'but the soul is from heaven, and it is the inspiration of the Almighty that has given its understanding'.[205] He elaborates:

> It is an emanation from the Supreme intelligence. It has the image of the Deity stamped upon it. It partakes of his perfections, and is capable of knowing and serving him, of acting by the same rule with him, and of being happy in him for ever.[206]

What is interesting about Price's description is the decentring of the soul's relationship with the body – which is contingent, temporal, inconveniently 'convenient', but, as Price will later relate, a brutish hindrance and an 'impure' threat at the best of times – so as to centre and celebrate its original, ultimate and eternal ('for ever') partnership with God.[207] Of and with the 'Deity', as well

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[200] Price, p.1.
[201] Price, pp.2-3, 6, 4-5.
[202] Price, p.5.
[203] Price, pp.5-7.
[204] Price, p.7. An excellent chapter, 'Where were the Media before the Media' by Knut Ove Eliassen and Yngve Sandhei Jacobsen, which explores Condillac's technologies of touch as a medium of knowledge, can be found in *This Is Enlightenment*, (eds) Clifford Siskin and William Warner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp.64-86.
[205] Price, p.11.
[206] Price, p.11.
[207] Price, p.20.

as intended for and an extension of 'Him', the soul in its truest and liberated state is totally and absolutely one with God – a God that is 'Supreme intelligence' and who makes himself known through human intelligence too. In this simultaneously native and future state, Price's soul participates in its own deiformity: it intuits God through reason ('knowing'), virtuous acts ('serving') and obeying ('acting by the same rule') natural and divine laws, which God 'himself' has made, and by which he is bound. This divine, rationally based and secure 'kinship' is, as Hickman observes, Neoplatonic in origin and without a trinitarian, Christological or grace-orientated framework when it comes to salvation (though orthodox Christian theologians have 'harmonised' Platonism with trinitarian dogma).[208] Deiformity and that central communing and communicating kinship with God are, therefore, the responsibility of the individual, a gift and indication of the very independence God has granted to the Pricean soul. Reason becomes the crux and node through and in which God and soul unite.

Reason is God-given, but it is also the driving force behind and signal of man's need for disembodiment. Price never hides this; the 'health' of the soul is his only concern and its deliverance from the potential damnation of the body his focus. 'Let not our immortal part be employed for the vile purpose of tending and pampering the brute,' he extols in his sermon.[209] 'Let not what can soar with angels, grovel in the dirt,' he exhorts, further denying any possible importance or sanctity to the body, and insisting on its condition as antithetical to the soul. He ends:

> Let not what is to exist through eternity, confine its view to a moment; or what the son of God dies for, be chained down to this polluted earth, or given up to be the slave of sin and the prey of Satan.[210]

Again, the body is associated with the downward pull, energy and depravation of the 'polluted earth'. The carceral body is particularly felt here, as thanks to the mortal body, the immortal soul risks being 'chained down', Prometheus-like, to the perishable earth for all 'eternity'. 'Confining' one's view to the earth, to temporal bodily sights, pleasures and visions, futurity is curtailed by the imprisoning body of the individual and wider prison of the mortal, fallen world.

For all its references to carceration and enslavement, *Rights of Woman* departs slightly from Price's complete derogation of the body. Wollstonecraft is clearly influenced by Price's dissenting and Neoplatonist-inspired inscription of a rational soul when outlining her vision for women's futurity. Reason is central to God's relationship with the individual – and reason is very much central to *her* relationship with 'that Being' who 'impressed' 'Utopian dreams' (of gender parity and reform) on 'her soul' (p.103). Reason is referred to over 100 times in *Rights of Woman*, more than any deific synonym, used to differentiate between animals ('brutes', p.102) and humans, as a touchstone between epochs and civilisations to signal progression or regression, but also, in a Pricean and rational dissenting vein, as a godly aspect that must be given pre-eminence and exercised in order for an individual to achieve and enjoy any kind of liberty in this world and the next. So far, Price and Wollstonecraft are aligned. Reason 'regulates the universe', and enables an 'immortal soul' to 'free itself from the shackles of matter' and to self-govern in accordance with the 'order of the universe' (p.115), Wollstonecraft professes when at her most Platonic and Protestant. She is, therefore, also united with Price in the understanding that the body is not everlasting (p.122) and that, unlike the soul, it will not survive death and is destined to return to the dust from which it came. Where she differs from Price is in emphasising the social construction – carceration – that allows the body to imperil the soul. Women in rational

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[208] Hickman, p.6.
[209] Price, p.20.
[210] Price, p.20.

dissenting communities did have freedom to speak and contribute socially; they had access to educational opportunities and, in some cases, innovated education for the young, as is the case for Wollstonecraft's contemporary, Anna Laetitia Barbauld. But men were still at the forefront of radical sectarianism. It is this aspect of patriarchal dominance and subsequent socialisation that Wollstonecraft brings into conversation with dissenting Protestant ideas on body and soul. It is here that she refines and qualifies Price's dualism:

> 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. More or less may be conspicuous in one being than another, but the nature of reason must be the same in all, if it be an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator; for can the soul be stamped with the heavenly image, that is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason? Yet outwardly ornamented with elaborate care, and so adorned to delight man, 'that without honour he may love,' the soul of woman is not allowed to have this distinction, and man, ever placed between her and reason, she is always represented as only created to see through a gross medium, and to take things on trust. (p.122)

Like Price, Wollstonecraft defines reason by its "improving", educative powers; its 'divine' nature and its connection between man ('creature') and God ('Creator'). Stated like this, gender and sex do not come into the equation. However, as soon as Wollstonecraft turns her eye from what lies within to what exists – or rather is applied – 'outwardly', hetero-patriarchal powers and 'distinctions' disrupt this partnership and the effective yet selective kinship Hickman associates with Pricean deiformity. Here, man becomes the block, the carceral wall, the literal body or 'gross medium', between a woman's soul and her creator. Gender, a social rather than a spiritual construct, becomes not just a barrier or circumscribing partition to God, but a mortally grievous one. In this unequal distribution of power and unbalance in relational dynamics, the gendered body abjectly subjugates woman to man, to an intermediary relationship to reason, and, therefore, to God. Taking 'things on trust', at a 'gross' remove from any object, woman resembles the female citizen who is 'immured' and 'groping in the dark' (p.67), thanks both to her family and the French republican constitution, as despairingly described by Wollstonecraft in her prefatory letter to Talleyrand-Périgord. Again, Wollstonecraft implies that the personal is the political – *and* the spiritual. This is not St Paul's seeing 'through a glass, darkly', a reference to man's imperfect earthly state and inability to understand God's full divinity whilst on the earth; rather, it is the cowed position woman is forced to occupy – the socially inflicted 'blind obedience' (p.90) or cultural blindfolding she is expected to silently endure – in her relationship to the surrounding world.[211]

In her belief in deiformity and Pricean-inflected notions of the soul-body relationship, Wollstonecraft returns us to the issue of social construction. She takes us back to the curtailment of intellectual progression and the physiological development – the stunted and stilted 'unfolding' of woman's 'faculties' (p.92) – in and through her relationship to the external world. Layers of relationality and social and biological construction are impeded by man coming between woman and reason, reason and the supreme being, and 'representation' – its part in this

[211] 1 Corinthian 13v12 in *The Bible*, King James Version. Wollstonecraft cites this phrase and alludes to St Paul's passage twice in her novel, *Mary, A Fiction*: the first instance is when the omniscient narrator describes the development of Mary's mind as a teen and her wish to take the holy sacrament ('she too plainly perceived that she saw through a glass darkly', p.11); the second occasion is in direct speech, after Ann's death and when in intimate conversation with Henry she declares her views on the afterlife ('these struggles prepare me for eternity – when I no longer see through a glass darkly I shall not reason about, but feel in what happiness consists.' p.41). Both should be taken as a reflection of the heroine's views and idiomatic choices rather than the author's, although there is space for connection considering this is a work of auto-fiction.

continual construction, as and through the language of men especially – is to blame. Wollstonecraft takes us full circle then, inadvertently demonstrating that the body is needed to secure and maintain a greater relationship with God. If bodies (literal and figurative) inhibit and supplant, they can also aid and support, raise and participate in the exercise, extension and 'enlarging' (p.90) of reason and its 'tie' between woman and God. Surely in removing the obstacle of man – his patriarchal superiority and oppression, his own bodily desires and subsequent subjugation of woman – the 'mind *and* body' (my italics), as Wollstonecraft was so often wont to repeat, would be 'strengthened', thus strengthening her kinship with God? Price saw the body as a hindrance to spiritual deliverance, progression and perfection. Wollstonecraft did so too, but not so much because of its inherent materiality; rather, its social malleability rendered this most fragile yet necessary of mediums susceptible to regressive cultural standards and hetero-patriarchal powers. It was the carceral body – or man's hand in shaping it – that was the biggest threat to the soul.

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Mutiny against the carceral female-encoded body came again in Wollstonecraft's posthumously published and unfinished novel, *The Wrongs of Woman, or. Maria. A Fragment* (1798).[212] Whilst *Rights of Woman* closely analysed the causes and effects of the carceral form on the soul, the *Wrongs of Woman* went one step further and dramatized both. Placing her heroine in a literal place of confinement (a mental asylum), Wollstonecraft not only re-enacts the process through which women's bodies and minds were socially constructed but re-negotiates within an actual prison space the alternative directions of freedom and futurity: reformed embodiment or disembodiment. The *Wrongs of Woman* peels back the layers of carceration caused by social construction and the prejudices and injustices that underpin it by having her heroine, Maria, in a post-partum state, unwillingly married (though committed to the asylum on her feckless and abusive husband's command) and literally shackled in a madhouse. As Elaine Showalter has rightly said, the 'mansion of despair' (p.75) in which Maria finds herself becomes 'a symbol of the manmade institutions, from marriage to the law, that confine women and drive them mad'.[213] Eleanor Ty, too, has noted the overt 'literalization' of oppressive patriarchal symbolism in Wollstonecraft's employment of the Gothic, specifically through the spatial topos of the mental asylum, a fictional nod to the ubiquitous vision and metaphor of the French 'Bastille' in the 1790s.[214]

Wollstonecraft's decision to incarcerate Maria in an asylum whilst in a post-partum state – with a 'burning bosom' (p.75), 'breasts bursting with nutriment' (p.75) and 'tortured by maternal apprehension' for an infant 'torn from her' and suspected dead (p.80) – allows her to interrogate philosophy's complete derogation of feminised bodies (and their "mess" as Grosz would term it) and their historical association with madness and mental ineptitude. Venturing into the asylum, Wollstonecraft challenges the historic institutionalisation and pathologization of women's bodies and minds and exposes the real madness that lies in the very socio-political, cultural and legal institutions themselves. A triple carceral form – social, maternal and spatial – is subsequently suffered by Maria. Unable to have autonomy over herself and her own purse when attempting to leave her husband, she is further humiliated and denigrated by being separated from her newborn child. No longer able to fulfil her role as a mother, her maternal body becomes a torturous form of carceration itself, as expressed in the quotations above. Going from the

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[212] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, or The Wrongs of Woman*, (ed) Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[213] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p.1.
[214] Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp.31, 33.

captivity of the domestic sphere (her husband locks her in rooms) to the prison of the private asylum (a continuation of the violent curtailment of the marital home), Maria's carceral experience redoubles and the madness of her enforced carceral form is exacerbated. Focalised through this maternal, post-partum body is the absence of the child, the husband, the familial and political state, and the judicial system supposedly in place to protect them. Wollstonecraft has the reader, like Maria, grappling and reckoning with these multiple forms of carceration from *within* the site of utmost confinement, the late eighteenth-century asylum, in order to break free.

We enter the asylum with Maria, and into the carceral body, in order to find a way out. We cautiously step in and find that Wollstonecraft's mad house is a generic, historical and figurative amalgam of a loci, embedded with literary tropes and historically accurate details in equal measure, that looks to what such premises were, would become and could mean for women, on and off the page. Gothic in its depiction – though it purports to surpass the 'abodes of horror…filled with spectres and chimeras' (p.75) of such fiction – the asylum of *Wrongs of Woman* at once resembles the hidden recesses and secret chambers found in an Ann Radcliffe novel (where assumedly "dead" mothers are actually locked up by their sinister husbands) and various types of institutions found throughout eighteenth-century Britain.[215] Dark 'dungeon-like apartments' (p. 84) with 'small grated windows' (p.76) that open out into galleries ('narrow avenues', p.84) gothicize the private asylum, lending it a desolate air, which is accentuated through the addition of surrounding ruins that can be seen from beyond the cell grate. In this 'most horrid of prisons' (p.77), we find Maria, four months after having given birth and six weeks into her unlawful imprisonment, inhumanely clad in chains, her arms 'manacled' (p.76), and unable to leave her cell without the assistance and permission of an attendant, Jemima, whose own history (of extreme poverty, sexual and physical abuse, and sex work) is the reverse of the eponymous heroine's and yet both find themselves in a type of carceral state.[216]

Wollstonecraft's positioning of Maria's carceral form in a gothicised mental asylum brings to mind Catherine Spooner's observation of 'Gothic's' inherent attachment to the 'Enlightenment project', and by extension to 'modern feminism' as a whole.[217] If, by Spooner and Jerrold E. Hogle's formulation, Gothic identifies 'the clean and proper self as bourgeois, rational and progressive' and subsequently casts off 'its horrifying and fascinating others', then the genre, much like the feminism of the time (as they argue), is able to shore up 'its boundaries and…legitimacy as a liberal politics.'[218] In the Gothicised cells of the private asylum, therefore, Maria is the abject, ostracised 'other', one whose female-encoded post-partum body,

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[215] I am thinking of Anne Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), where the first Marchioness Mazzini (Louisa Bernini) is kidnapped in the midst of a fit of illness and awakes to find herself in a secret 'hideous abode' in a subterranean cavern to the Castle, so that the Marquis Mazzini may remarry. She remains there for fifteen years. See Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.174-183, for the Marchioness' narrative. Of course, distressed or 'distracted' women being locked in rooms by their tyrannical husbands and would-be lovers, became an evolving trope of its own in eighteenth-century literature and beyond. From Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa either locking themselves away for protection or being locked away for surveillance and control by men, through to Brontë's Jane Eyre bolting her door to Rochester (and earlier, though unwittingly, to his first wife) and Antoinette Mason being effectively imprisoned in Thornfield Hall by the same man, one can see how the determination to curtail and contain women, through the accusation of madness, came about, and how such spaces became synonymous with them, in literature and actual life.

[216] The fact that Wollstonecraft specifies the time-scale, both since Maria's labour (four months) and her entering the asylum (six weeks), demonstrates an awareness of the extremely vulnerable state her heroine would be in; it is now known that during the first five to six months after giving birth, a mother's hormone and chemical levels are readjusting, leaving them most susceptible to experiencing post-partum depression. This state of vulnerability is amplified by the gothic surroundings and tone of Wollstonecraft's narrative. Jemima's history runs as a kind of inversion of Maria's: rather than being locked up, she is forced out and into a permanent state of fugitivity.

[217] Catherine Spooner, 'Unsettling Feminism: The Savagery of Gothic' in *The Gothic and Theory: An Edinburgh Companion*, (eds) Jerrold E. Hogle and Roberts Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p.130.

[218] Spooner, p.130.

transgressive flight from her husband and depression threaten all that legitimates the Enlightenment bifurcations – soul and body being one of them – crucial to such 'liberal politics'. However, the feminist gothicism of *Wrongs of Woman*, like many contemporaneous fictions and later novels by women, simultaneously renegotiates the genre in order to question its underlying political and philosophical divisions. As Spooner acknowledges, 'feminism' 'is riven by its attempts to separate itself from the gothic, even as it finds its grand narratives and most productive metaphors within [its] texts.'[219] Through the trappings of the gothic – which, as Spooner notes, include a 'model of incarceration and flight' as well as 'nightmarish and dreamlike landscapes, the figures of the subconscious imagination' and 'a depiction of polar characters of good and evil' as Ty enumerates – Wollstonecraft unfolds the oppressive patriarchal ideologies inherent to female-encoded carceral corporeality, and challenges the cultural dualities and structural inequalities and inequities existent in eighteenth-century systems, not least the early modern psychiatric institution.[220] Through the stylistic markers and tropes of the gothic, and to an extent its narrative arc, she is able to consider the possible freedoms that were or were not available to women at the time. We will return by way of Poovey, Spooner, Ty and Foucault to the ideological, narratological and generic possibilities that the gothicised psychiatric space opens up later in this section, but first we must explore and historicize Wollstonecraft's construction of the asylum, in order to understand its importance to her deconstruction of carceral corporeality and her own reformulation of soul-body duality.

Wollstonecraft's gothicising of the space, with its 'groans and shrieks' (p.75) from the other inmates, results in this 'private receptacle for madness' (p.119) bearing a resemblance to the most infamous public institution in Britain: Bethlem Hospital. Roy Porter, however, suggests that – irrespective of other kinds of public hospitals, asylums, Bridewells and houses of correction that were to flourish prior and post the conversion of the Priory of the Order of St Bethlehem into a public hospital for the 'insane' – 'Bethlem the institution was small' but 'Bedlam the image loomed large in the public imagination'.[221] Notorious for its 'gloomy horror', Porter argues that Bethlem 'became the epitome of all that people fantasized about madness itself.'[222] Yet, despite Porter criticising contemporary historians who made sweeping statements aggrandising the reality of such horror, he does outline accounts of the corruption and neglect that took place in Bethlem, particularly during the 128-year leadership of the Monros.[223] Many of those confined to Bethlem were denied proper diets, heating during the cold winter months, and regular and updated medical care and treatment; those deemed most 'distracted' could endure continued mechanisms of restraint and prolonged periods of solitary confinement.[224] This, indeed, was the true "gothic" horror of the early modern psychiatric "system".

More telling was the misappropriation of provisions, by an institution that was repeatedly accused of being run for the 'convenience and profit of its staff, over its patients.'[225] Such exploitation, particularly for monetary gain, was the common connection between public hospitals, like Bethlem, and private asylums, which started to populate the psychiatric landscape during the eighteenth century (though they were an unofficial and, prior to the eighteenth century, unregulated form of assistance for families with mentally ill loved ones).

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[219] Spooner, p.130.
[220] Spooner, p.132; Ty, pp.34-5.
[221] Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (London: Penguin, 1987), p.122. This is seen especially in the work of William Hogarth, whose *A Rake's Progress* (1732-4; printed in 1735) resolves in the eponymous hero being confined to 'Bedlam'. See Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* (1732-4; printed in 1735), Scene 8 'The Madhouse', British Museum (plate no. S, 2.49).
[222] Porter, 1987, p.123.
[223] Porter, 1987, p.128.
[224] Porter, 1987, p.125.
[225] Porter, 1987, pp.124, 128.

Wollstonecraft's private 'madhouse', therefore, collapses public and private, fictional and real, both in terms of Maria's own personal history, and that of psychiatric spaces and treatments available across the period. Through the genre and dramatic cast of the gothic, Wollstonecraft hauntingly intensifies the corruption behind psychiatric spaces and methods, as well as the human psychologies that were supposed to be contained and cared for in such institutions. Furthermore, through Jemima's own first-hand account and diatribe against public and private places of confinement – like the 'house of correction', 'work house' and 'asylums' (p.118-19), all of which she deems 'prisons' – Wollstonecraft emphasises the circular history of neglect and unfeeling, exploitation and punishment (which springs from classed and gendered bodily positionality), across all iterations of these spaces. Through Jemima and Maria's joint experiences of gothicised confinement, Wollstonecraft historicises the impact of psychiatric and wider institutional neglect upon the female-encoded body and mind. It is the gothic that centralises and magnifies the bodily sensations, eroticism and terror of such confinement, and it is none other than the tremulous female-encoded body that this genre prioritises. One could even say that *Wrongs of Woman* is one of the forerunners to a kind of sub-genre of the gothic: the feminist psychiatric novel. It is from within the asylum that Wollstonecraft denounces institutional neglect and the institutionalisation of women's minds and bodies.

That Wollstonecraft's gothicisation of the asylum emphasises Maria's post-partum body as one worthy of pity and eventually power, rather than delinquency, runs counter to the critical narrative spun around psychiatrically institutionalised women. Similar to Showalter, Jane E. Kromm's scholarship traces the literary, visual and material culture that represented and helped formalise madness as a female malady in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain and France.[226] Kromm argues that there was a shift from male to female dominance in cultural constructions of madness in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[227] From Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) to Cowper's *The Task* (1785), and from Richard Westall's *Ophelia* (1793), engraved by James Parker in John Boydell's *The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery* (1789-1805), to Fuseli's painting *Mad Kate* (1806-7), male depictions of mentally "disturbed" women abound in the latter half of the century. As Kromm has noted, the Crazy Kate or the Opheliaesque lunatic types gradually formed. Pretty, seemingly virtuous and often sympathetic to behold, the Ophelia-type sang and raved, evoking tears in readers and spectators alike. But there was also the other type: the sexually provocative – or rather sexualised – dishevelled, hysterical woman, a precursor no doubt to Brontë's Antoinette 'Bertha' Mason.[228] Kromm saw such types, particularly when it came to the early nineteenth century, as a post-revolutionary response of fear towards women's political agency and the subsequent destabilisation of gender roles.[229] Far from featuring such types in *Wrongs of Woman* out of fear, Wollstonecraft includes them, weaving their more realistic histories – of forced marriage, post-partum depression and psychosis in the case of the Opheliaesque 'lovely maniac' (p.88) whose 'exquisitely sweet' singing is heard by Maria from her cell, for example – into the fabric of the institution. Though a clear counterpart to Mackenzie's genteel singing maniac in *Man of Feeling*, Wollstonecraft's woman has not lost her senses to frustrated sexual yearning or a lost amour; rather, her insanity stems from a lack of familial and social feeling towards her; and it stems from another institution, one that colludes with those of psychiatry: forced marriage.[230] By placing this female type in the backdrop of the asylum interior (and momentarily within the narrative), audibly close to Maria but not visibly so, Wollstonecraft creates a sub-narrative and shows the potential end of her main heroine, as well as demonstrating

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[226] Jane E. Kromm, 'The Feminization of Madness in Visual Representation' in *Feminist Studies* (Autumn 1994), pp.507-535.
[227] Kromm, 1994, p.510.
[228] Kromm, 1994, p.508.
[229] Kromm, 1994, p.507.
[230] Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.33-35.

the interlocking nature of these stories of marital and domestic abuse. In the 'female maniac', she at once announces the sanity of her heroine whilst condemning the institutions (cultural, marital and psychiatric) that have doomed and created insanity in another.[231]

Further to the idea of psychiatric institutions exposing the abusive, carceral conditions of domestic and socio-political ones is the concept of the surrogate family in the asylum. Kromm observes that when it came to artistic renditions of female patients in mental institutions the apparatus – staff and space – of the asylum was reconceived through the domestic and familial.[232] Stressing the safety and sanctuary – the home in what most would consider the unhomely – of the asylum, Kromm looks at engraved works by Rowlandson and Pugin, which emphasise 'moral treatment' and the cleanliness, order and domestic continuity carried through staff and patients, seeing it as a recreation of family modes and roles of behaviour.[233] Indeed, in contemporary artwork and visitor accounts the asylum was seen as the bridge between home and mad*house*, between the domestic body and that which becomes increasingly institutionalised. Pugin and Rowlandson depict it as a modern success – the arms of the public hospital and the private realm working together to improve mental health, curtail the most disordered of minds, and re-civilise and re-domesticate the most disorderly of bodies: those of women. Wollstonecraft, however, denounces this notion, subverting this coextensive spatiality between the domestic and institutional by continually revealing the carceral conditions of the family unit – Darnford's betrayal of Maria in the potential endings, and prior to this the abuse and breakdown of her own marriage to Venables – through the gothicised imprisoning interiors and exploitative staff of the private institution. As a "homely" restorative to a supposedly unsound, "unhomed" mind, the carceral-like situation of the asylum fails, re-incarcerating the soul as much as the body. Failed by all spaces and the culture that reinforces them – the home as private sanctuary, the asylum as a public extension, reaffirmation and rehabilitation of that – Maria's individual post-partum body and mind, however, paradoxically retain their narrational and symbolic centrality to her own freedom. Again, it is within the deeply problematic, gothic carceral space of home-cum-asylum and asylum-cum-home that the carceral female body and the futurity of the soul must be reckoned with.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault recognised that the soul-body problem was significant to the development of the psychiatric "system".[234] In his later work, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault reflected on how the transference of punishment went from body to soul, from the spectacle of disciplined corporeality to the concealed chastisement of the mind.[235] The brutal separation of the corporal and incorporeal through carceration and the modern mechanisms of criminal justice, posed a problem for a society historically invested in expressing power and its related structures through the body. In *Madness and Civilisation*, however, insanity and social curtailment (and castigation) does not come about through the separation of soul from body; neither does the derangement of one (the soul), divest symbolic and social value

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[231] Showalter observes, through Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's work, that these 'deranged figures' who haunt the margins of nineteenth-century texts, represent the author's rage towards 'the rigidity of patriarchal tradition' (p.6). She sees Wollstonecraft's novel as the forerunner to this. But the female characters in *Wrongs of Woman* go beyond authorial anger; they are individual critiques, embodied deconstructions of stereotypes that pervade the dominant culture, and actively reflect the intersection between the personal and the political, the private and the public, and the devastating effect the latter has on the former.

[232] Kromm, 1994, p.519.

[233] For the etching by Rowlandson and Pugin see Kromm, p.514; and for further information on moral treatment and the asylum as surrogate family, see p.517.

[234] Porter contests that any such system existed, despite what contemporary historical scholarship may suggest. He says any such "system" was 'slow, limited and piecemeal': 'the eighteenth-century madhouse map reveals less a coordinated system than a highly uneven spattering of heterogeneous establishments – big and small, private enterprise and charity, subscription and proprietary', in *Mind Forg'd Manacles*, pp.156-7.

[235] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 2020), p.16.

from the other (the body), especially through the problematic armature of the asylum. Rather their unity, their relationship is, according to Foucault, the problem, and the expression of their correspondence, through excessive 'passion' visible through the body, through language and through a culture that cautions and works against a too close connection between the two, is the larger issue at hand.[236] 'Before Descartes and long after his influence', Foucault declares, 'passion continued to be the meeting ground of body and soul'.[237] From Greco-Roman thinking to humoral medical theories and then the nervous physiology of the Enlightenment (as proposed by proponents Thomas Willis and Robert Whytt), 'madness' is associated with 'diseases of the body and soul' and 'maladies in which the affection of the brain is of the same quality, of the same origin, of the same nature, finally, as the same affection of the soul'.[238] Foucault's map of madness – not just one of psycho-geography across Enlightenment Europe, but of psychophysiology and psychiatry across time – problematizes soul-body duality, making a mockery of traditional philosophical oppositions – feeling/reason, vulgar/sophisticated, feminine/masculine – that spill out of it. Foucault saw how madness at once confirmed the unity of such dualisms, yet also 'turned against' them, seeing soul-body duality *and* relationality 'put it into question', through their distorting collisions in those declared insane.[239] If madness brings these opposing substances together, uniting them in an excess of emotion, obfuscating their socially constructed boundaries and their culturally desired limits, what does that say about the mad in the realm of reason? What does it imply about rationality and those rationally organised criteria that deem the body and soul substantially at odds and incompatible? And where does this leave women, who are associated with the bodily and the socio-political derogation this connotes?

Gender and where it sits on this plane of soul-body relationality, does not factor in Foucault's theorising over institutional power, as Showalter has noted.[240] There are no women in his analysis of the collusion between church and state in exploiting the labour of those deemed insane and confined in European Hôpitals, houses of correction, Bridewells and other such sites, for their capitalistic gain.[241] And there are no women mentioned when Foucault argues that the 'classical age' (the Enlightenment) perceived 'madness…through a condemnation of idleness' and saw confinement as a communal 'ejection' of 'all forms of social uselessness'.[242] But women are surely found in these marginalised groups and in the social quashing of what is undesirable, unruly, "workshy", disabled, anarchic, poor, and, of course, unreasonable. Though Porter contests Foucault's historicizing of madness and sees its evolution of psychiatric institutions in England as partially acceptable at best, and though Showalter's call for an analysis of gender in Foucault's work is valid, his theory of the great confinement still holds power and sheds light on Wollstonecraft's own address of soul-body relationality, the formation of the carceral body, and the dialectic of inner and outer, embodiment and disembodiment, in *Wrongs of Woman*. Foucault may not discuss the cultural and medical typology of gendered madness, as later outlined by Kromm and Showalter, but his understanding of the cultural revulsion towards what was unruly and what challenged and conflated traditionally observed binaries – in addition to his awareness of the socio-political desire to contain and cut out that which threatened to overturn said oppositions – bares much on the treatment of women who spoke up or "acted out" against such norms in late eighteenth-century Britain.[243] Here, again, body and soul, and, therefore, what was

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[236] Foucault, 1988, pp.86, 88; for comments on nervous physiology, see pp.88-90.
[237] Foucault, 1988, p.88.
[238] Foucault, 1988, p.88.
[239] Foucault, 1988, p.89.
[240] Showalter, p.6.
[241] Foucault, 1988, p.54.
[242] Foucault, 1988, p.55.
[243] Though his chapter 'Aspects of Madness' (pp.117-158) goes into detail about mania and melancholia it fails to recognise the gendered variations and diagnoses this spawned in and out of cultural representation.

supposedly dualistic in nature – feeling and reason, passivity and action, objectivity and subjectivity, sophistication and vulgarity as touched on by Grosz above – meet and collide, obfuscating and upending longstanding laws of patriarchal thinking and power.

In the character of Maria *Wrongs of Woman* presents not only a carceral body but one which is subject to Foucauldian carceration *because* she dares to break free of it. Surrounded by types (as described by Kromm and Showalter) that exist in the shadows of the gothicised asylum, whose 'wild luxuriancy of noxious passions' (p.83) – the Foucauldian basis for madness – she sees from her room's window and hears during her imprisonment, Maria, though 'despondent' and 'debilitated by grief' (p,81), is not mad. Nevertheless, her actions (of attempting to leave an abusive husband and then declare herself separate from him) are read – and will be read, as per the judgement declared in the last chapter (pp.198-99) – as deviancy, that Foucauldian unruliness that must be contained. Subject to Foucauldian carceration, within a carceral body, in the enforced confinement of a private madhouse, Maria's choices are limited; the pathway to freedom, self-definition, and a liberated ensouled body, is denied her. From the inflicted position of "madness" and its socially necessitated repression, Maria considers her condition; she reflects on the states of embodiment and disembodiment she has been forced to assume or for which she yearns. This reflection and re-negotiation of inner and outer, embodiment and disembodiment, soul and body occurs through writing, the very activity that sits in the centre of all such interrelated dualities. 'Language is the first and last structure of madness,' Foucault states.[244] He continues:

> That the essence of madness can be ultimately defined in the simple structure of discourse does not reduce it to a purely psychological nature, but gives it a hold over the totality of soul and body; such discourse is both the silent language by which the mind speaks to itself in the truth proper to it, and the visible articulation in the movements of the body.[245]

That language accommodates and articulates madness – as witnessed by Maria when overhearing the 'sweet maniac' sing – means that a positionality of enforced madness and its resulting carceration affords Wollstonecraft's heroine the same linguistic privilege. Falsely accused of being mad, of needing restraint and seclusion from the world, Maria, by Foucault's line of argument, not only has words at her disposal, but is entitled to 'such discourse', to both its mental manifestation and physical 'articulation'. Implied in Foucault's description is a simultaneous "unbodying" and "rebodying" through language, which for Wollstonecraft is crucial; that is, through her act of narration and the embedded narratives of Maria, Jemima and Darnford, the "reason" of the patriarchal world – the law-endorsing figure of husband, the private asylum keeper and the judge – can be challenged by the "unreason" of those deemed unreasonable by them.

Challenging such "reason" with what patriarchal structures claim is "unreason", however, occurs in the equally unstable form of memoir. An intimate genre – one close to frequently feminised forms of écriture – this type of writing could be regarded as an extension of the body, a discourse coming solely from the material and physical. Both Ty and Poovey have identified the instability in this and the other diverse narratological, stylistic and generic strands of the novel.[246] Whilst for Poovey Wollstonecraft's 'lapses' into 'sentimental jargon', both through the omniscient narrator and Maria's first-person recount, evince her reluctance to relinquish the

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[244] Foucault, 1988, p.100.
[245] Foucault, 1988, p.100.
[246] Mary Poovey, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: The Gender of Genres in Late Eighteenth-Century England' in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (Winter 1982), pp.111-126. Ty, pp.31-34.

genre of sentimentalism and the bourgeois ideals it upholds, for Ty, the polyvocal and formally various narrative strands at work in *Wrongs of Woman* represent a battle between the semiotic and the symbolic, the mother and the father, and the literal and abstracted forms of both in Wollstonecraft's own life as well as that of her heroine.[247] Using Kristeva's theory of the semiotic, which she defines as 'bodily' and 'discontinuous, unstable and structured around the maternal', Ty sees Wollstonecraft grapple with the 'symbolic world of the father' through the respective modes of sentimentalism and the gothic, in particular through Maria's memoirs, letters and the later court room scene. For Ty, these seemingly contradictory and unstable forms, styles and genres actively 'literalise' and expose the institutional, legal and domestic oppression Maria faces whilst also expressing it in terms – the 'incorrigible romanticism' Poovey attributes to the heroine – to which women readers of the time would relate.[248] Echoing Foucault in implying that articulations of reason are somewhat in the possession of those deemed most to be unreasonable by institutions of rationality, Ty quotes Luce Irigaray in asserting that Wollstonecraft's polyvocal narrative and formal variety in *Wrongs of Woman* does just this: appears 'contradictory to the logic of reason' and to those 'who listen with ready-made grids, a code prepared in advance..' but offers another meaning to those willing to listen 'differently'.[249] Couched in these theories of the irrational, the semiotic, the unstable and unreasonable that are embedded and exaggerated through the genres of sentimentalism and the gothic, memoir becomes more than a meeting ground for this tussle and attempt at reconciliation. Memoir and all the various types of narrative expression and experience in Ty's analysis become a successful channelling of interwoven thoughts that contradict the symbolic and speak against oppression.

Yet, out of all Wollstonecraft's formal, generic and narratological strategies, memoir belongs to the most personal, personable and long-running literary tradition. In this, it regains its stability and appeals to the reason prized so much by Renaissance humanism. It was late Renaissance humanism after all, as Porter highlights, that saw man delighting in himself through a proliferation of 'new cultural genres' such as the self-portrait, the diary, the biography and autobiography, thus showing its formal variety as much as its stabilising connection to humanistic traditions.[250] Voices exploring and expressing their own truths through such a form were as various as they were prolific: earlier philosophers, theologians, saints (St Augustine, St Teresa d'Avila) and mystics (Margery of Kempe, Julian of Norwich), all wrote about their own life or focalised their thought through their experiential, as well as visionary, selves in this personal form. By the eighteenth century, such genres were a cultural mainstay – as seen in Letitia Pilkington's memoir, *The Memoirs of Letitia Pilkington* (1748-1754), Rousseau's autobiographical *Confessions* (1782), Methodist writer Hester Rogers' spiritual autobiography, *An Account of the Experience of Mrs. H. A Rogers* (1793), and, of course, Wollstonecraft's own autofiction, *Mary*, to name but a few – with the self being at once rebodied, rethought and reknown through memoir and diverse forms of life writing.[251] Body and soul, feeling and reason, personal and public were married into this genre, giving the reader unique access to the self in all its multifariousness. In this light, it is perhaps not so much a 'mad' genre, as one that unites in a Foucauldian sense, and 'weaves' in an Irigarayian manner, that which is traditionally kept apart.

Writing is subsequently a revivifying and reconstituting act of recollection for Maria, one that has a purpose beyond herself:

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[247] Poovey, pp.117, 119; Ty, p.32.
[248] Poovey, p.119; Ty, pp.44-45.
[249] Poovey, p.45.
[250] Roy Porter, 2004, p.5.
[251] For a deeper discussion of autobiography see *A History of Autobiography*, ed. Adam Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) and for works specifically on autobiography by women authors see Robert Folkenflik's chapter from the same volume, "Written by herself': British women's autobiography in the eighteenth century', pp.119-132.

> The books she had obtained, were soon devoured, by one who had no other resource to escape sorrow, and the feverish dreams of ideal wretchedness or felicity, which equally weaken the intoxicated sensibility. Writing was then the only alternative, and she wrote some rhapsodies descriptive of the state of her mind; but the events of her past life pressing on her, she resolved circumstantially to relate them, with the sentiments that experience, and more matured reason, would naturally suggest. They might perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the tyranny, her mother knew now how to avoid.…This thought gave life to her diction, her soul flowed into it, and she soon found the task of recollecting almost obliterated impressions very interesting. (p.82)

Unlike reading, writing becomes a more tempered exercise, one where reason still has the upper hand over feeling, psycho-physiologically speaking. The short escape that books provide is not enough to ease Maria emotionally. Where reading delivers her back to her predicament – and the bodily repercussions of it ('intoxicated sensibility') – writing takes her simultaneously out and through her present troubles, to a future beyond even her own. Looking backwards through her script to 'the events of her past life', Maria is able to consider and look forward to the life of her child ('they might instruct her daughter'). Writing subsequently becomes a choice in a choiceless situation; it becomes a plan of action ('she resolved'), a form of moral employment (through the 'instruction' of her daughter), a bid to mother and protect ('shield') her newborn infant. Writing becomes a diachronic activity that surpasses that of reading, the latter of which returns her to a greater sense of her physical and mental confinement. Looking to the life of another enables Maria to recount, relive and restructure, on the page, her own; to mother from afar, to write against her carceral state and envisage a futurity and those in it who might benefit from her example and the lessons she has learned. Thus, a circularity develops that incorporates both body and soul, embodiment and disembodiment, reading and writing, author and narrator, through whatever is contained on the material page. Though writing here is a consoling act, one that is soul-prompting and spiritually edifying, allowing Maria's 'soul' to 'flow' into her 'diction', it is, we imagine, a physical process, involving the sensation and touch of skin, the active workings of muscle and bone, the neurological wirings and transmission of a corporeal subject. What is more, it is passed through the hands of a compassionate gaoler, her would-be lover and the actual reader, making it (both novel and the memoir there within) a substitute for her body, a surrogate for her child, a stand-in for as well as a material execution of bodily and spiritual autonomy. It is an attempt at communion and an affective and physical connection with those absent. From within her cell, chained, alone and considered mad, Maria achieves a Foucauldian discourse, one that facilitates and necessitates a dual process of unbodying and rebodying for all women (mother, daughter, reader, helper).

This paradox – of surpassing one's bodily and surrounding confines and yet being very much of both; of reconstituting the disembodied self through the body of words – is challenged towards the end of the novel. Unlike her memoir, which won the interest and sympathy of Jemima and Darnford, Maria's paper to the courts of law wins no one over and is used against her. Body and soul are no longer united and neither is within the heroine's power to rhetorically shape and dictate to her purpose. The judge aligns her with all that is corporeal only – with the sexual body for her 'violation of the marriage-vow' (p.198); the feminised 'feeling' body from which she talks (the judge reduces Maria's reasoned paper to a plea of her 'feelings' and a legitimation of 'infidelity' and 'immorality' in general, pp.198-9), and the pathological body, by justifying Venables' conduct in light of hereditary insanity found in Maria's familial line (and her actions reflecting those of a person not of a 'sane mind', p.199). This, to Poovey, was the failure of the novel or rather Wollstonecraft's political ideals; whereas to Ty the retreat into idiolects and tones

of affectivity recalls the failures of patriarchal systems only – the failure of the symbolic alone.[252] Reduced to the carceral body again, Maria's bid for an empowering form of self-construction is turned against her. The written word no longer liberates but denigrates the female author. Sara Ahmed writes of how complaints are turned on the complainant as a way for hegemonic parties and powers to avoid consequences; it becomes convenient to pathologize – as Venables and the judge do – the complainer to undermine the veracity and credibility of her complaint.[253] As Madelaine Lane-McKinley notes, 'the complaint is an illness or condition…to complain is to make noticeable a set of symptoms, while it is also to be mistaken as symptom'.[254] Complaining about the unlawfulness of lawful marriage, Maria strikes out against the very legal institutions to which she complains. In doing so, these patriarchal institutions are able to double down and reverse the victim-perpetrator dynamic. The judge sees Maria's complaint as a threat not just to the institution of marriage and its instituting of gendered roles ('it was her duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents…'), but to British identity and morality itself ('we did not want French principles'; 'he hoped no Englishman would legalize adultery', p.199). Turning her complaint back onto and into her "deviant" body, Maria is metaphorically re-incarcerated, condemned to the type of socially constructed and legally instituted embodiment she does not deserve or want. It is telling that some of the mapped out prospective endings of the novel (included in Godwin's posthumously edited and published version) for Maria feature depression and suicide. Again, we come full circle where the body of the narrative ruptures, fragments and dissolves in the face of institutional judgment and punishment, denial and violence. When logic and logos no longer provide hope, no longer embody reason, selfhood or the soul's future purpose and sense of life, disembodiment through death and narrative disintegration becomes the only form of escape. *Wrongs of Woman* narrates the dysphoric impossibility for eighteenth-century women to envisage and experience new forms of embodiment and ensoulment in the madhouse that is the British patriarchal, socio-political world. Complaint then turns from an outcry against injustice to a disempowered cry, a pitiful plaint, a disorder of grief.

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Coda: The Wrongs of Thel or Windows of Disembodied Perception

In Blake's *The Book of Thel* (w.1789), issues of embodiment and disembodiment are taken to a new extreme, elucidating again the soul-body problem for women.[255] Wandering listlessly in the 'eternal' vales of 'Har', the titular character converses with a lily, a cloud, a worm and clod of clay, all of whom are personified to great effect in Blake's lines and images.[256] Pining for a sense of existential stability and purpose, the gentle Thel questions each creation only to be given a response expressing their complete satisfaction in the position they occupy. Thel, nonetheless, remains a wispy, restless reminder of the Greek meaning (desire) behind her name; ever desirous for permanency and contentment, she declares herself to be '…like a parting cloud, / Like a reflection in glass, like shadows in water.'[257] Struggling to find an adequate figurative representation in a sea of successive, morphing similes, Thel's feelings of insubstantiality obscure what she truly is to the reader. Is she a spirit yearning for the fixity and solidity associated with embodiment? Or are the humanised lily, cloud, worm and clod an extended fission, a concatenation of her unfixed subjectivity, a dream-like montage of her wish fulfilment for

[252] Poovey, p.119; Ty, p.45.
[253] Sara Ahmed, 'The Complainer as Carceral Feminist' in *Feministkilljoys* blog (June 2022); see also Ahmed's *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
[254] Madelaine Lane-McKinley, 'Of Complaints and Apologies: Feminist Theses Against Carceralism' in *Glass-Bead.*
[255] William Blake, *The Book of Thel* in *Blake, The Complete Poems*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2007), pp.99-106.
[256] Blake, 1789, L25-26.
[257] Blake, 1789, L8-9.

corporeal strength, pleasure and structure? Is she a disembodied soul struggling with the arc of her own mythos, akin to Blake's soul for Blair's *The Grave*? Or a mythological mortal out of sync with the pastoral idealism of which she is supposed to be a smooth and seamless part?

Split into four parts – a device that reiterates the flitting, dissolving, apparitional nature of Thel and her world – the third section sees the 'matron clay' invite the heroine to 'enter' her 'house' and eventually enrobe herself in mortality. In Part 4, Blake turns to Neo-Platonism again, with a 'northern bar' lifted and Thel stepping into a 'land of sorrows and of tears'.[258] For Neo-Platonists the northern bar or "gate" was the portal through which souls descended to earth. Derived from Homer's 'cave of the Naiads' in the *Odyssey* and quoted in a commentary by Porphyry, this classical topos would have come to Blake through Thomas Taylor's work, *Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (1790), which was published during the writing of *Thel*. Passing from a realm of idealistic forms into a space of 'dolours and lamentations', Thel sits beside her own 'grave plot' and hears the 'voice of sorrow'.[259] The possibility and actuality of embodiment becomes too much for the spectral heroine, as she overhears a list of rhetorical questions regarding the limitation and corruption of the five senses. To be embodied is to be open to both pleasure and pain, strength and weakness, the hope of perfectibility and the inevitable lack of it. To be embodied is for the ears, eyes, tongue, nostrils and hands to be in disharmony or unity with each other; for a 'little curtain of flesh' to prohibit and exhibit 'desire'.[260] Thel cannot cope with the encumbrances and possible freedoms laid out by bodily parameters and flees back to Har, shrieking with this awful knowledge.

Written with a tender understanding, Blake does not renounce or applaud Thel for her hurried departure. Rather, he abruptly shuts down further exploration of this alternate region, clipping the end of the poem so we may ponder all that is lost and gained through embodiment. Gripped and, perhaps, equally perturbed as Thel by the riddle-like voice speaking from behind her own tombstone, we are left questioning whether a soul really can grow and develop outside of a body, away from a vale of tears. *Thel* thus complicates any neat Neo-Platonic or Pricean arrangement of a virtuous soul and a base body. In *Thel*, Blake refuses to support any oppositional notions with regards to embodiment and disembodiment. His illustration of Thel's predicament presents and dramatizes the anxiety connected to embodiment and disembodiment for women; it captures the ambivalence towards occupying one state over another, and the hesitancy for women to embrace their embodiment when the fleshly and social perils of the body are all too real. Though Blake's *Thel* is an allegory that invites reflection on many contemporary concerns like theories of epistemology and religious debates over corporeality and eschatology, what it really evinces and strikingly implores us to consider is the issue women face over their own relationship to the body.

At various stages of her narrative, Wollstonecraft's Maria expresses a similar desire to be rid of the body. Unlike Thel, Maria achieves a bodiless state, from an embodied position. Whilst Thel balks at the corrupting and fatal trammels of mortal life, pushing her further into formlessness, Maria attempts to reconstruct her disembodiment from within her carceral corporeality, embracing embodiment, particularly through writing as I have delineated above, in order to enjoy a resulting form of disembodiment – a reverse of Blake's structure and teleology for *Thel*. Through Maria, Wollstonecraft writes a teleology where women are forced to negotiate and navigate the constraints, conditions and terms of bodily existence until they reach spiritual transformation and transcendence. Flying away from the body is, in Wollstonecraft's novel, not so much an action instigated by fear, as one initiated by great need, and in turn great courage,

[258] Blake, 1789, L103-4, 109.
[259] Blake, 1789, L110.
[260] Blake, 1789, L123.

strength and faith. Flight in *Thel* is triggered by fear and apprehension of what lies beyond the vale; in *Wrongs of Woman*, a soul-extended state becomes a point of self-reference, self-assertion and self-determination, embracing soulfulness in all it is and all it points towards. We see forms of flight in Maria's escape from her husband, then the madhouse, but also in instances of soul-soaring narrated in and through the course of her memoir writing, especially a recounted episode before a window (p.163, which I will go on to analyse in some depth below). Maria's escape from her marital home, for example, is both a physical deliverance and a soulful liberation: 'when I turned the corner, I seemed to breathe a freer air. I was ready to imagine that I was rising above the thick atmosphere of earth; or I felt, as wearied souls might be supposed to feel on entering another state of existence' (p.170). Thel's sense of formlessness may perplex and depress her, whereas the possibility and encounter of this state emboldens and enlivens Maria at certain points in her story when embodiment either eludes or entraps her. What is more, in *Wrongs of Woman*, specific acts of disembodiment and soul-soaring are often a bid to enter into deeper intimacy not just with the self, but God. Beyond the respective voices and precepts of authority in *Thel* and *Wrongs of Woman*, the threshold of disembodiment holds real liberatory potential.

Considered in this light, *Wrongs of Woman* could be read as a fable of woman's plight to be rid of the carceral body so as to come closer to the Supreme being. Recounting a visit to her home town, Maria dwells on an episode when she has looked 'above…to the Father of nature', only to feel her 'soul rest…on itself, and…fill the universe' (p.152). Stripping her narrative of the occupying, oppressive bodies of man, Maria surmounts her situation, as inscribed on her body; she is able to loosen the 'fetters' of marriage, fetters that have eaten into her 'very vitals' (p.139) and expand. This is a moment of hyper-being, an overt transcendence that allows Maria to ontologically reorient and 'be' herself. Yet it is, sadly, short lived. The carceral body and its demands are not far behind, as seen with the Blakean soul in his illustration to Blair's *The Grave* (fig.1). As outlined in the preceding section, linguistic and semiotic transposition may unite soul-body oppositions; it may make the ineffable effable, the intangible tangible, but in doing so it technically threatens to 'sully' those subliminal and purely soulful experiences 'with a sigh' (p.152). Fleshly demands, as well as those more dysphoric socially constructed conditions imposed on women's corporeality await and inevitably disrupt this euphoria. This physiological intrusion reminds Maria of her actual shackled state and of the corporeal carceration that prevents fuller ensoulment or soul-extension. Of course, this disruption of a soul-soaring episode at once shows the interconnectedness of the soul and body, whilst nodding to the Platonic and Pricean prisoner-imprisoned paradigm. Pulled from the exalted heights of heaven back into the demarcations of sense, Maria can only snatch at immortality through the apertures of a retrospective narrative.

Later in the novel, Wollstonecraft mirrors Blake by spatially dramatizing this dilemma of soul and body, disembodiment and embodiment, inner and outer reality. Structured again through a series of carceral spaces, the device of a window is used to contrast Maria's earth-bound body with her surmounting spirit. Window scenes in *Wrongs of Woman* frequently frame the heroine's yearning for alternate perspectives and prospects. The casement does, however, underscore Foucault's theory of the union of soul and body through the line or layout of (mad) passion. It also literalises what Gaston Bachelard terms the 'dialectic of outside and inside', and demonstrates Grosz's ideas on the body as an interface, a Mobius strip-like plane that is not one, but two at once.[261] An ambiguous boundary, one that in the eighteenth century marked a questionable and worrisome threshold for private and public, the window confuses inside and out; it infers the one only to communicate the other, and it problematizes where Maria begins

[261] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (trans) Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp.211-231.

and ends psychologically and physiologically.[262] The window, in short, signifies the interconnectivity of soul and body (as well as the private corporeal space with the wider public corps), but stages their overlap and the problem this entails for those wanting a dualistic narrative. Having discovered her husband's plan to prostitute her pregnant body to an acquaintance, Maria resolves to end her marriage and 'part for ever' from Venables (p.162). After he locks her in a dining parlour, she opens a window and, set upon 'liberty', recalls how:

> …The face of heaven grew fairer as I viewed it, and the clouds seemed to flit away obedient to my wishes, to give my soul room to expand. I was all soul, and (wild as it may appear) felt as if I could have dissolved in the soft balmy gale that kissed my cheek, or have glided below the horizon on the glowing, descending beams… (p.163)

Here, Maria goes beyond pathetic fallacy in her dreamy description of soul expansion. Dwelling on the breeze, a romantic trope that reoccurs in unbodying sequences, the heroine recounts her 'emancipation of mind' (p.162) and resolution to cut all ties to Venables. Such a 'balmy gale' seems opportune, a beneficent relief and release from the violence she endures. It also highlights the dissolution of her marital body and strife. At once an inspirational and exhalatory gale, this soothing breeze intimately fuses Maria's spirit with that of 'heaven'. Borne on the wings of the wind, this 'wildness' of vision, which defies empirical experience and probability, destabilizes the "stable" bodily self and sees it subsumed into absoluteness, the mighty "allness" of an immaterial soul. On surmounting her material self, it would appear that all of nature, the surrounding world of matter, bows to her 'wishes'. Gliding, descending, dissolving, Maria elides her bodily coordinates and assumes a state of infinitude.

Even so, if one was to visualise this dislocation between soul and body, one could not fail to see the physical form haul the spirit back like an anchor. Lena Halldenius has noted that in this moment of 'freedom', Maria is 'detached' from her physical self and the institutions of society, but as soon as she leaves and enters the asylum, towards which this moment arguably propels her, 'she is all body'.[263] Framed by the window, reminiscent of Blake's soul (fig.2), this ecstatic, metaphysical moment and liberatory episode of detachment will soon be grounded and closed back into the stifling confines of room, marriage, the asylum from which she recounts all and, of course, the carceral form. Consequently, the limitless outside infers the limited inside; the narrated soaring of soul returns us to the encasing bodily nature of language and its informing structures. Caught on an ontological and spiritual cusp, the window frame, a liminal circumference, an existential precipice, reveals the suspended existence of late eighteenth-century womanhood. Looking for more, woman must be jolted back, called down to earth, turned and folded into the narrow domestic and institutional space, into chattel-like, carceral corporeality, with the oppressive finitude of the only window being closed. Denied the window of celestial opportunity available to the Blakean feminised soul (fig.2), Maria can only relive this instance of boundlessness on the page, in her memoir, through the written word.

Hurtling towards the heights of heaven, while one's feet are firmly placed on the ground, could appear presumptuous, a feat of Icarian pride, a trespass on the starry terrain of the divine. We see this fear of hubris and the eroticism involved in a soul scaling the heights of heaven superbly replayed in Anna Laetitia Barbauld's poem, 'A Summer Evening's Meditation' (1773). Barbauld's

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[262] Amanda Vickery discusses the notion of privacy in regards to the Georgian home and sees the era as one significantly advancing such a personal need, as is evident in the interiors of houses (private studies, cabinets) and the levels of security (shutters, keys, padlocks) employed to keep them private. But windows were still regarded as vulnerable 'orifices' and 'weak spots' of homes; they were seen as invitations to thieves, witches and demons. See Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p.5.

[263] Lena Halldenius, *Mary Wollstonecraft and Feminist Republicanism* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015), pp.70-1.

winged Platonic soul whirrs towards the 'trackless' and orgiastic 'deeps of space', 'longing to behold her Maker'. But 'abashed' and aware that it is not quite 'the appointed time', Barbauld's soul turns back to 'the known accustomed spot'.[264] Maria's soul-souring similarly reveals that desire in the soul, the Thel-like hunger to know more than one should or could handle, at least in the eyes of the world. 'Dissolving' into the 'soft balmy gale', which kisses her cheek, Maria's spiritual and psychological freedom unapologetically borders on the erotic. The aural qualities of the passage – the sibilance, assonance and the hypotactic structure ending in polysyllabic adjectives – gently build a growing sense of surrender, ecstasy and satiation. Thel's fear of the sexual taint of the body is done away with here, as Maria seeks and attains pure fulfilment in disembodiment. This erotically tinged moment is not necessarily a corporeal one. Spiritual eroticism, virtuous love and a love of virtue – the kind that saw the Platonic or Socratic soul bud feathery wings and scale the skies in *Timaeus* – was the peak of pleasure, freedom and active reason. For women to have a brief glimpse and taste of this, albeit from the sanctioning "safety" of a window ledge, was one way of experiencing the thrill of liberty and the spiritual eroticism Wollstonecraft herself endorsed throughout her polemics and private letters.

Taylor has identified within Wollstonecraft's own instances of soul-souring an 'amatory identification with God' which made possible 'a female moral subjectivity'.[265] This is evident throughout *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, where invocations to the Supreme Being are the precursory moral voice to her autofictional heroine Maria, and distinguish Wollstonecraft from the morally muddled and physically stunted multitude of her "sex". In *Rights of Men*, this is affirmed when Wollstonecraft declares her dependence on God and submission to the 'moral laws' which her 'reason' deduces from him. Disputing Burke's argument of instinctive or 'untaught feelings' of virtue, Wollstonecraft reiterates across several paragraphs her intellectually and morally edifying relationship with God, the fear of whom 'makes [her] reverence herself' (p.33). Although not a soul-soaring moment, it is an instance where Wollstonecraft's polemical tone and rhetorical line of direction make space for her own personal religious convictions, inevitably allowing her to dip into spiritual exceptionalism with mention of her nourished 'soul' (p.33). As mentioned above, the tone of *Rights of Woman* is similarly interrupted by admissions of her own connectivity to and intimacy with 'that Being who impressed' 'Utopian dreams' on her 'soul' (p.103). This is the only dependency and submission Wollstonecraft will admit, but it is one that, unlike the normative heterosexual partnerships she so decries in *Rights of Woman*, paradoxically upholds her independence and reinforces her reason. 'I love man as my fellow; but his sceptre, real, or usurped, extends not to me…' (p.103), Wollstonecraft boldly announces. Claiming 'female moral subjectivity', as Taylor aptly phrases it, Wollstonecraft goes simultaneously inward (her reason, her soul) and outward (the page, public declaration, the god within and without), and lays bare the working, sustaining, dependable union of which she is a part. Disposing of the body in these instances and in contrast to the overly sexualised, sensitised female forms regaling the pages in 'fruity' language, as Taylor defines it, Wollstonecraft nominates herself as a model of ensouled virtue, putting forward the relational standard all should be aspiring towards: the sacrosanct amatory tie with the almighty.[266]

A Short Residence takes these advocations and invocations to new heights through extended, ecstatic encounters of soul-soaring disembodiment. This is legible early on in the published letters, where, despite her early chastisement of Burke, she unabashedly revels in her ability to contemplate the 'sublime' and 'the beautiful' (p.10) which marks the Scandinavian landscape. In several memorable romantic and rhapsodical episodes Wollstonecraft demonstrates her

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[264] Anna Laetitia Barbauld's poem, 'A Summer Evening's Meditation' in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, (ed) Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.9-16.
[265] Taylor, p.129.
[266] Taylor, p.116.

dependence on the Supreme Being, impresses upon the reader her superior mental and emotional powers, and, as Taylor has cogently outlined in her intellectual biography, frames the liberatory and libidinal love she shares with her maker. Taylor has suggested these textual acts of 'amatory identification with God' are owing to Wollstonecraft's ineptitude and inexperience when it comes to sexual relationships. 'So poorly equipped for love', Taylor insists, 'the idea had an appeal that never disappeared'.[267] Yet this tired biographical reading undermines the proto-feminist liberatory project at the heart of Wollstonecraft's ideas about soul-body relationality, God, reason, deiformity and love, all of which Taylor thoroughly examines herself, and which rarely change across her oeuvre in spite of the shift in her sexual and marital status. In fact, *A Short Residence* frequently incites such soul-expanding erotic encounters with God *before* her then romantic partner, Imlay, so much so that irrespective of his own unloving and unfaithful treatment of Wollstonecraft, these occurrences are evidently about her, as a person and writer, rather than any lack of reciprocation from a male recipient or institution. In short, soul-soaring and expressions of ensoulment, erotic or otherwise, have nothing to do with compensating for a lack of patriarchal presence or power, and everything to do with what makes women spiritual subjects realising their full potential and destiny in spite of such institutions. In *A Short Residence*, therefore, instances of disembodiment move beyond social compensation and consolation for a lonely, unloved soul, into those spiritually expansive, nourishing and unifying occasions related in her polemics. Contemplating from the window of a carriage the Swedish landscape in the early hours of the night, Wollstonecraft relates her most erotic soul flight:

> The very air was balmy, as it freshened into morn, producing the most voluptuous sensations. A vague pleasurable sentiment absorbed me, as I opened my bosom to the embraces of nature; and my soul rose to its author, with the chirping of the solitary birds, which began to feel, rather than see, advancing day. I had leisure to mark its progress. The grey morn, streaked with silvery rays, ushered in the orient beams,—how beautifully varying into purple!—yet, I was sorry to lose the soft watry clouds which preceded them, exciting a kind of expectation that made me almost afraid to breathe, lest I should break the charm. I saw the sun—and sighed. (p.35)

Surrounded by dozing travellers, Wollstonecraft's exceptionalism is again underscored when she, like her autofictional counterparts, departs from her sublunary confines to greater celestial heights. Framed again through a window, distinctions between inner and outer blur, with bodily parameters elided by her spirit-expanding escapade. Transferring vocabulary often associated with those supine female bodies found in *Rights of Woman* onto her spiritually eroticised form, Wollstonecraft creates an ethical erotics, one where a 'feeling' soul rises to its 'author' to enjoy 'voluptuous sensations' within and beyond this world. Reminiscent of Young's *Night Thoughts*, where the restless sleeper's soul roams and rolls through an imaginative landscape (again Blake's illustrations realise this wonderfully) or Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782), where his spirit 'soars through the universe on the wings of imagination', Wollstonecraft's soul roves beyond this poetic musing by plunging into the dreamy depths of Scandinavia's rocky edifices, turbulent cascades and pretty wildernesses.[268] Unlike Young's speaker or Rousseau, though, she is neither unconscious nor has she withdrawn from society. Rather, hers is a soul expansion occurring amongst the dreaming, slumbering bodies of others, in the social and public space of a carriage. What is common to all is the evocative natural sites enabling the soul to move from the skin of social spheres, mores and concerns into those of a more divinely profound and sublime aspect. Thus air, birdsong and 'soft watry clouds' (p.35), the phantasmagorical motifs of nature and romantic signs of spirituality, rhapsodically unite to woo the soul, to captivate and seduce the hyper-conscious, ultra-present and ever-susceptible narrator. Inside and outside, body and

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[267] Taylor, p.131.

[268] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, (trans) Peter France (London: Penguin, 1979), (p.107).

soul coalesce, as Wollstonecraft opens her 'bosom' to the 'embraces' of the natural world and the Supreme immanence therein. As the soul rises to its 'author' (p.34), the sky seems to echo this human surrender to the supernatural. Strewn with 'purple' and 'silvery rays', a sun slowly rises, almost just for Wollstonecraft, and completes this holy ecstasy. Echoing her heroine in *Wrongs of Woman*, the writer is afraid to 'breathe' (p.35), but upon seeing the sun this near-orgiastic moment is totalised and concluded with a bodily 'sigh' (p.35). The balmy 'air' that triggered this magic interlude returns full circle to the exhalation of breath, paralleling Maria's later experience in the novel. Soul must be brought back to earth, to the body, to the page, to the written hand. Sighing, this simultaneously preternatural and natural release must draw to an all too human close.

Later again, when visiting the cascade in Letter 15, the sublimity of the scene prompts another case of soul-surging disembodiment. Here, death appears 'under every form' and bursts in on Wollstonecraft's thoughts: 'I asked myself why I was chained to life and its misery?' (p.89). What enables her 'soul' to rise, 'with renewed dignity, above its cares' and grasp at 'immortality' is the sight of 'dark cavities' and the 'tumultuous emotions' they excite (p.89). What these successive out of body experiences reawaken is a sharpened dual sense of mortality and immortality, the infinite and the finite. Nature, that backdrop to Wollstonecraft's interiority exteriorized, is a stage upon which soul both acts and is acted on; it is where the soul, in a most Thel-like agon, must choose mortal or eternal life, and work through its dilemma over embodiment here or full disembodiment in the next life. 'I stretched out my hand to eternity, bounding over the dark speck of life to come', Wollstonecraft intones of an episode at once melancholic and uplifting. From the cascade to the 'ruggedness of the scenery', disembodiment passes into embodiment, with Wollstonecraft noting landmarks and turning to her reader to acquaint him that accounts of the 'monsters' of the sea 'ought to be torn out of our Geographical Grammar' (p.90). As factual verification replaces spiritual deliberation and exaltation, the body and bodily world of men stops soul-surging and ideations of suicide short of complete disembodiment and destruction. Complete disembodiment then, is reserved for one's final departure; that is death, and is not, contrary to what Price has extolled regarding disembodiment and resurrection through death and what Grosz has claimed about Wollstonecraftian soul-body duality, a proper solution to socio-cultural carceration. It offers a reprieve, a (narratological) release, a reminder of what and who the human soul is to the divine creator, but it does not offer a resolution to the soul-body problem or the social constructionism of corporeality for women. As this chapter has demonstrated, disembodiment infers embodiment, as much as the soul does the body and the written word does the hand that inscribes it upon the page, as conveyed powerfully through Maria and Wollstonecraft's respective memoirs. Blake well knew that to be enrobed in a 'little curtain of flesh' was to be open to the desirous possibilities of life and the painful inevitability of death; it was to be aware of the acute susceptibility and strength of the body, as well as the restless searching and soaring of the soul.

Section 2: Corporeal Strategies & Schemes

The Return of the Rococo Body and the "Vagina of Versailles"

Fig.7, Anish Kapoor, *Dirty Corner*, 2011-2015, Corten steel sculpture, earth and mixed media, 8.9 x 6.55 x 60m.

Versailles, for all its gilded furnishings, lavish drapery and glittering glass, would be nothing without its gardens. Designed by André le Nôtre, Controller of Buildings to Louis XIV, the gardens turn out and extend the palatial magnificence that lies within. Sweeping away Versailles' past as a rustic hunting lodge and transforming surrounding marshland into grounds fit for a Sun King, Le Nôtre's geometrically daring designs have since earned him the epithet 'king of gardeners'.[269] Like the palace, the grounds envelop with their grandeur and surprise with their hidden groves and recesses. And like their royal occupants, the gardens' classical statuary bask in the splendour of the sun, frolicking in fountains and along walkways. If a courtier were to stand by a window in the Hall of Mirrors and look out beyond the first parterres, she would be struck by a strip of green and a vast expanse of water stretching into the horizon. Known as the Grand Canal, this extended waterway was a feat of seventeenth-century engineering never achieved before in France. If our courtier had the view of the gods, she would see that the Grand Canal was designed in the shape of a large Catholic cross, a vision only fit for an absolute monarch. Denied this privileged perspective, our courtier would be deceived into thinking it was a continuous plain of water and grass. Luring the eye forward in pursuit of infinite perfection, the water would have appeared like a single translucent beam, a vector of divine light emitted from the wall of mirrors inside and carried along celestial lawns and rivers without.

This was just one of many tricks employed by Le Nôtre in his formation of the grounds. Such optical illusions (the one above is known to artists and architects as anamorphosis) were not lost on the artist Anish Kapoor during his 2015 commission at Versailles. Playing on Le Nôtre's early enlightenment designs, with their mathematical exactitude and magnification of light, Kapoor

[269] This is quoted on the website for Versailles, on the 'Discover' and 'The Gardens' pages devoted to André le Nôtre and his role at the palace. See my bibliography for the link.

placed a large concave mirror, entitled *C-Curve* (2015), on the chateau steps. Further on, close to the Parterre d'Eau, he positioned another reflective surface on stilts, titled *Sky Mirror* (2015), which faced upwards like a convex satellite dish or an overturned silver bowl scooping up the heavens. Both glasses inferred and drew out the inner world of the Bourbon dynasty into the chateau grounds. Both reframed the chateau's famed grandeur, repeating the space to itself, forcing the grounds to baroquely fold in. In doing so Kapoor's works tilt the chateau into the uncanny and dizzyingly surreal. Instead of an innocent homage to seventeenth-century ingenuity, Kapoor stresses the eccentricity, irregularity and abjection lying dormant within the palatial interiors and surrounding gardens. He conjures forth its garish bodily excesses and forces the 'interior disquiet' and 'suppressed' discord out from its 'rational order'.[270] He reveals what 'is always sitting there' and unearths what Le Nôtre had seen all along.[271]

The sculpture that best enacts this process of unearthing is *Dirty Corner* (fig.7, 2015), a monstrous hulk of rusty metal that emerges from the Tapis Vert like a truculent subterranean creature disturbed from its slumber. If our courtier were to peer out from her casement centuries later, she would no longer see the sublime sheet of lawn or the crystal clear water. Instead, Kapoor's sculpture would obstruct her view and deliberately destroy all sight lines. Shocked, even horrified, our courtier would cover her eyes, fearful of gazing into its medusa-like stare. For this is a sculpture that threatens and confronts in its vaginal and vulvic suggestiveness – the eponymous 'dirty corner'. It is a form that breaks through the strict lineaments of Le Nôtre's grids and geometric planes to cause havoc, to create the mother of all messes, to disclose the gaping fertile void at the heart of it all. Dubbed the 'vagina' of Versailles by the media, *Dirty Corner* proudly owns itself as a point of origin and a spectacular descent into the origins of place.[272] It posits both the dark promise and danger associated with the female body and sexuality, especially during Le Nôtre's time, whilst looking back to phallic power: the rear of this metal orifice is a rusting tubular tunnel, akin to a hydraulic pipe, indicative of what literally did lie beneath the grounds of Versailles in the eighteenth century. Reddish rocks, rubble and dirt surround the funnel-like opening, returning Le Nôtre's garden to a site of reconstruction.

What many critics see as a vulgar act of vandalism to the seventeenth-century gardener's designs, Kapoor perceives as a return of the repressed, the irrational bursting free from the well-manicured lawns of rationalism and formality.[273] Irrespective of whether one likes Kapoor's work or not, what *Dirty Corner* and his five other sculptures capture is the history of the site: that is, its grounds, various buildings, successive royal occupants, and tumultuous political embroilments. Kapoor's sculpture is, therefore, as much in keeping with Le Nôtre's sly anamorphic designs as it is ostensibly *against* them in its amorphous, queer, hermaphroditic, bodily import. By bringing the site back to the body – back to its excesses, neuroses and conflicted states – Kapoor forcefully and viscerally delivers it back to its conflicted past and the cause of its downfall. The "effeminised" luxury and dissipation that had appalled the third estate, then, in turn what was to become the National Assembly and their international Republican sympathisers, had to be controlled, suppressed, overcome and eventually cut off. But *Dirty Corner* rears up in its own rebellion; it comes back to haunt seventeenth-century ideas of the Baroque and eighteenth-century principles of enlightenment, the years of near totalitarian terror in early French republicanism, and now, more recently, the oppression and injustices of modern conservatism

[270] Anish Kapoor, *Blood and Light. In conversation with Julia Kristeva* (2015).
[271] Kapoor, 2015.
[272] Many articles that employ or make reference to this term, and discuss the controversy around Kapoor's work, were published in *The Guardian*, *The Independent Artnet News* and other publications. See Angelique Chrisafis, 'Anish Kapoor's Versailles 'Vagina' causes controversy in France' in *The Guardian* (4 June 2015) and Alyssa Buffenstein, 'Public Outrage Erupts in France Over Anish Kapoor Vagina Sculpture at Versailles' in *Artnet News* (8 June 2015).
[273] See Robin Lane Fox's article 'Le Nôtre's masterpiece vs Anish Kapoor's 'Dirty Corner" in the *Financial Times* (10 July 2015).

and nationalism. In its reclamation of bodily extremes and pleasures, *Dirty Corner* is at once a reminder of what was and what still could be.

Kapoor's staging of the repressed revolutions – and revulsions – of French cultural and political history serves as a metaphor for Wollstonecraft's own relationship to and representation of France. Prior to travelling and residing there, Wollstonecraft's writing already showed sympathy for French philosophical thought. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, Rousseau's ideas significantly influenced her own: across her letters through to her early didactic literature and later works, she was engaged in critical dialogue with Rousseauian theories of gender, selfhood, socialisation and political systems. Most significantly, as examined in Chapter 1, in *Rights of Woman* she expressed critical disappointment, horror and revulsion at his coquettish exemplum of femininity and womanhood, the fictional Sophie from his *Émile*. All her published writings, private letters and reviews evince familiarity with other French thinkers and writers, such as Jacques Necker, whose treatise she translated for Johnson in 1788; Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, whose letters she loved and fondly quoted in her own epistles; and children's author Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, whose work she used when working as a governess in Ireland.[274] Her famous polemics, *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, not only wade deep into the debates and developments of the revolution, but were, as is evident from the titles, inspired by them. When it came to political and philosophical innovation, France was ever before her, shaping the discourses of the European enlightenment and igniting the minds of radical British thinkers, writers and artists alike.

There was, nevertheless, another side to Wollstonecraft's relationship to France: the xenophobic attitude she held towards its socio-cultural structures, institutions and relations, and, thereby, the bodies involved in and dependent on them. This Francophobic aspect to her thought manifests in Wollstonecraft's prose, even, at times, when in the midst of praising the nation's politicians and philosophes, and was most prominent in those revolutionary works of the early-to-mid 1790s. *Rights of Men*, *Rights of Woman*, 'Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation' (w.1793; published 1798) and *An Historical and Moral View of the Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) all critically appraise French political revolutionary ideas, progress and events whilst employing Francophobic and xenophobic tropes regarding French manners and morality, gender relations, sexualities and orientations, and, subsequently, individual and political bodies.[275] It is here, in these Francophobic sexualised and sexualising tropes, that we witness that which Wollstonecraft wishes to suppress or dismiss resurface in her rationalistic philosophy. Like *Dirty Corner*, Wollstonecraft's sexualised figures resurgently appear, disrupting the persuasive power and purpose of her framework and vision. In her earlier polemics, she identified a particular type of corporeal conduct as "sensual" and "frivolous" (the voluptuous manners and slumbering morality outlined in *Rights of Woman*) and thus dangerous and retrogressive to individual and institutional progress. In later political writings she attempted to qualify this through grand historical analysis and contemporary French propagandist material, situating France within a European and universalist project of human evolution.

Her shifting stance on the revolution reflects the wider narrative of the event itself. Preceding Kapoor with the rupture of the sensuous, Wollstonecraft's analysis also parallels the contemporary artist's visual conceit in her confrontation of how and why the revolution, as a series of individual and collective actions, failed its original cause. In 'Letter on the Present

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[274] Jacques Necker, *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions*, (trans) Mary Wollstonecraft (London: Joseph Johnson, 1788); for Wollstonecraft's references to Mirabeau and Genlis, see *Letters*, pp.223-224, 98.

[275] Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effects it has Produced in Europe* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1794). All quotations will be taken from this edition unless stated elsewhere in the chapter.

Character', *An Historical and Moral View* and personal letters written during her residency in France, we see Wollstonecraft revising her opinions, as critics Tom Furniss, David Bromwich and Daniel O' Neil have noted, in light of the degeneration of the revolutionary hope of forming a democracy.[276] The turn of the revolution from a more just representation and leadership of the people through to resurging tyranny with the terror pushes the rationalist revolutionary's aspirations and actions back into the excess he originally shunned. Wollstonecraft's response was more than a readjustment of opinion; at times, her prose bordered on the surprisingly excessive itself, lamenting the ruin into which this hoped for democracy and democratic thinking had fallen. Moving through Versailles in a melancholic and elegiac section of *An Historical and Moral View*, Wollstonecraft's tone and position not only draw close to Burke, but to the sentimental extremes and mannerisms she condemns elsewhere. Placing herself in the original locus of the old regime, rather than the cosmopolitan and sociable streets of Paris, Wollstonecraft draws attention to a reversion of extremes and a socio-political regression of significant proportions: a once renounced palace, the symbolic apex of hierarchy and aristocratic privilege, has become a site of political loss, grief and sorrow while Liberty's boulevards are awash with 'blood and bitter tears' (p.255).[277] Allowing these gothic interludes to enter into her prose, she draws close to Kapoor in anchoring analysis in this problematic historical site, problematizing the political history of France that surrounds it and further rendering her own position on the two obscure.

This gothic intrusion in her text, alongside the xenophobic sexualised bodily tropes cautioning against French manners and morals, creates another corporeal bifurcation in her work. Considering these gothic passages and sexualised figures, monstrous and ostensibly anomalous to the controlled, rational discourse in which we find them, two bodies emerge, both of which are textually framed as decidedly French: the rococo and the republican. Seemingly distinct and oppositional, these corporeal types often mutually infer one another, akin to Kapoor's sculptural homage to Le Nôtre, which looks back to the *ancien régime* and forward to the ruinous actions of its political counterpart and successor, the *nouveau régime* of the French republic. The rococo body is a composite form representing all that is dissolute, lascivious, hedonistic, theatrical and physical. Stylistically it is François Boucher to Jacques-Louis David: the lavish individualistic past to the restrained, classically heroic and collective future. The republican body is, conversely, masculine, rational and national in its outlook; it is emotionally restrained yet feeling, as we have seen espoused elsewhere in Wollstonecraft's work. Both bodies are plural, but embody and manifest this plurality with different intentions and to different effects. Like a hydra, the anti-royalist symbol of *ancien régime* excess, the solipsistic rococo body monstrously replicates itself *for* itself, whereas the republican body unites the many – the people – into one corps for the advantage and in the interests of all. Both pluralities were not lost on Wollstonecraft and are called on in her depiction and examination of France's rapidly changing socio-political system. Across her political writings, both bodies are developed by or evince residues of influence from British royalist and French republican propaganda and the pamphleteer debates to which Wollstonecraft herself contributed.

How do these two conflicting and converging bodily ideologies progress or regress Wollstonecraft's ideas of freedom and republicanism? How does her Francophobic characterisation accentuate or negate her ideas on bodily freedom in particular? Where do such portrayals stem from in this radical era? Looking again at Wollstonecraft's two *Vindications* and her lesser-known works written whilst in France, 'A Letter on the Present Character' and *An*

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[276] Tom Furniss, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's French Revolution' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, (ed) Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.59-81, 72; David Bromwich, 'Wollstonecraft as a Critic of Burke' in *Political Theory*, 23 (November 1995), pp.617-634; Daniel I. O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization and Democracy* (Penn State: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).
[277] From a letter to Ruth Barlow (July 8th 1794); see *Letters*, pp.254-255.

Historical and Moral View, in addition to private correspondence from her time there, I will consider how this period of revolt and liberty, hope and disillusionment informed her evolving relationship to and depiction of the body.

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In an anonymous engraving of the late 1770s (fig.8), differences in British and French manners are laid bare. Published by C. Sheppard, a South London printer of cheap satirical prints for consumers of popular ephemera, the crude image alludes to the complicated, warring relationship between America and Britain, and the former's alliance with France during the American revolution. With France entering into the revolution in 1778 under the Treaty of Alliance (the date of which coincides with that of the print's publication), the engraver commemorates this event by gently mocking all involved. America is absent, except for the demeaning synecdoche of a roasted 'American goose' which the Englishman (possibly a naval officer) obnoxiously claims from the serving dish. Bringing it to his mouth and taking a bite from the bird entire, he completely ignores the pleas of his fellow diners and satiates his hunger without apology or embarrassment. By far the largest figure in the room – and one who impolitely wears his tricorne hat whilst eating – the Englishman rudely ignores the decorum required of him by the room and the conduct of all those who inhabit it. Behind him, the artist has alluded both to the conflict at hand and that overseas with a simple framed sketch of two prize-fighters mid punch. Evidently there is not just a political conflict at work here, but a cultural one. A viewer could be forgiven for thinking the scene occurs in the parlour of a British household, but the print is titled 'The Englishman in Paris' (fig.8), further underscoring the unbecoming behaviour of this entitled and domineering foreign figure.

Fig.8, *The Englishman in Paris*, published by C. Sheppard, (1778). © British Museum Trustees.

'The Englishman in Paris' satirises all involved, as well as their vested interests in entering the war. Although the Englishman bullishly ignores his dining companions and believes the goose – and country – to be solely his, the French demand a slice of the prized bird: 'think you we'll tamely look on and starve? / No, no Mons. Anglois, we wait for to carve'. Far from supporting

American independence for the sake of it, the French await a return for their financial and military involvement. More important, however, is the satirisation of French manners and morals. Looking on at the theatrics of greed and dominance betrayed by the Englishman, the French stare, hardily moving except for the objecting figure in the foreground tilting his chair and raising his hands. Another man looks on amusedly, as if he were attending a comedic drama, and a woman does not deign to put down her wine. Elaborately dressed from head to toe, with pink breeches, pink polka dot jackets and ruffled shirts and sleeves, all three diners and their servant look every bit the British stereotype or Francophobic conception of Frenchness. Overly dressed and finessed in appearance to the point of foppishness, they appear more ornamental than actively civilized; more mannered than moral.

What solidifies this is the hyperbolic and ostentatious hair styles; each figure is excessively coiffured and powdered, with wigs, ribbons and lace further exaggerating the look. The objecting Frenchman in the foreground sports an exceedingly long plait from a dramatically feathered head of hair; the woman has a suggestive, gigantic cap and the amused fop a plait of his own. Through their hair and attire alone, the men are almost indistinguishable from the woman, thus effeminising the diminutive French males in sharp contrast to the overbearing masculinity of the Englishman. Despite the plainness of the room, the French are impractically dressed and look as if they have been called to court or are waiting to attend a ball. Fashion rather than intention takes centre stage here, and highlights that meaningless niceties, surface accomplishments and over-preening attention will not win you a war – or a goose! Far from standing on ceremony, the Englishman literally seizes the day, but in a somewhat proleptic vision, the French go hungry and without their portion because of their inability to act and their preference to be served. What 'The Englishman in Paris' suggests is the contrasting social relations, formalities and habits of each nationality – formalities and habits which could have significant repercussions on the world stage.

Too much ceremony to the point of absurdity was often dressed in the apparel of Frenchness in English Culture. In the same year that Sheppard published 'The Englishman in Paris', Frances Burney's debut novel, *Evelina*, made its 'entrance' into the world. With it came the author's conception, Madame Duval, an older English female character whose behaviour borders on the salacious and who elaborately apes the overly finessed form of feminine Frenchness espied in 'The Englishman in Paris'.[278] Whilst Sheppard's print mocks the passivity, effeminateness and mannered behaviour of the French, hinting at their inability to overthrow English colonial might in America, Burney's characterisation of French femininity is employed to reinforce English notions of selfhood and propriety. Madame Duval is continually at odds with her surroundings and fellow characters, many of whom are satirical versions of English types (fops, rakes, vulgar-mouthed men and masculinised women) and yet she remains a threat in her conspicuous performance of French manners and invidious modes of behaviour. What Burney's complex Francophobic caricature highlights is the fear of foreign behaviour and ideas influencing British women. Unlike the French figures in 'The Englishman in Paris', whose proclivity for appearance over action render them ineffectual as models of exemplary modes of behaviour, Madame Duval

[278] Frances Burney, *Evelina*, (ed) Vivien Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; first published 1778). Obeying social codes and customs with a looseness befitting her loud and garrulous speech, Madame Duval, as observed by her granddaughter Evelina, dresses 'gaily, paints very high' and is 'already out of mourning' despite her husband having died but 'three months' prior to her arriving in England (p.55). From her vulgar sparring with Captain Mirvan (p.53) to her suggested liaison with Monsieur du Bois (who eventually makes inappropriate overtures to Evelina), through to her continual, open denigration of English manners and conversation with anyone who will listen, Madame Duval's Frenchness, though a disingenuous act in and of itself, is seen as a fault; a corruption of British mores, conventions and codes of morality as inscribed in and expressed through manners (see pp.51-56). Wollstonecraft would have been familiar with Burney's novel, having reviewed her work for the *Analytical Review*.

is actively and provocatively, repulsively and violently "French" to a British audience. Though a parody of wayward French mores, a mockery within a mockery, Madame Duval as an Englishwoman mimicking Frenchness reflects badly not on her original nationality and homeland, but her falsified adopted one. Thus in an era of revolutionary warfare, satirical portraits of Frenchness had political as well as cultural motivations. As Linda Colley has noted, British national identity was 'forged' not just through its 'contact' with foreign cultures and nations, but through its 'conflict' with them too.[279] Dror Wharman has also examined the threat American patriots posed to the very notion of Englishness when fighting for a republic; 'was this a civil war between Englishmen, or was it a war with aliens…disguising themselves as Englishmen…?' he queries, demonstrating that any trace of otherness to the English was enough to inspire xenophobic unease.[280] Published at a time when Britain was at war with America, and France was supporting American colonialists in their bid for independence, Shepherd and Burney's xenophobic characterisations of the French could be seen as desperate attempts to reaffirm British notions of cultural as well as geopolitical supremacy. In the face of destabilising otherness – both French and American – Britain wanted to present (at least to itself) as reassuringly stable, capable and strong.

With such limited, if not outright Francophobic, representations of the French already established and in circulation in British media and literature by the early 1790s, it is little wonder Wollstonecraft's own theory of contemporary female manners had become entwined with them. Since the 1770s, Britain had accelerated its campaign to define itself against those nations with whom it was at war; in the 1790s, with revolutionary sympathies rising amongst British radicals and Britain eventually going to war, again, with France, the determination to affirm and defend the national character was at an all-time high, with the government doing everything in its power (from arrests of Jacobins to the censoring of terminology that betrayed even a hint of linguistic patriotism with France) to suppress and restrict French influence, revolutionary fervour and anti-royalist activity.[281] Although Wollstonecraft was a proud supporter of the revolution, her views of French behaviour and morality were still inflected with Francophobic and prejudicial notions. Whether it be the effeminised inactivity of the French presented in 'The Englishman in Paris' or the subversively parodic and potently entertaining femininity of Madame Duval, the Frenchification of women's *and* men's manners was a threat to the moral health and personal and political relationships of both, she would argue. It was men's 'specious homage' to women, as encouraged by French Rousseauian thought and preserved as gallantry in British conduct literature, that 'bubbled' their minds (p.71), encouraged their 'barren blooming' emotionally and physically (p.71), and had a detrimental effect on gender relations and socio-political progress overall.[282] In *Rights of Woman*, this tension between republican visions and rococo means and modes of self-actualisation results in the rhetorical and literal intersection of those two corporeal forms throughout the body of Wollstonecraft's text.

Wollstonecraft's letter to Talleyrand-Périgord illustrates this tension. Her respect and admiration for the political cause is evident from the opening paragraph where she dedicates the book to Talleyrand-Périgord (member of the National Assembly, and envoy and minister of French

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[279] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp.1, 6.
[280] Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.245-246.
[281] Joan C. Beal, "À la Mode de Paris': Linguistic Patriotism and Francophobia in 18th-century Britain' in *The Languages of Nation: Attitudes and Norms*, (eds) Carol Percy and Mary Catherine Davidson (Multilingual Matters).
[282] Taylor's article on the history and permeation of French gallantry in British thinking, writing and culture excellently demonstrates Wollstonecraft's frustration with French cultural importations of gendered behaviour and inadvertently gives us ground for considering how and why her feminism has become entwined with xenophobia. See Taylor, 'Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightenment Britain' in *Representations*, 87 (Summer 2004), pp.125-148, 127-129.

Foreign Affairs in 1792) and shows pleasure in his pamphlet on the education of citizens in France. She adopts a deferential tone towards 'those enlarged minds who formed your admirable constitution' (p.65) and acknowledges the 'more general diffusion of knowledge' thanks to 'social intercourse which has long subsisted between the sexes' (p.65). Underneath these notes of appreciation and deference, however, are the seeds of her own revolutionary thinking. Never one to write without assessing the full extent of a proposal, Wollstonecraft's exceptions are on display: Talleyrand-Périgord's pamphlet, *Rapport sur l'instruction publique, fait au nom du Comité de constitution* (1791), elicits pleasure except for its sub-par educational opportunities it grants to women owing to their "subordinate" status; her love for the constitution stops short when its titular *droits de l'homme* stands solely for men and denies the 'abstract rights…. of woman' (p.67); and lastly, the Nation's 'diffusion of knowledge', its renowned salon culture presided over by women, may well be a marker of Enlightenment progress and epistemological dissemination, and yet these spaces and forms of sociability still inform and augment gender roles and relations for the worse. It is at this mention of salon culture that Wollstonecraft's tone and argument changes, revealing her own opinion of French women, manners and morality:

> …I utter my sentiments with freedom, that in France the very essence of sensuality has been extracted to regale the voluptuary, and a kind of sentimental lust has prevailed, which, together with the system of duplicity that the whole tenour of their political and civil government taught, have a sinister sort of sagacity to the French character, properly termed finesse; from which naturally flow a polish of manners that injures the substance, by hunting sincerity out of society. – And modesty, the fairest garb of virtue! has been more grossly insulted in France than even in England, till their women have treated as prudish that attention to decency, which brutes instinctively observe. (p.65)

In a series of statements simultaneously highlighting and playing, in a Kapoorian reflexive style, with the duplicity of French sociability and socialisation, Wollstonecraft positions the political situation and system of France in the more personal dimension of their homes and salons and thereby in the collective and individual bodies of the nation. Here, we see Wollstonecraft's objection to seeming, to the artifice of social construction and interaction, to its preference for the external ('the polish of manners') over the internal ('the substance', 'sincerity' itself). Her gripe is with a regressive inversion of order that prioritises excessively sensitised, pleasure-seeking bodies over minds, and manners over morals, leaving the latter, as she will proceed to say, 'an empty name' (p.66). The rococo body, implied in the language and descriptors of libertinage and chivalry ('regale the voluptuary', 'sentimental lust', 'sinister sort of sagacity') hints at the orientalist tropes of seraglios, harams and slavish Eastern bodies to come in her text (as explored in the previous chapter), the anti-royalist terms employed when discussing the courts of Louis XV and Louis XVI, and the trivialisation, exoticisation and sexualisation of the French character deployed throughout her various works.

What is most problematic for Wollstonecraft about this duplicity and superficiality of behaviour is that it comes from the top and, in this instance, trickles downwards, into the very aspect that makes France advance: its arenas of sociability and communal intellectual exchange, the micro loci of the wider project of democratization and universal knowledge. Progress amongst and between the sexes, concerning the formation of identity and subsequently the constitution of political and national character, sees a return to specious forms of power in such spaces, when the external, the 'garb' of modesty, is preferred to inner virtue. In denying women educational parity with men and opportunity in general the very 'system of duplicity' that Talleyrand-Périgord seeks to uproot is perpetuated in personal and social domains that form the foundation of wider political institutions. The old regime and its ways prevail, seep in and keep the culture of tyranny alive, as 'finessed' as it may seem and despite the revolution and republican policies

attempting to reverse it. In a Kapoorian vein, Wollstonecraft's conception of the superficial, bodily, sexualised, 'sagacious' character of French women re-emerges like his sculpture amidst her reason-focused argument and republican-endorsed discourse. Here, in her reason-focused prose and tone, and her rationalisation of the current state of French society, the rococo body rhetorically reappears, emotively colouring her cautionary reminder to Tayllerand-Périgord that more needs to be done in order to save the morality of France's *citoyennes*. Thus Wollstonecraft's biased and culturally inflected conception of Frenchness, as imagined in its centres of cultural and communal exchange, and relational, gendered interactions, becomes integral to the republican vision itself. Framed not as xenophobia but ethnographic analysis and sociological observation, Wollstonecraft's prejudicial attitude to the French has a politically insistent ring.

In 'Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation', Wollstonecraft's analysis of the French is again framed as that made by a historian or proto-sociologist.[283] Written less than two months into her sojourn in France, when she was struggling to learn the language and find work for one of her sisters, Eliza Bishop, 'Letter On the Present Character' was published several years after it was written in Godwin and Johnson's *Posthumous Works* (1798). The fragment is prefaced with a note by Godwin stating that 'Letter on the Present Character' was to be 'Introductory to a Series of Letters on the Present Character of the French Nation'. This series did not materialise, though the seeds for Wollstonecraft's epic, *An Historical and Moral View*, which does chart the civilizational development of France and wider Europe, are visible in this single epistle. We know from correspondence with Johnson, her sister Everina and a newly made American acquaintance, Ruth Barlow, that Wollstonecraft would already have made connections with the British Jacobin community, such as Helen Maria Williams, who had migrated to France to witness and be part of the revolution first-hand. We also know that in this very short time – late December 1792 to early February 1793 when 'Letter on the Present Character' was written – she had already witnessed the arrest and trial of Louis XVI and was still residing in Paris at the time of his death.[284] What is more, she had said no to a place on a carriage for a return journey to England, evidently enjoying her stay and eager to engage with French politics and the French and British Girondin circles instrumental to it.[285] Though a first-hand observer of the revolution for only two months, Wollstonecraft had already encountered both the highs and lows of France and its rapid revolutionary activities. Whether this made her an accurate analyst of the situation of the country and its moral state is arguable, but it does speak of her desire to throw herself into the thick of what was undoubtedly one of the most exciting and tumultuous periods of French history.[286] Her decision speaks of her eagerness to understand what underpinned their society and propelled them towards this political moment of ferment and change. In 'Letter on the Present Character' her Francophobic opinion of French manners and morality does not shift, but her reasoning behind her assessment is qualified somewhat by her 'wish' to 'calmly…consider the stage of civilization in which' she finds them (p.43).

Before this qualification, nonetheless, are several pages criticising the French for being 'the most sensual people in the world' (p.42). Recounting her walk along the Parisian '*Boulevards*' (p.40) to an unnamed correspondent, Wollstonecraft again employs a string of 'contrasts' to highlight the duplicitous state in which she finds Republican France.[287] The capital at once announces 'riches

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[283] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Vol. IV, (ed) William Godwin (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798), pp. 39-51.

[284] See *Letters*, where Wollstonecraft relates these episodes to Johnson and Ruth Barlow, pp.216-217, 221.

[285] This was recounted in a letter to Ruth Barlow, p.221.

[286] Emma Clery writes persuasively of Wollstonecraft's intentions to travel to France and the reasons behind her prolonged stay. See her article, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: A Feminist Exile in Paris' in *Litteraria Pragensia*, 29 (2019), pp.29-26.

[287] 'Letter on the Present Character' could have been addressed to Ruth Barlow or Joseph Johnson, since some of the phrases employed in it match those used in contemporary epistles to them, although Furniss argues that the

and poverty, elegance and slovenliness, urbanity and deceit.' Not wishing to have her objective view tainted by 'intimacy' with individuals (ironic considering the relationships she forms there), she holds onto 'first impressions' made of a 'Nation, as by a countenance', rather than ameliorating them with wider experience and further knowledge of the country. This is an unusual approach to adopt, considering her espousal of women thinking beyond the "present moment" and extending their view and intellectual reach. And yet Wollstonecraft is assuming a Rousseauian solitary walk amongst, but not *of*, the people, enabling her to take a philosopher's unbiased and unvarnished eye to all without being swayed by personal feelings.

No sooner does she embark on this walk, however, and place us in the midst of cosmopolitan Parisian life, the city where 'Epicurus has long been at work' (p.47), but she deems French people 'frivolous', 'amiable' (p.40), 'vain' and 'void of care'. They are a people who 'trifle away their time' and 'play before [her] like motes in a sunbeam, enjoying the passing ray…' (p.41), she declares whilst borrowing lines from Milton's *Il Penseroso* (1645-6). Critical and somewhat condescending in her estimation of them, conjuring before us the satirical prints and figures of English artists and writers alike, Wollstonecraft's descriptions nevertheless convey the bodily ease, levity and satiation of the rococo form. Not just sensibility, but pleasure is the 'manie' of the day according to her portrait of the French here, who, unlike the English, savour 'the volatile sweets of the moment' (p.41). It is the 'English head' that searches 'for more solid happiness', and it is, by syntactical association, the English head that, in the more respected pursuit of reason, 'shoulders' the 'heavy burthen of life' (p.41). Coasting on the pleasures, frissons and vanities of daily existence, the French, as represented by Wollstonecraft, are not fit for the rigours of the revolution that reason, as a virtue, demands. By her estimation they are not prepared to forsake the gross bodily liberties of the past for the actual reasoned liberty of the future. The republican body, ruled naturally by the head, is forsaken for the 'selfish' enjoyments of the senses, the 'luxuries' and 'pleasures' that in the long-run 'emasculate' (p.48) and 'root out the simple emotions of the heart' (p.47).

Later in the same work, Wollstonecraft adopts a visionary tone when calling upon the rococo body's opposite, the republican form and trope of Liberty:

> I would I could first inform you that, out of the chaos of vices and follies, prejudices and virtues, rudely jumbled together, I saw the fair form of Liberty slowly rising, and Virtue expanding her wings to shelter all her children. (p.43)

Liberty represented the French Republic rising up to claim freedom and shake off the chains of former tyrannical systems of government and power. Like the Three Graces or Muses, she was part of a trio of feminised abstract republican values (*La Trinité républicaine*): *La Liberté*, *L'Egalité* and *La Fraternité*, all of which were emblazoned across buildings, sold as etchings and enshrined in the constitutional foundations of the New Republic, whilst being ironically and typically defined and enjoyed, for the most part, by men. Though *La Liberté* – or the Marianne as she was also named – would later be known for her bare-breasted body, fighting and walking amongst her people (as immortalised in Eugène Delacroix's later work of 1830, *Liberty Leading the People*), in the 1790s she was often depicted by the French with restrained classical attire in a bid to reclaim the values, gravity and stature of republican Rome. *La Liberté* is often shown sporting toga-like drapery (chastely covering her chest), a Phrygian cap, a cockade, a fasces, a laurel crown and broken chains, with each part of her regalia symbolising some aspect of the French republic (see fig.9). In some prints her clothes are worn after battling the 'hydra' of tyranny, and in others it is she who has the 'expanding wings' that Wollstonecraft associated with her abstract figure of

'series of letters' was intended to be written 'in the manner of Helen Maria Williams' which suggests Wollstonecraft had a more commercial purpose for her work, as well as a particular audience in mind. See Furniss, p.66.

Virtue. Always a solid form, perhaps reminiscent of and physically baring that solidity Wollstonecraft associated with the 'English head' and reason, Liberty often folds the other republican ideals into herself, becoming an absolute embodiment of civic and political freedom and the fight against the 'jumble' and 'chaos' of *ancien régime* 'vices and follies' alluded to in the quotation above. What is, of course, striking about her description of Liberty – that is, the republican body and the incarnation of the republic itself – is that the figure is recalled from the confused and proliferating attributes of the rococo form. Inferred when decrying the aspects that mark and maim the French character, the favoured form of 'fair Liberty' appears the diametric opposite, the 'contrast' to which Wollstonecraft fails to see on her Rousseauian walk through Paris. Whilst demonstrating the philosopher's own singular and superior republican position and reasoned head, this longed for vision of liberty, a form the French reinvented for themselves *of* themselves, is supposedly beyond the nation.

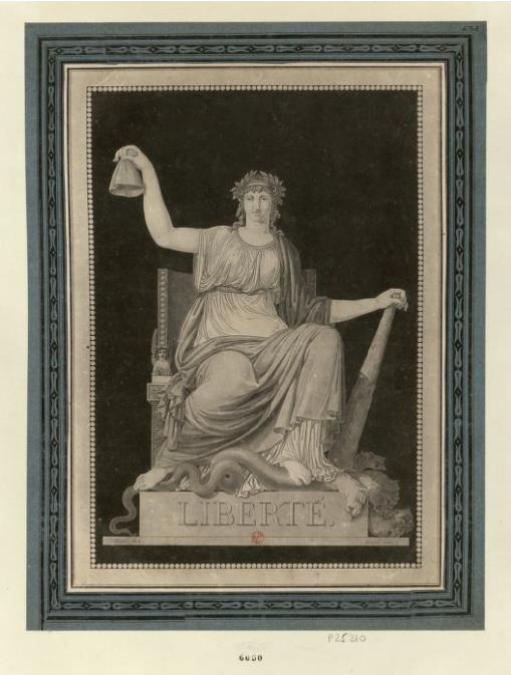

Fig.9, Jean Francois Janinet, *La Liberté*, c.1792, engraving. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Fig.10, Thomas Rowlandson, (drawn by George Murphy), *The Contrast*, 1793, engraving. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

What I am considering above is that the Francophobic rhetoric of Wollstonecraft's texts, whilst grappling with the supposedly contradictory state that France found itself in socio-politically during the 1790s, still operates along the lines of cultural biases long-held by Britain before the revolution properly began. Liberty in the above quotation, a short-lived vision amongst the sensual and bloody excesses rampant in France according to Wollstonecraft later in her 'Letter', becomes a trope divested of its original French signification and inherent republican meanings,

and instead becomes a British fantasy. Her vision of *Liberté* and alignment of reason with Englishness resemble the calmly comported and balanced impression of 'British Liberty' found in Thomas Rowlandson's etching of George Murphy's famous anti-Jacobin drawing, 'The Contrast' (fig.10, 1793), which was republished by the Crown and Anchor Society when Wollstonecraft would have been writing 'Letter on the Present Character'.[288] Rowlandson and Murphy's 'French Liberty', by comparison, is a harridan in face and muscular form dressed in rags and hellfire, a dissolute and unsexed figure heedless of who she assails and assaults in the name of "freedom". 'British Liberty', however, reabsorbs and reflects the characteristics of the typical Marianne, by sitting and gazing assuredly out to the country's prized naval might, a tamed lion by her feet (not unlike the trampled serpent associated with France's figuration of Liberty), the scales of justice and equity to hand. Despite Wollstonecraft's fleeting vision not being furnished with such details, it is evident that her longed-for ideal of Liberty comes closer to that found in 'The Contrast', thus inverting her own schema of order and chaos, French liberation and the violently dissolute corps and corporeality it has supposedly supplanted (but she still espies). A product of her 'English head', the absence of this longed for French Liberty calls up its excessive opposite on the streets of Paris, demonstrating that rococo and republican forms in Wollstonecraft's xenophobia-inflected work were as inextricably linked as they were distinct in her mind.

Past scholars have sought to explain Wollstonecraft's xenophobia-inflected theorisation and representation of the French. Jan Wellington admits that 'although she shared with her more nationalistic contemporaries a measure of the distaste they felt for a nation whose habits and manners were in many ways alien', Wollstonecraft's characterisation and response to the French was not 'nationalist propaganda' designed to 'differentiate and disempower the national 'other".[289] Instead, Wellington argues, Wollstonecraft's 'implicit' and 'explicit' characterization of the French as 'effeminate' was employed to 'recuperate' character – individual and national – on 'multiple levels.'[290] Although Wellington goes on to qualify that Wollstonecraft later revised such animated and strongly-held views of French manners and modes of being, she still considers her initial depiction an apt rhetorical device and one that is effectively employed to assist in the dismantling of a corrupt, specious system oppressive to all.[291] Virginia Sapiro rightly recognises Wollstonecraft's belief concerning the importance of communal and social spheres in the formation of character, and, subsequently, citizenship ('Virtue is founded on sociability, an ever-expanding circle of esteem and compassion', 'civic virtue is learned in both the domestic and public arenas', Sapiro observes), but when writing on her 'Enlightenment creed' and theories of democracy, Sapiro fails to address this rhetorical seam of othering in her work.[292] At best, she sees Wollstonecraft's wider critique of female manners across both *Vindications* as integral to her call for proto-feminist and civic change. In recent surveys of Wollstonecraft's writing, Furniss fails to critique Wollstonecraft's characterisation of the French as 'theatrical' and uncritically observes that it 'was commonplace in eighteenth-century Britain to claim that the old order of France exhibited a fatal combination of political tyranny and luxury', whilst Spiros Tegos only relates Wollstonecraft's antipathy to European chivalry in his review of her thought from the

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[288] A colourless etching by Rowlandson was published as early as 1792, the same date as Wollstonecraft's publication of *Rights of Woman*.

[289] Jan Wellington, 'Blurring the Borders of Nation and Gender: Mary Wollstonecraft's Character (R)evolution' in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, (eds) Adriana Craciun and Kari Lokke (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001). See also, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: A Sourcebook*, (ed) Adriana Craciun (London: Routledge, 2002).

[290] Wellington, pp.34-5.

[291] Wellington, pp.50-1.

[292] Virginia Sapiro, 'Wollstonecraft, Feminism and Democracy: "Being Bastilled"' in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, (ed) Maria J. Falco (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp.33-46; and *A Vindication of Political Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

'Revolutionary Period'.[293] With the exception of scholars Laura Kirkley and Eileen Hunt Botting, whose more recent works acknowledge the Francophobia and xenophobia in Wollstonecraft's writing, many earlier critics ignored, excused or, worse still, embraced this aspect of her thinking and philosophy.[294] What both Wellington and Sapiro – the former in her excusing of Wollstonecraft's xenophobic-inflected rendering of French character and femininity, and the latter in her complete omission of it from her analysis of Wollstonecraftian politics – miss is how a complaint about the prejudices of prescription and appearances and their resounding effects can be founded on prejudice itself, thus taking down the whole politicising structure of one's argument. Furthermore, they fail to conceive of how the misconception and misrepresentation of nationally and ethnically diverse individuals plays into the very systemic prejudices that keep minority groups oppressed and disempowered. As has been explored in previous chapters, Wollstonecraft herself was no stranger to this prejudice, particularly concerning her sympathy with the French republican cause. Spurred on by Godwin's revelations of Wollstonecraft, particularly her unmarried co-habiting life with Imlay in France, as well as anti-Jacobean and French sentiment, Polwhele's characterisation of Wollstonecraft in *The Unsex'd Females* ironically aligns her with the very transgressive form of conduct she decries. Wollstonecraft's own prejudicial judgement may be partially informed by the British culture of the time and seen as a rhetorical strategy to highlight the failures of both British and French political systems in their treatment of women, but it runs the risk of souring her own proto-feminist democratic politics, as Sapiro terms it, by erasing the real experiences of French men and women alike and subsuming them into an unsavoury and obscene whole.

Reputation may have been exactly what she was attempting to save, if not secure, with her Francophobic reflections on the French. As Kirkley rightly notes, 'Enlightenment thinkers often evaluate foreign cultures in relation to racial and cultural hierarchies complicit in imperialist violence. Wollstonecraft is no different.'[295] Although, 'Wollstonecraft subscribes to a Eurocentric teleology of progress in which Western Europe represents the pinnacle of civilisation,' continues Kirkley, this problematic vision and direction in her thought does not mitigate or excuse her Francophobia, nor mask it as historicist critique.[296] What Kirkley's observations underline are the traditions to which Wollstonecraft was laying claim, the literary styles in which she was writing and the audience to whom she was delivering her message. As a self-educated and self-presenting political philosopher, Wollstonecraft had to acquire and master the very invective and rhetoric associated with such thought, even if Francophobic tropes were the result. As a woman, she had to align the tone and register of her prose, and the metaphorical palette with which she painted her arguments concerning other nations, to that of the Enlightened, male-dominated, thinkers of the day, whether radical or conservative. Language with all its political affiliations, literary connotations and social distinctions had to be harnessed in such a way as to be legible to those who spoke and wrote it. The republican bodily lexis had to correct and trump the rococo one. Xenophobic figures that were long enshrined in British culture as well as the intellectual vocabulary of the educated or "enlightened" elite were, therefore, one way in which Wollstonecraft could place and legitimise her arguments about the revolution and democracy in general. Entering the pamphlet war amongst male thinker Thomas Paine, and answering to the oratorical heavyweight in the world of politics, Edmund Burke, required her ideas to "pass" a test of intellectual gravity, credibility and persuasion. What, nevertheless, did this mean for the body? And what did these Francophobic figures, with their attending or underlining corporeal

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[293] Furniss, pp.70-71; Spiros Tegos, 'The Revolutionary Period' in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, (ed) Sandrine Bergès, Eileen Hunt Botting and Alan Coffee (London: Routledge, 2019), pp.77-89, 84.
[294] Laura Kirkley, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Cosmopolitan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp.6, 119. Eileen Hunt Botting, *Wollstonecraft, Mill and Women's Human Rights* (New Haven: Yale University press, 2016), pp.11, 159.
[295] Kirkley, p.6.
[296] Kirkley, p.6.

ideologies, their mutually inferring yet bifurcated rococo and republican forms, mean for Wollstonecraft's response to the revolution in her writing? How did this xenophobia-inflected discourse further or hinder her arguments regarding freedom for all? And with which 'body' was it politically expedient to align herself?

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Rowlandson's engraving of *The Contrast* in many respects shares parallels with the rhetorical strategy Wollstonecraft employed in her response to Burke. It certainly capitalised on and magnified the anti-Jacobin fears expressed in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): the engraving revels in the bloody acts supposedly occurring in newly 'liberated' France, (though much of what was actually taking place there was enormously exaggerated in British reports by royalist propagandists) with dismembered torsos littering the streets, aristocrats hanging from lampposts and the heads and hearts of French Liberty's victims brandished on pikes as she ran amok in the capital.[297] This gory gothic vision portrayed in the roundel, bore something of a resemblance to Burke's own dramatized descriptions of the French market-women, the *poissonardes*, marching in protest and storming Versailles; like them, Rowlandson's French Liberty is every bit the unsexed femme in her sword-wielding and order-toppling actions. The discord feared by Burke was manifest in the pictorial rhetoric of Rowlandson and Murphy's work. Yet despite arguing in favour of the revolutionaries and expressing her hopes for a republican democracy to be founded in France, Wollstonecraft's rhetoric in *Rights of Men* shares something of the righteousness and moral rectitude of the first roundel by Rowlandson. Taking a swipe at the Burkean lexis throughout her pamphlet, Wollstonecraft's 'plain' and 'manly' (p.6) prose supposedly draws closer to the composure, assuredness and respectability of 'British Liberty', who is drawn in a more restrained fashion and kitted out with all the symbolic paraphernalia (the 'Magna Charta', the aforementioned scales, the plumed Roman helmet) befitting the restraint, justice and equity she is supposed to incarnate. In an act of subversion, Wollstonecraft tries to reclaim the English solidity and reason extolled in her later works, *Rights of Woman*, 'Letter on the Present Character' and *An Historical and Moral View*, aligning Burke with the French extremes both he and Rowlandson denounce in 'The Contrast'. This is where the rococo and republican body are first enunciated in her polemical works: through language and its cultural and corporeal connotations. By lambasting Burke for his sensibility-soaked and ostentatious prose, Wollstonecraft sets her argument, ideas, and own authorial persona in the opposite camp. This was the real "contrast," drawn out across linguistic, textual and sociolectal lines, vying for political and cultural currency, as well as the success or downfall of the institutional bodies each writer supported.

Wollstonecraft's decision to set herself against Burkean rhetoric and all that it stood for was evident from the opening of *Rights of Men*. In the 'Advertisement' that preceded the pamphlet, words are carefully chosen to mark out her approach. Though *Rights of Men* is written as a rapid response to the 'topic of the day' (p.3) and without the 'leisure' to address every part of Burke's lengthy *Reflections*, it promises to directly identify the 'sophistical arguments' contained in the latter's work. What is interesting is that the same lexis used to describe French manners and morals in *Rights of Woman* and 'Letter to the Present Character' is already legible here. Burke's *Reflections* is marked by an elaborate linguistic subterfuge and prolixity: 'he has levelled many ingenious arguments in a very specious garb' (p.3) and his work and syntax moves in 'devious tracks' inspired by an unrestrained and deviant 'fancy' (p.3). Metaphors of disguise and masquerade are thrown at Burke, akin to those used to describe the 'duplicitous' French character discussed above. Wollstonecraft condemns the 'sophistical arguments, that every

[297] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin, 1986).

moment crossed me, in the questionable shape of natural feelings and common sense' (p.3). Manners and morals, words and inner substance, are divorced in Burke's writing when Wollstonecraft argues that the sentiments of *Reflections* ring false. Wollstonecraft's emotions are also on display here: upon reading Burke's work her 'indignation was roused,' so much so that a short retort inspired by the 'effusions of the moment' has swelled 'imperceptibly in size' (p.3). Pitting moral feeling against the appearance of it, her Advertisement structures the contrasts – masculine versus feminine, republican versus royalist, plain truth-telling versus ornate gothicised speechifying – that result in the promotion of the republican body over a rebounding rococo one. As Tomaselli has observed '[s]he made [Burke] her opposite, and it was a presentation of herself as much as it ought to expose him'.[298] In the 'Advertisement' then, Wollstonecraft would 'speak as she felt' and position her textual self as standing for 'simplicity, vitality, authenticity'.[299] From this invocation of opposites a reversal of gendered roles, bodies and vocabularies appears – but not always to either writers' advantage.

Wollstonecraft's assault on Burke's rhetoric and his associated gendered position stems from the conceptual contrasts of his own earlier treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).[300] A study of form and feeling, the external phenomena of the world and our aesthetic response to it, *A Philosophical Enquiry* explored the seemingly antithetical categories of the 'sublime' and 'beauty'. Without oversimplifying his examination of these two classifications, which unfolds over several parts and touches on the interrelated issues of taste, society and sympathy, the sublime is inscribed with feelings of 'terror' and 'pain', 'horror' and 'astonishment', is linked to qualities of 'obscurity', 'infinity' and 'darkness', and can be evoked by everything from the threat of death to the overwhelming expansiveness of the ocean or a mountainous landscape.[301] Beauty, on the other hand, is sociable, inspires sensations of 'love', 'tenderness' and 'affection,' and is linked to smallness, smoothness and lightness.[302] In short, the sublime gestures towards the might and power of the masculine whilst the beautiful is overtly associated with the feminine throughout *A Philosophical Enquiry*. There are occasions when these aesthetic categories overlap or stray from the strictness of their observed logic, but on the whole they are dichotomous pairings, dependent on being distinct from each other.

Naturally, Wollstonecraft takes umbrage with these Burkean distinctions. This is not simply because he states them as such, but because of how they bleed into the language of his prose in *Reflections*, reinforcing his obsequious veneration for aristocratic structures and gender stereotypes. They are also categories that crossover and compliment her own xenophobic inflections of French character. In *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft begins a systematic take down of Burke's ideas from *A Philosophical Enquiry*, as filtered through his conception of the feminisation of 'beauty' and gothicizing and aristocratizing of the 'sublime'. Parodies of these Burkean distinctions abound, forming the main lexical arsenal to Wollstonecraft's anti-monarchy, anti-rococo argument: from mockingly rationalising the 'sublime' as 'truth', and the 'beautiful' as 'simplicity' in the opening paragraph (p.5), to claiming a 'manly definition' of 'reason' (p.5) and aligning Burke with a 'pampered sensibility', and what she believed was an ineffective, corrosive effeminacy ('Even the Ladies, Sir, May repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations', p.6). She is unafraid to turn his own critical thinking inside out to expose what really lurks behind the gothicised veil of his philosophies. Turning his own lexical and gendered aesthetic categories on him, Wollstonecraft, though

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[298] Tomaselli, p.148.
[299] Tomaselli, p.148.
[300] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[301] Burke, 1757, pp.36, 53.
[302] Burke, 1757, pp.39, 83.

shrouded in authorial anonymity at the time *Rights of Men* was published, positions herself as the reasoned, 'manly' philosopher to his effeminate, mawkish and ineffective orator. Even though hers was an argument supposedly formed from the cold, hard calculations of reason, as Burke derogatorily defined republicans in the National Assembly, it was really his 'ostentatiously displayed' feelings that were the 'cold declamations of the head' (p.6). Exposing the rococo body, Wollstonecraft rebuilt the republican body to be one with a true 'heart' as well as a rationally strong, fortified mind.

One of her main contentions was that Burke used rhetorical extravagance and gothic extremes in staunch defence of hereditary rule and privileges. His ostentatious prose sprung from a 'lively imagination' (p.5) and excessive sensibility, but it was also marked by a sycophantic, courtier-like defence of monarchic hierarchical structures. In fact, these 'feverish eccentricities' and flights of emotionally unbridled fancy were synonymous with such structures. It is deference to hereditary rule itself that unmans Burke and his thinking. To Wollstonecraft's mind, a corrupt royal body inevitably results in a corrupt social one: the 'corrupt' power of 'despots,' she would go onto pronounce in *Rights of Woman*, like a 'baneful lurking gangrene is most quickly spread by luxury and superstition' (p.83); it is a 'pestiferous purple which renders the progress of civilization a curse' (p.83). In the closing paragraphs of *An Historical and Moral View*, she would again describe the body politic as 'diseased' and 'sickened' (p.371) after detailing the luxury of the court and how its voluptuous behaviour trickled downwards into the capital and the manners of 'people of quality' (p.359).[303] This royal body, which is figured in her schema as effete, dangerously feminine and monstrous in a very Kapoorian sense, is often located in the actual bodies of the upper orders. Much like the carceral body in the previous chapter, the rococo form was socially constructed and politically corrosive: it was 'an indolent puppet of the court', a 'luxurious monster', a 'fastidious sensualist', 'an instrument of tyranny' (p.83) and a virtual parasite on the poorer classes, as Wollstonecraft would go on to expound in *Rights of Woman*. Like genteel white women, whose status and proud prerogative existed in their inactivity, monarchs similarly laid waste their own physical, intellectual and political energies. Any defence of them, therefore, resulted in a similar taint; that is, Burke's sickly and unmanning reverence for the old order carried with it the pollution of royal bodily enervation, excess and effemination.

It was not just deconstructing the metaphorical body politic that was central to Wollstonecraft's criticism of Burke's prose. It was the actual body of the French Queen, Marie Antoinette, that stoked the fires of her argument and came to represent all she despised about monarchic rule and its feminisation of society and culture more generally. In Burke's prose, the queen emblematised aristocratic rule, privilege and the inherent natural feelings it espoused in man. In Wollstonecraft's prose, the queen epitomised all that was wrong with such a political system, so much so that she would take a significant shot at Marie Antoinette in *An Historical and Moral View* (which we will discuss in some depth below). In both British and French polemical writings of the 1780s-90s, republican and royalist sympathies played out over the queen's body, thus making her a symbolic node of political and socio-cultural disagreement or consensus. Through the death of the king the coherence of the body politic and public would, as Dorinda Outram argues, be challenged and reconcentrate itself through greater acts of public display, congregation and celebration so as to regain a sense of order and unity, cohesion and wholeness.[304] Through the death of the queen, however, symbolism of a different kind would be intentionally shattered and forsaken. Representing to republicans all that was flawed with the monarchy: excessive

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[303] This quotation is taken from Todd's edition of *Rights of Woman* which includes an abridged version of *An Historical and Moral View*, but subsequent quotations are taken from the 1794 edition, unless stated otherwise in my footnotes.

[304] Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp.2-3.

spending, dissipation, luxury, a supposed lewd sexuality, the effemination of the upper classes through indolence, greed and fashion, Marie Antoinette was the root cause of the moral decay that had spread through France's political system – or so argued her many detractors. For them, she was the rococo body incarnate. For Burke, who believed she embodied chastity, femininity, maternity and the chivalry that was owed to all three, any assault on the symbolic or literal body of the queen was sacrilege – a full desacralization of the highest order. For Wollstonecraft, however, who no doubt read republican propaganda and the French polemics of the period, it was exactly these qualities so valued by Burke – or rather, their feigned and 'finessed' appearance – that needed to be revolutionised by the republic. Thus a political and rhetorical battle, through the queen's form, took place in their respective works; the rococo and republican corporeal ideologies would go head to head.

What would have particularly irritated Wollstonecraft about Burke's description of the queen in *Reflections* is its exemplification of the gendered categories found in *A Philosophical Enquiry*. Depicting a queen that is at once sexualised victim and sexually alluring spectacle; a woman who is paradoxically vulnerable monarchic body and (supposedly) invulnerable pride of the French court and nation, Burke prepares the ground for his own dichotomous aesthetic theorisation. It is telling that from the opening of this recount, his focus on the queen, particularly his attention to her literal body, surpasses that of the king, who is physically and editorially eclipsed by his wife's form (a sign that some of the libellous French pictorial depictions of the royal couple's power dynamic had a hint of truth for royalists and republicans on both sides of the channel). Capitalising on the excesses of the abject and the terror of the sublime, Burke's description of Marie Antoinette is also coloured by an almost medieval definition of chivalric honour; that is, in Burkean social codes, an attack on the queen is a blow to the king's – and by extension the nation's – honour. But it is his hyperbolic account of the siege of Versailles and the attack on the royal apartments by the market women or *poissonardes* of Paris that – laughably or shockingly depending on your sympathies – sees him pit the public body against the monarchic one. It is this that in the early Wollstonecraftian schema would appear utterly regressive and transgressive; a contrast of immoral proportions, in which an individual aristocratic body is prized above the justly protesting masses. Positioning the queen's body against the monstrously defeminised *poissonardes* and their overly phallic conspirators, the 'cruel ruffians and assassins' who successfully penetrate her 'chamber', Burke's prejudicial and theatrical description comes right out of Rowlandson's playbook of revolutionary contrasting extremes.[305] What is more, by positioning the profane *poissonarde* bodies against the queen's sacrosanct and singular one, Burke intends to deflect the sexualised and destabilising effects of her royal body onto theirs. This intention is understandable considering his royalist loyalties and conservative ideas, but it rebounds onto the queen. Piercing her bed with a 'hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards', the 'ruffians', whose weapons are 'reeking with blood' from the killing of a guard, ostensibly assert a grotesque form of phallic power, which is reinforced by the sexual presence of Marie Antoinette. The king, away from the queen and unable to assist her, is virtually cut out of the narrative, impotent and unimportant to Burke. Running 'almost naked' from her bed, the queen is an eroticised victim in a fantasy of rape, sexual deviancy and violent exuberance. The 'infamous contumelies' that Burke revels in when describing the 'abused shape of the vilest of women' – the *poissonardes* – only serve to emphasise the sexualised victimisation of the queen's body; such 'horrid yells' and 'shrilling screams' form a Bacchic procession of celebration that fanfares out and around the sexualised / desexualised royal bodies.[306] Attempting to build on his assertion from *A Philosophical Enquiry*, that 'beauty in distress is the most affecting beauty', Burke's depiction of the queen as a virtuous victim in distress here evokes titillation.[307] In a

[305] Burke, 1790, p.164.
[306] Burke, 1790, p.165.
[307] Burke, 1757, p.100.

nightmarishly gothic scene, one where the overlapping of contrasting bodies goes beyond rhetorical expediency into political efficacy, Burke's rendering of the queen, irrespective of where she is or who beholds her, never fails to excite responses of a sexual nature.

Though his intentions concerning the queen's body were the reverse of those held by her republican detractors, Burke's symbolic depiction and recount carries the same sexual taint. Throughout the 1780s, the royal consorts were slated with the same epithets in which Kapoor's sculpture, *Dirty Corner*, has been accused: vulgar, disgusting, gross and excessive – all such terms were thrown at the king and queen before the revolution properly got underway in 1789. They had become associated with a greed that bordered on vampirism, with the king being portrayed in pamphlets and satirical etchings as an oversized glutton, one who drank the blood of the labouring nation with fellow nobles. Marie Antoinette was forever paying the price for her foreignness by being named 'L'Autrichienne' and characterised as a harlot, one who orchestrated orgies at Le Petit Trianon and incestuously slept with her brother, Joseph II, whilst paying him money from the French royal coffer.[308] What is more, rumours of lesbianism with her friends and ladies in waiting, Madame de Polignac and the Princesse de Lamballe, were circulated in pornographic material, further scandalising the queen and associating her body with transgressive sexual practises and appetites.[309] Their names and bodies continually enmeshed in the scurrilous forms and words of the press, the royal bodies of king and queen were combined and morphed into the grotesque, the monstrous, the horrific. As Joan Landes has observed, whilst the king was depicted as a pig, a swine, an ox, a cat, a tiger or a giant stomach whose disorder put the health of the nation at risk, the queen was 'a guinea pig, a hyena, a tiger, a she-panther, a hermaphrodite' and a harpy (fig.11).[310] Thus the king was mocked by the press for his impotence, while the queen was viciously attacked for the opposite: sexual rapacity and incontinence. The simultaneous desexualisation of the king and hyper-sexualisation of the queen in media portrayals not only destabilised the hierarchy of monarchic power, but again destabilised the national character and entire socio-political system. Vice not only had a face, but a body and a dangerously female one at that: the queen's voluptuous body, in particular her vagina, was symbolically, rhetorically and literally a threat.[311] Like Kapoor's synecdochic sculpture, the queen's sexually grotesque form and threatening femininity, as styled by the libellous press and public, symbolised the abuses of the *ancien régime*, abuses that had to be curbed and capitally condemned.

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[308] Joan B. Landes and Laura Lunger Knoppers (eds), *Monstrous Bodies / Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p.158; and Dena Goodman (ed), *Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.5. For more on the scurrilous rumours surrounding Marie Antoinette's sexuality, see Antonia Fraser's biography, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* (London: Orion Books, 2001), pp. 268-9. Interestingly, Kapoor's *Dirty Corner* was daubed with racist and xenophobic graffiti and detractors of the work labelled it an 'execrable intruder'. In its conjuration of royal history and former occupants of Versailles, *Dirty Corner* highlights the continued xenophobia of France's past and present. See Robin Lane Fox, 'Le Nôtre's masterpiece vs Anish Kapoor's 'Dirty Corner" in *The Financial Times* (10 July 2015).

[309] Fraser, pp.331-332.

[310] Landes & Knoppers, p.155.

[311] Chroniclers have questioned whether Louis Charles, Louis XVI's second-born son, the ill-fated surviving dauphin Louis-Charles XVII, was actually fathered by him. See Fraser, p.269.

Fig.11, Unknown artist, *Marie Antoinette as a harpy*, 1789. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Like Kapoor's vulva-like funnel with its hydraulic, snake-like torso, the terrifying spectre of the rococo body and all its attendant anxieties returns to haunt Wollstonecraft's prose in the form of Marie Antoinette. Several pages of *An Historical and Moral View* are dedicated to her portrait alone, with the queen reappearing in various key events throughout the text. Unlike Burke's eroticised victimisation of the queen, however, Wollstonecraft effectively writes her off as a whore. There is, however, a telling moment where she sees the queen as an impressionable guileless *dauphine* who is brought into a 'voluptuous atmosphere' (p.33) and comes into contact with the 'contagion' of the king's body. This king is Louis XV, but the sense here is of a legacy of contagious profligacy passed on from king to king, in what we will see is a kind of hydra-like repetition reminiscent of the serpentine depiction of the royal body in satirical pamphlets. In Wollstonecraft's history, nevertheless, Marie Antoinette soon 'develops an inclination for court intrigue, under the mask of the most profound dissimulation' (p.33). Marie Antoinette is undeniably a grandiosely obscene version of Wollstonecraft's middle- to upper-class woman, whose feminine wiles and ways flash throughout *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, and she reiterates the slave-cum-tyrant paradigm so despaired of by the philosopher. Flattery, beauty and the art of coquetry – those most despised and morally disempowering arts in the Wollstonecraftian schema are just a few of Marie Antoinette's weapons employed to secure her own way. As if these were not insidious clues to the queen's ruinous character, Wollstonecraft compares her to an actress several times, intending us to comprehend all senses of the word ('it was very natural for her to become a *complete* actress', p.135 my italics). A lover of theatre and a performer for private theatricals before her inner circle at Versailles, Marie Antoinette's genuine pursuit and love of the arts is effortlessly turned against her in *An Historical and Moral View*. Wollstonecraft frames her as a consummate performer, adept in deceit, those scandalising aspects of the French character she so decried in 'A Letter on the Present Character'. Sex, however, remains the favourite weapon that Wollstonecraft accuses her of employing the most. Using terminology common to contemporary French pamphlets devoted to slandering the royal family, Wollstonecraft turns the queen into something akin to the whore of Babylon: she is another 'Julia' and 'Messalina' of antiquity. Like another 'Circe' or Jezebel, her fatally sexualised and feminised body "emasculates" the court, dupes the milky Macbeth-like king and 'makes him pay a kingly price for her favours' (pp.133-4).

It is hard to read Wollstonecraft's construction of Marie Antoinette as anything other than misogyny and xenophobia fuelled by the sustained campaign in French republican propaganda. Both would have the reader believe that it was the queen who was pulling the strings and dealt the final blow to the king, that the fictitious textual and verbal narratives constructed around the supposed transgressions of her body displaced and overshadowed his, symbolically and literally, and that the nation was contaminated by her voluptuousness, not the Bourbon dynasty's nor the aristocratic classes built around them. Like Burke, Wollstonecraft sees political opportunity in the figure of the queen, but unlike her polemical adversary she takes her inspiration from republican discourses of all kinds rather than her own first-hand encounters, aesthetic ideals or the genre of the gothic. Chantal Thomas observes that such proliferated ephemera, the kind Wollstonecraft was no doubt reading, were literary, vocal and spatial in nature.[312] Circulated in marketplaces and the streets, sung and read out loud in cabarets and on stages, these pamphlets and satires created what Thomas identifies as a revolutionary consciousness throughout society, both within the court itself, at the instigation of the Comte de Provence (in order to discredit the Bourbon claim to the throne) right through to the furthest reaches of the illiterate classes.[313] In fact, Versailles and the monarchy itself would have enabled this, by having daily exposure in the format of public rituals. Thanks to the sustained and wide circulation and spatialization of these ideas, the constant consumption and pornographization of the queen's body occurred at a rapid rate, rendering her an object of fantasy and horror at once. Revolutionary vocabulary, whether pictorial or written, not only traversed geographical and socio-cultural boundaries, but created its own active space, one that eventually resulted in violent action. Wollstonecraft's subscription to this rhetorical strategy, her reclamation of it in her polemical works through the sexualised figure of the queen, though evidently successful in terms of philosophical argument and political outcomes, trades in the violence of the revolution. It carries with it, through its messy xenophobic misogyny of the figured sexual performativity of the queen, that Kapoorian haunting of a rococo body returning to the surface of rational discourse, republican history and the spaces (literal, textual), all came to create.

Hostility to the monarchy in print could only last so long before breaking out into physical violence. Consolidation of the new body politic and body public through institutional (as well as symbolic) representations of *Égalité*, *Fraternité* and *Liberté*, would only occur, paradoxically, through a form of dismemberment. Landes has argued persuasively that dismemberment – through text, scientific specimens and Enlightenment classifications – marked the transition from the old order to the new – and would, eventually, result in the self-dismemberment of the republicans under Robespierre's rule.[314] Thus, even before the guillotine came into view as the most chilling and era-defining severance of all, dismemberment was in action through the violent campaign levelled at the queen, 'who was…made the useful female (and foreign) scapegoat for the general political troubles of the King'.[315] Whether as a mythological creature, a hybrid lascivious beast-cum-human, or as a Sapphic paramour, her limbs locked around those of her female confidantes (the Duchesse de Polignac and the Princess de Lamballe), the queen, through such misogynistic figuration, underwent this gradual dismemberment well before her own decapitation.[316] These printed forms of simultaneous dismemberment and distribution were a hint of the gruesome acts of actual dismemberment to occur later in the century. From the September Massacres of 1792, for instance, where priests, the aristocratic opposition, common-law prisoners (thieves, sex workers and street children) and members of the queen's own inner

[312] Goodman, p.101.
[313] Goodman, pp.100, 103.
[314] Landes & Knoppers, p.148.
[315] Fraser, p.269.
[316] Fraser, pp.331-332.

circle (including Lambelle), were brutally murdered with pikes, cudgels and sabres, to the theatrically gruesome spectacle of bearing freshly decapitated heads of the aristocracy on pikes throughout the city, dismemberment ironically became the punitive arm and language of the people and its new order: the reconfiguration of the body public through the literal disfiguration of the body politic.[317] Reconstituting the body politic and social through their respective works, Burke and Wollstonecraft became part, even as commentators, of the dismemberment of the French nation as they each fashioned it. Their writings form a body of works, therefore, that attempt to either recuperate the French monarchic (rococo) body, as was the case with Burke's *Reflections*, or reconstruct the new republican body, as encountered in Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* and *An Historical and Moral View*. The body of the queen, Kapoor's vagina of Versailles, was, then, as she now is in films and television: a hotly contested and controversial site, provocative and ever capable of provoking commotion; the dismembered form that would return again and again.

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In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault devotes his entire first chapter to describing the death of the 'Damiens the regicide'.[318] This graphic account runs for four pages and sees the philosopher dwelling on the prolonged and agonising scene of bodily torture. Condemned for the attempted murder of Louis XV in 1757, the punishment of public execution by dismemberment was the typical sentence given to anyone who threatened the actual body of the king. Whether through a 'process of 'humanization" or the growing distaste for punishment as a form of entertainment, executions gradually disappeared from the public eye.[319] Nevertheless, Foucault's gruelling opening chapter demonstrates that it was once the body that was 'the major target of penal repression'.[320] That this repression, through a very public act of spectacle and decapitation, should then be turned back on the state and the monarch (and with the same executioner, Charles-Henri Samson, used for Robert-François Damiens) is profoundly ironic – and deliberate. Occurring in the same place as Damiens' public execution, la Place de Grève, the swift acts of dismemberment and capital punishment brought about by the republic (first through propaganda, then through the guillotine), had an eerie sense of justice and of history revisiting and repeating itself through the bodies of different men. The executed had become the executioner, so to speak, but in reversing the order of power and punishment the republican body had appropriated the rules and acts of its renounced rococo other. Just like the contestation over the symbolic bodies of the king and queen, the republican battle over the actual bodies of anyone who threatened the revolution and the new nation state was one of unquestionable power and assertion. Loyalty to the new republic, to the people, to France, had to be witnessed in the very public renouncement of individual bodies who represented the older institutional ones. Foucault briefly acknowledges that it was this too public form of bloodletting that instigated private forms of corporal and capital punishment.[321] His work also implicitly conveys the social and political cohesion gained from the scaffold, as barbaric as it seems today. Through violence the republican body, like its royal predecessor, consolidated and re-established the nation; through violence, the republican body subsumed its rococo counterpart in an ironic foretelling of its own fate.

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317 Eric Hazan, *A People's History of the French Revolution*, (trans) David Fernbach (London: Verso Books, 2017), pp.188. For more about the Princess de Lamballe's horrific but also sensationalised murder, see Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.635.
318 Foucault, 2020, pp.3-31, 3.
319 Foucault, 2020, p.7.
320 Foucault, 2020, p.8.
321 Foucault, 2020, pp.9-10.

Yet the republican body politic was not reconstituted through rituals of public violence alone. It was also reformed and reconstructed through communal congregation in the form of festivals, two examples of which are that of Jacques Hébert's Festival of Reason in 1793 and, a year later, Robespierre's equally problematic Festival of the Supreme Being in 1794. The republican body expanded and reconceived itself through plays and meetings, as well as its own vocabulary, the dramatic transition into a new calendar and, of course, a written constitution.[322] The republican form created its own time, seasons and language for both. In *An Historical and Moral View*, much was made of the reassembling of the new corps through communal gatherings, distinguishing the republican from the rococo through social inclusion, union and formation – ostensibly the antithesis to the reified, elite world of the court of Versailles. Written at the same time as 'Letter on the Present Character', the grander project of *An Historical and Moral View* was no doubt inspired by the work of David Hume, Burke and Catherine Macaulay – and, to a certain extent, the travelogues of Helen Maria Williams. Anchoring her dialectic of the rococo and republican forms within this grand historical analysis then, Wollstonecraft finds footing for her xenophobic characterisation of the French in the evolving fortunes of France and Europe's own civilizational progression and regression. France's problems could, for the most part, be pared off as Europe's, or rather a national issue that was not impermeable to the issues of neighbouring nations surrounding it. Moving rather animatedly from 'the Age of Chivalry' (but not without mention of Ancient Greece and Rome), tracing the development of sensuality and luxury across the reigns of various French monarchs and councillors, with the exception of the revered Henri IV, through to the final ruler from the Bourbon Dynasty, Louis XVI and his aforementioned consort Marie Antoinette, Wollstonecraft illustrates the events, figures and political transitions that brought about the enlargement and eventual "ending" of the rococo body and the uprising of the republican one.

The timeline of *An Historical and Moral View* abruptly ends in 1789 with the Parisian women's march to Versailles, despite Wollstonecraft writing after the uprising of the Paris commune in 1792, and during the executions of the king and queen in 1793. This abrupt termination of analysis, a supposed pause before future volumes followed (which did not materialise), was Wollstonecraft's way of averting any possible risk to herself at a time when Britain was at war with France and British migrants were being closely monitored, arrested and imprisoned. It also suggests, as Furniss has noted too, that Wollstonecraft was concerned, both historically and ideologically, with the crucial, decisive moments that led up to the people turning against the royal body.[323] It underscores her interest in when and how this decisive corporeal-corporational split, which saw the king siphoned off, stripped of his national significance and symbolic power, and deemed a mere 'man', occurred. It was these decisive and patriotic events – a far cry from the bloodied, murky excesses of the Massacres and later Terror – that framed Wollstonecraft's bodily ideology in *An Historical and Moral View*. Neatly, persuasively, and without the complications and contradictions of aberrant counter-revolutionaries, cross-assembly divisions and a 'rational' nation irrationally turning in on itself at the guillotine, this bifurcated presentation of republican and rococo forms came into view, substantiating to an extent the liberated and unified vision the republic hoped to project to the world.

Book 2 of *An Historical and Moral View* sees Wollstonecraft's narration swing compellingly between two diametrically opposed groups. Contrasts are made again between the unified body of the Assembly and the divided, manipulative, multiple and multiplying bodies of the courtiers, with ample opportunity given to describing their 'arts' (pp.111-2). In her recount of the famous

[322] See Sandrine Bergès and Alan Coffee's article on Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges for more on theatre as a means of education and advancing the cause of women during the French revolution: 'Cocks on Dunghills: Wollstonecraft and Gouges on the Women's Revolution' in *De Gruyter* (26 September 2022), pp.135-152.
[323] Furniss, p.69.

Tennis Court oath, Wollstonecraft describes the men who united with the third estate to 'be of one mind activating the body', again in contradistinction to the duplicitous rococo forms of the aforementioned courtiers, who were 'holding mischievous councils, composed of characters most obnoxious in the eyes of the people' and holding out against the latter's 'rights' to an 'equal representation' (pp.111-112). Using this commemorative and iconic congregational event, one later celebrated by the National Convention's chosen artist, David, in a drawing of 1793 which upholds similar unity of purpose and corporal intent in its composition, Wollstonecraft exemplified the cohesion, coherence and corporeal collaboration of the republican body right on the cusp of its first pronounced formation:

> …in the presence of an applauding crowd, they joined hands solemnly, and took God to witness, that they would not separate, till a constitution should be completed…The benedictions that dripped from every tongue, and sparkled in tears of joy from every eye, giving fresh vigour to the heroism which excited them, produced an overflow of sensibility that kindled into a blaze of patriotism, every social feeling… (p.113)

Here the members of the third estate are a united force, holding hands, committing their power to God, before God, in honour of a new, unifying constitution. In some respects, Wollstonecraft's description captures the essence of bureaucratic movement and organisational activity carried out by the third estate in the run-up to and on the very occasion of the Tennis Court oath, where the necessary votes stood in their majority, speeches by Sieyès, Mounier and Mirabeau rallied the men in their favour, and language (such as their name 'National Assembly') was ratified and made a living, embodied reality, despite strong protestations from the king.[324] It is fitting, too, that the metaphors employed to describe the third estate show them to be constitutionally sound in every way: 'fresh vigour' is secured by the free flow of a unified neurophysiological and emotional response to their united action and commitment to act. Unlike with Burke and his faux feeling when discussing the French monarchy, here Wollstonecraft endorses the 'overflow of sensibility', especially since it is in aid of 'patriotism' or 'social feeling', as she qualifies it. A love for one's fellow man, for his domestic comforts alongside your own, is exactly the kind of Pricean patriotism and type of compassionating passion that Wollstonecraft espouses. Moving from the specific and private Burkean concerns of one royal family, to those of the men in France and beyond, this feeling for brothers beyond your own shore is a sentiment she can appreciate and textually honour. Here hundreds of men act as one, speaking ('every tongue'), emoting ('every eye'), moving ('joined hands collectively') as a monumental, monolithic unit.

Wollstonecraft's cosmopolitanism – that is her espousal for universal compassion, benevolence and philanthropic feeling, and her belief that sentiment as well as reason was integral to galvanising the French to revolt, as Kirkley defines it – is brought to the fore here.[325] Kirkley has observed that Wollstonecraft's argument in *An Historical and Moral View* shifts between 'detached and partisan rhetoric', thus revealing the 'conflicting moral imperatives at the heart of her cosmopolitan ethic'.[326] This conflict to 'privilege reason and establish a clear-sighted moral view' over the 'imperative to participate emotionally in the experiences of others' sees Wollstonecraft dip into the latter in the above quotation.[327] Indulging in a lexis of affectivity and tactility, the physical touch and political pledges of the men present at once move and implicate the reader. Nouns and verbs connoting light, conflagration, metaphorical ignition and recognition ('sparkled', 'blaze') attract the reader also, holding our attention, making us more than the

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[324] Hazan, pp.60-64.
[325] Kirkley, pp.1-25.
[326] Kirkley, p.105.
[327] Kirkley, p.105.

'applauding audience' witnessing the act, but participants in this unified protest and moment. Wollstonecraft rhetorically participates and enjoins us to enter into the heightened sensibility of the description, thus collapsing boundaries, lexical, political and national, in her cosmopolitan vision of universal egalitarianism.[328] The republican body is envisioned as a united and universal body, one which is open and incorporates the moral sentiments and rights of all *because* it is able to reach and consider others across diverse divides, literal and metaphorical.

Helen Maria Williams' *Letters Written in France* (1790) also courts this same universalising experience and cosmopolitanism when relating her experiences of the revolution.[329] Williams' narration of the Fête de la Fédération (held on 14 July 1790, evidently after the formation of the National Assembly, but written before Wollstonecraft's recount of it), a festival dedicated to celebrating the fall of the Bastille and the creation of a new constitution by the Legislative Assembly (the natural successor to the original National Assembly and their planned constitution), displays her trademark sublime sensibility.[330] Conflating Burke's categories of the sublime and beautiful, Williams sees and, more crucially, *feels* the beauty of this sublime moment of collectivity, where the 'impetuous feelings of [the] immense, exulting multitude' does not overwhelm and destroy, as the Burkean sublime has the potential to do, but instead 'elevate[s] the mind' and 'connect[s] the enthusiasm of moral sentiment'.[331] Unity of feeling and bodily manifestations of such social yet sublime sentiments are fully registered and excitedly poured over by Williams in colourful and exaggeratedly enthusiastic epistolary form: old men are seen kneeling, women are seen holding their infants up and 'melting into tears' and people dance in the rain.[332] We see this corporal unity in full force again when the assembled Parisians, who had gathered at the then military training ground Champs de Mars – 'half a million people' according to Williams – 'lifted their eyes to heaven, and called upon the Deity to look down and witness the sacred engagement into which they had entered'.[333] Akin to Wollstonecraft's later retrospective account above, Williams creates a pietistic tableau designed to inspire similar emotions in the reader. A grand levelling of people from different strata occurs in both writers' narratives, and this in itself is designed to unite and implicate the reader in a moment of universal equality, fraternity and rejoicing in becoming a 'citizen of the world' as Williams defines it.[334] Williams may have used the characteristically emotive and immediate form of letter writing, but Wollstonecraft's 'historical' mode still borrows from the former's famous sensibility-soaked style to describe the revolutionary body/bodies that made up the National Assembly. Excessive sensibility, which is usually annexed to the rococo form in the Wollstonecraftian schema, instead knits man to his wider community, to the republic of ideas and the European project of democratization, cosmopolitanism and progress for all mankind in these historical accounts and first-hand epistles. This is the more humane, humanising and laudable vision of republican corporality and embodiment that both Wollstonecraft and Williams could support, subscribe to and share in their various works. Large bodies of people, congregating for the good of the nation and the universal rights of man, was a far cry from the privatised and self-prioritising *corps royal*, and it was clearly a more marketable and palatable instance of collectivity than that of public execution.

A counterpoint to the fraternal unity and universalising aspect of the republican body was the serpentine-like splicing of the aristocratic, rococo form. Unlike the upward looking, unitary,

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328 Kirkley, pp.5, 110.
329 Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France, In the Summer of 1790*, (eds) Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Lancashire: Broadview, 2001).
330 Williams, pp.64-70.
331 Williams, pp.64-65.
332 Williams, pp.66-67, 69.
333 Williams, pp.64-69.
334 Williams, p.69.

collectively focused, active corps of the deputies and third estate, the aristocratic body looks inward, to the individualistic wants of the court. It speaks with a polyphony of polished words, but to no purpose or point, according to Wollstonecraft, as evinced in her remarks on the 'baneful effect' of oratorical 'eloquence' (pp.88-9) and the king's own 'cant of courts; dictating whilst complimenting' (p.94). More tellingly, when relaying the events surrounding the Tennis Court oath the court and wider aristocracy are figured as both an extension of the king and a corrupting influence on his leadership. All of the upper, landed orders are seen as parasitic bodies that have long fed off the 'lower orders' (p.79). Innumerable in form, much like the flourishing fleshly forms found in rococo paintings by Boucher and Fragonard (two favoured painters of Madame Pompadour and Marie Antoinette respectively), the aristocratic body reflects onto and folds into the king's body, accentuating the satirical portrait of Louis XVI's greed. Wollstonecraft's likening of the priesthood, another branch of the landed orders, to 'canker-worms', conceives the kingly body as diseased, as well as vampiric and monstrously multitudinous: a body that is decaying and attracting further morbidity from the inside out. Echoing the republican satires of the time, Wollstonecraft depicts the aristocracy as a 'hydra', in which each clerical figure is 'entangled in…[and]… contributes to…the massy fabric of despotism' (p.79). Using the hydra trope (see fig.12 below), she accentuates its true hideousness and unwieldiness as a political body by describing its smaller members becoming 'entangled' in itself. The king's body goes beyond 'his milkiness of heart' and 'pretended watriness of head' (p.136); it goes beyond his alleged 'gluttony' and 'disgusting' person (p.133), and grotesquery through overconsumption of his people. As a hydra, the rococo royal body foretells of its own downfall and its medusa-like end: decapitation. But it returns, like the mythical feminised monster, a deathly stare, undeterred by loss of limb or torso. The horrifying power to scare is still retained in the royal, rococo body: growing new heads, like the ever-repeating rococo s-curve, the hydra returns, again and again, in a haunting parody of its own collapse. We are reminded of Kapoor's sculptures here, in the artworks' repeated offence in appearing again and again, proliferating beyond Versailles through media outrage and public contention. Louis XVI's watery head may not have seemed much of a threat, but the multiple courtly bodies he represented were. It was this insidious, insinuating body, the opposite of the united body of the people, that epitomised the effeminised traits of slavish sensuality and despotic duplicitousness and took them to gruesome extremes. Yet it was this body that mocked its republican opposite by returning in the most unforeseen and eventually bloodiest forms imaginable.

Fig.12, *Unknown artist, L'Hydre aristocratique*, 1789. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The rococo body was continually reproducing itself, though not always to the detriment of the people. Remnants of the old order were resurfacing and in their very presence challenging the authority of the state – but also the antithesis played out in Wollstonecraft's work. Threats to the new order did not so much appear in the shape of royalist supporters waging a direct counter-revolution, but in small deviations from state orders and proclamations, in silent protests behind closed doors, under cover of night. Many of these diversions were led by women: nuns or 'sisters of charity' who provided care for the sick and hungry, and schooling for the uneducated; disillusioned *femmes patriotes* and *clubistes*, dissatisfied with the various political factions failing to resolve the grain crisis. Even some of the *poissonardes* and trades women that instigated the march to Versailles, the storming of the Bastille and other such seismic events of the revolution, turned against the Girondins and Jacobins alternately when they felt they were no longer being heard or represented.[335] Acts that were not in step with the supposed "majority" were often punished. It is also noticeable that not all, but many of those who were sacrificed so as to maintain the coherence and command of the republican body were women. Olympe de Gouges, Marie-Jeanne 'Manon' Roland and Théroigne de Méricourt were just a few of the politically active women who all suffered either imprisonment or succumbed to the blade of the guillotine for their supposed defiance and disorder, as well as their deviation from gendered roles.[336] The republican body, ever 'manly' in power and might, purged from within those figures who, like Wollstonecraft, longed to see a better government, universal suffrage and educational improvement for women. In these and increasingly many more self-annihilating executions, particularly under the leadership of Robespierre, the republican body succumbed to the excesses it had sought to end. It saw the return of its opposite, not through the swift resurrection of the monarchy, though imperial figures of a kind would have their moment of power before Louis XVIII and Charles X restored the Bourbon dynasty; rather, in its repressive and violent measures towards its own people, its broken judicial system and its league of exploitative deputies (whom Wollstonecraft describes as 'cocks' on 'dunghills' in her 'Letter on the Present Character', p.50), its prioritisation of ideals over the lived realities and bodies of actual citizens, the republican body succumbed to a rococo fate. It triggered its own dismemberment, and even its own hydra-like battle in the successive revolutions that followed it.

Wollstonecraft's response to and representation of this return is a generic and textual interlude of gothic proportions. A pathetic and melancholic reversal of her Rousseauian walk through Paris in 'Letter on the Present Character', here, after decrying the orgiastic antics of the queen and her 'favourites' (p.160), she traverses the galleries and gardens of Versailles. Ostensibly this is a return to the beginning of the trouble, to the epicentre of France's moral, hence political, failings. But the over-commitment of her rhetoric to describe the scene and grieve the repercussions of its royal past blur her intentions and sympathies. Walking the 'endless apartments, half shut up', she fancies seeing the 'fleeting shadow of the pensive wanderer, reflected in the long glass that vainly gleam in every direction' (p.162). Upon seeing the 'cold' canvases of portraits, 'the gloominess of the atmosphere gives a deeper shade to the gigantic figures' that sink 'into the embraces of death' (p.161). Haunted by the fallen, whether they be of royal or humbler blood, Versailles becomes a gothic castle, hostage to its own ill fortunes even as it harbours them. In its gothicisation, it becomes a backdrop for Wollstonecraft's wavering, grief-stricken loyalties:

> Lo! this was the palace of great kings! – the abode of magnificence! Who has broken the charm? – Why does it now inspire only pity?... Weeping – scarcely conscious that I weep,

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[335] Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (London: University of Toronto, 1989).

[336] Hazan, p.249. See Sandrine Bergès' *Liberty in Their Names: The Women Philosophers of the French Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), for discussions on the lives and works of all three women and many others.

> O France! over the vestiges of thy former oppression; which, separating man from man with a force 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… (p.162)

Akin to her letter to Johnson which also adopts a gothic tone, register and syntax when describing her fear over the possible death of the king, Wollstonecraft's own imaginings borrow something of the Burkean lexis here.[337] Sentences are punctuated with exclamatory remarks and broken with dashes. Visions of fugitives, wanderers, ghosts and the near-dead run amok in her purple, melancholic prose, reminding us that death is around every corner in republican France. Though the 'oppression' here is associated with Versailles and its 'former' royal occupants, the new despotism has been aligned with the wielders of the guillotine, the republicans. That this pitiable person should be running backwards, seeking shelter in the grounds of Versailles, the very place of oppression, albeit imaginatively, is confusing. In an elliptical manner, Wollstonecraft's gothicism says what she cannot properly own and directly pronounce regarding her views and feelings on the revolution. Though her grief suggests she has not forsaken the republican cause at the heart of the revolution, the gothic mode implies she has hit a most ghoulish and nightmarish nadir in regards to her views. Seeking comfort and relief in the shadows, in the gloomy 'mossy' groves and damp dilapidation of the 'vast pile' that was once Louis XVI's palace, Wollstonecraft wallows in the mess of it, discarding rational and objective discourse in favour of the extinguished rococo extremes from which her former hopes sprung. She has reached a point of textual and perhaps even personal crisis in her historical analysis and utopian dreams; anxiety sets in and 'palsies the hand that would fain do justice to the assault' of the Bastille (p.162). Such aporia in her work, rarely seen in her polemics, signifies not so much a failure, but a breach of faith, of surety, of confidence in which way to turn, in her political fidelity but also her personal relationships.

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This chapter began with the strict formalism of Le Notre as perceived and critically appraised by Kapoor. It began with the transgressions and delinquency of the queen's body, as insinuated by the artist's controversial sculpture, *Dirty Corner*. And it ends, somewhat, in the same way, with the heightened extremes, monumental emotions and declamations of Wollstonecraft's own prose over the same site: the rococo revisiting the republican, the republican redoubling down on the rococo in its own guise. What Wollstonecraft's somewhat elegiac attempt at confronting the brutal repression and regression of republican ideals and institutional bodies reveals is that such bifurcations in their mutual reinforcement bring about mutual desecration. That in every republican body lies a rococo one waiting to return, particularly at the most punitive and repressive of moments. Her turn to the gothic is proof of this troublesome dialectic – a genre which seeks to cordon off that which is excessive and irrational, whilst giving voice, figuration, language to these extremes. We see, in Wollstonecraft's prose, in her emotionally laden lapsing into regret and pathos and gothic recollection, Kapoor's own message about repression's return; in the vocabulary of dampness and dilapidation, there lies another dirty corner of recall.

[337] See her epistle to Johnson (Paris, December 26th, 1792) in *Letters*, pp.216-217.

Wollstonecraft and the Rhetoric of Enslaved Bodies

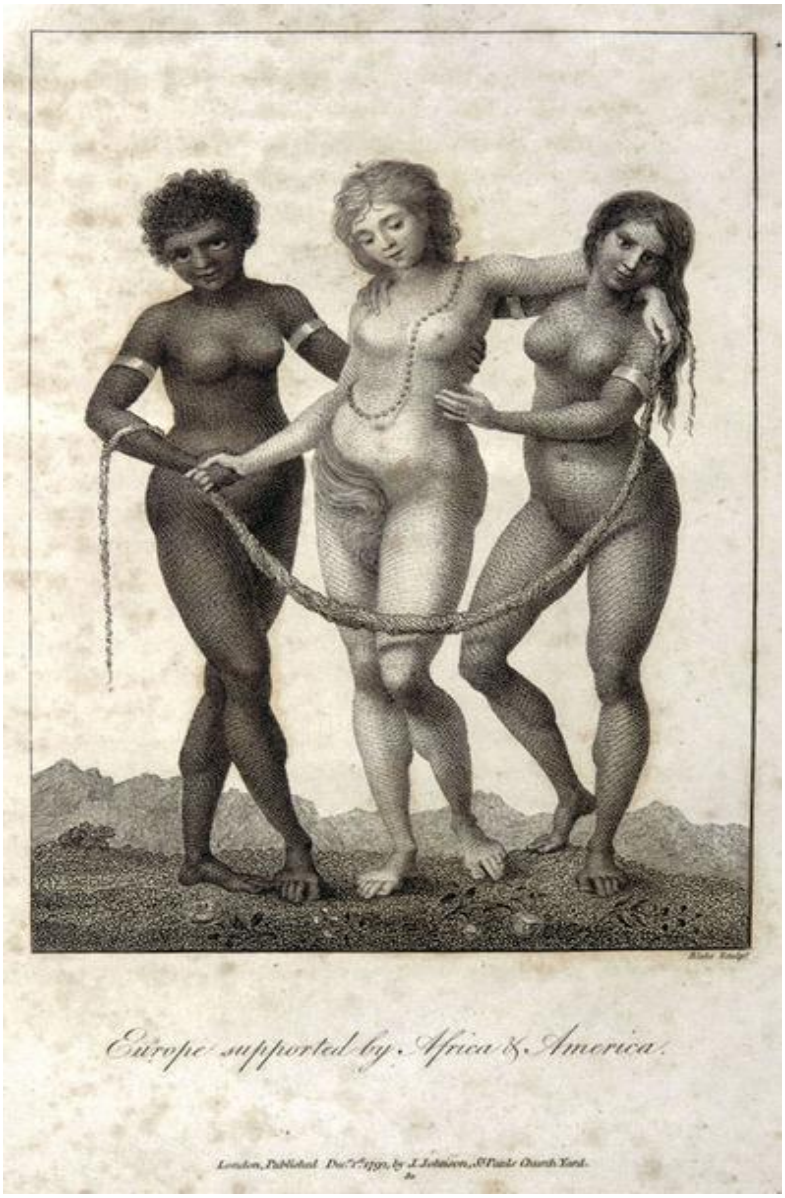

Fig.13, William Blake (sketched by John Gabriel Stedman), *Europe Supported by Africa and America*, 1796, etching. Image courtesy of the William Blake Archive.

Behind many "great", celebrated narratives exist suppressed stories, silenced voices, redacted passages, retracted references – and invisible bodies. John Gabriel Stedman's 1796 edition of *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* is no exception. Rewritten by William Thomson, at the instigation of radical publisher Joseph Johnson, the 1796 text altered the style, phrasing and, most importantly, pro-slavery sentiment carried throughout Stedman's original 1790 manuscript.[338] Stedman's response to the 'spoiling' of his book was one of deep anger and frustration, but Thomson's revisions were actually in keeping with the history of a text all too prone to the omission and suppression of the truth.

Narrative is derived from Stedman's original 1770s log, the diary he kept during his five-year post as a captain in Surinam, a Dutch colony in South America that was experiencing rapid change

[338] John Gabriel Stedman, *Stedman's Surinam, Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society*, (eds) Richard Price and Sally Price (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp.xlv-xlvi.

because of revolution, colonial expansion and industrial developments in North America and the Caribbean. Written on paper, cartridges and even 'a Bleached bone', Stedman's journal from the 1770s charts his journey from the Netherlands to Paramaribo, the capital of Surinam, and his subsequent experiences of colonial life on Dutch plantations.[339] Generically hybrid, the voluminous travelogue-cum-ethnographic journal is packed with observations of wildlife and agriculture; anecdotes about Native American customs and exchanges, and recounts of historical figures from the Dutch plantocracy and community of enslaved Africans, many of whom were leading forceful uprisings against plantocratic and colonial oppression. *Narrative* is also replete with graphic descriptions of enslaved African women, which is one significant detail that remains unaltered in the published versions of the text. Irrespective of the edition – and there are nearly thirty of them published around the world in multiple languages – Stedman's *Narrative* has always contained sexualised references to, not to mention actual graphic engravings of, enslaved African and Native American women.[340] What has been lost between the disparate manuscript sheets and the ghost-written pages is the level of Stedman's own involvement with these women.[341]

In the original log book, Stedman's frequent sexual encounters with enslaved African women, many of which were financial transactions, were crudely jotted down with a simple initial in substitution of the woman's full name: 'B——e sleeps with me' [(12 April 1773)]' or 'J——a comes to stay with me' [(23 April 1775)]' are typical of the entries detailing such "liaisons".[342] Some of his recounts – resembling a clerk's ledger rather than a personal diary – explicitly revel in and re-enact the exploitative sexual encounters enjoyed by the diarist: '…sleep at Mr. Lolkens…I f——k one of his negro maids.'[343] Regardless of whether shorthand was employed to conceal Stedman's exploits, the frequency and keenness with which he recorded such details highlights his deep involvement with the sexual economy at work in Surinamese plantocratic society. His sexual escapades with married women and sex workers in the Netherlands were known and common for a soldier of his rank (Stedman gives descriptive attention to them in the manner of an eighteenth-century picaroon, a veritable 'Tom Jones' as he would like to think of himself, as evinced in his early diaries). However, his behaviour in the Dutch colony was glossed over in the 1790 manuscript and virtually suppressed in Johnson's 1796 edition. This gradual textual suppression was not so much to hide the abusive nature of colonial, specifically plantation, life: British and wider European audiences were already aware of how men conducted themselves in the colonies. Rather, the eventual erasure of Stedman's participation in Surinam's exploitative sexual economy was designed at once to protect him from censure and his family from opprobrium, and to reposition the book as a form of anti-slavery discourse.

What is lost in Stedman's and subsequent editors' redactions may be considered slight, especially in comparison to what the 1796 text still reveals. But these subtle changes and omissions of Stedman's treatment of enslaved women shed light on a more prevalent issue when it comes to the textual representation of enslaved bodies. From his use of initials as linguistic synecdoche for the women, to his more flagrant admissions of how and with whom he had sex, Stedman's relationship with enslaved African women is predominantly, if not solely, experienced through the eroticisation of their bodies. Their additional roles, skills, experiences, histories and subjectivities are often entirely elided; even maternity is mentioned only in relation to the sexual

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339 Richard Price, 'Stedman, John Gabriel, (1744-1797)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Price quotes Stedman regarding his unusual writing materials such as the 'Bleached bone' in this ODNB entry and also in Price & Price, p.xxv.

340 Price & Price, p.xxx.

341 William Thompson was not credited as the writer of Stedman's *Narrative*, which makes him the eighteenth-century equivalent of a ghost-writer.

342 Price & Price, p.xxx.

343 Price & Price, p.xxx.

marketization and general sexualisation of female bodies.[344] Silenced, the enslaved African and Surinamese woman as initial or referent is only invoked and given historical significance and presence for her bodily sexual function. Sketches made by Stedman but engraved by prominent chirographers of the day – Francesco Bartolozzi, Thomas Holloway, Michele Benedetti, and most notably, William Blake – reiterate, redouble and, in effect, capitalise on the erotic rhetorical function of enslaved African bodies, thus perpetuating both sexual slavery and the economic nexus around it. Even when writing about his Surinamese "wife", Joanna, in the 1796 edition – and the nineteenth-century abolitionist spin-off, *Narrative of Joanna; An Emancipated Slave, of Surinam* (1838) – Stedman's rhetorical erotics are still present, albeit tempered with a sentimental tone and romanticised viewpoint.

The repositioning of the 1796 edition of *Narrative* as an anti-slavery text does little to mitigate Stedman's observations of and interactions with enslaved African women. Abolitionist discourses and iconography depended on invoking the enslaved African body as a sign and rhetorical figure to evoke sympathy and anger, and to generate support for the cause. From William Cowper and Hannah More's poetry to visual and material representations as seen in Josiah Wedgwood's 'Slave Medallion' and Thomas Clarkson's blueprint and model of the 'Brookes' slave ship, the depiction and consequent objectification of the enslaved African body often hovered dangerously close to or fell directly into an eroticised and fetishized rhetorical form. The supposed ambivalent positionality of Stedman's work – posed as anti-slavery discourse, despite his original intentions – coupled with their persistent reduction of enslaved African women to an eroticised referent, highlights the parallel erasure and problematic eroticisation of these women in more decided abolitionist literature and iconography.

What I am indicating by opening this chapter with Stedman's *Narrative* is that the signification of the Black African body becomes synonymous with its sexualised (enslaved) signage in British literature and visual culture of the late 1790s onwards.[345] Stedman's citings of enslaved African women result in what Kimberley Juanita Brown declares about modern scholarship on slavery and post-slavery trauma: that a text's signifying effect is located 'exclusively on black people' and, to accentuate Brown's observation, primarily on *and in* the 'black' body.[346] Similarly, Stedman's "anti-" / pro- abolitionist discourse also pre-empts what Toni Morrison describes as a 'slippery form of modern racism' in which the 'slavebody…re-enters the blackbody', rendering two distinct corporeal forms and their contingent cultural paradigms as one and the same.[347] By loading all sexual signification onto the African female body and treating the 'blackbody' as indistinct from the 'slavebody', to use Morrison's terminology, Stedman betrays what much British literature and visual cultural production (pro-abolition and otherwise) was guilty of during the late eighteenth century. Whether in satirical works, propagandistic iconography, poetry or early book illustrations, the 'slavebody', as cultural, social and biological difference, would be called back, projected over or inscribed into the 'blackbody' through pictorial and rhetorical

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[344] In the Prices' introduction to the 1790 manuscript, it is detailed that Joanna's mother (trafficked) offered her own daughter sexually to Stedman in exchange for money; see Price & Price, p.xxx.

[345] Please note in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis, I have chosen to capitalise the 'B' in 'Black' for political purposes. Throughout history, whiteness has been framed as the privileged marker through which Blackness has been constructed and to which it must defer. This dominance begins in language and its standardisation by white, Euro- and Anglo-centric institutions, as this chapter and thesis testifies. In capitalising the term Black when referring to people of African descent, anti-racist scholars and critics highlight attempts to counter the anti-Blackness found in language and the socio-political structures it upholds. They attempt to empower, but also to acknowledge the history of a group that has suffered the worst of social construction. See my bibliography for articles by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Lori L Tharps that argue for the case of capitalising the 'B' in Black; as Appiah articulates 'social identities are reducible to a label, but labels play a role in generating and sustaining them.'

[346] Kimberley Juanita Brown, 'Slavery's Afterlife in Text and Image' in *Criticism*, 56 (Fall 2014), pp.837-840.

[347] Toni Morrison, 'The Slavebody and the Blackbody' in *Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019), pp.74-85.

tropes recognisable to the reader and spectator. Morrison terms this a 'slippery form of modern racism', but its insidious origins are found in the rise of 'modern' subjectivity, in the eighteenth-century development of the 'modern' civilised self.[348] Such a conflation of signification and cultural construction around the Black female body in particular may be inevitable considering the prevailing European enlightenment theories on race and gender, seen in the works of Blumenbach, Soemmerring, Kant, and British thinkers Hume and Burke. But behind the ideas of even anti-slavery environmentalists, the superiority of the European body loomed and the inferiority of the 'blackbody' was pronounced.[349] Therefore, the collapsing of corporeal "realities" with culturally defined ones unsurprisingly finds its way into the work of authors insistent that conflation of this kind be deconstructed.

Wollstonecraft is one of these authors whose writing circles around the enslaved African body. Writing at a time when the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade had formed, Wollstonecraft's work both directly addresses issues of slavery in the British colonies and indirectly approaches them through the use of metaphor in her private letters, fiction and public polemics. Her rhetoric of slavery is thick with contemporary associations and, to use a concept identified by Sara Ahmed, 'sticky' with signs, figures and symbols that elicit and encourage certain emotions in readers.[350] In her reviews, didactic literature like *The Female Reader* (1789), and her political works, *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft directly refers to the slave trade and slave labour. Emphasis is placed on the continued violence experienced by enslaved African bodies in addition to the mercantile politics and economies erected around them. In such early work, the enslaved African body starts to gain a performative significance of the kind Brown describes above: wherein the signifying power of a text and its argument relies on the Black (often enslaved) form. Brutalised Black bodies become, therefore, politicised sites with which to highlight, discuss and renegotiate the moral and affective failings of white individuals. In the *Rights of Woman* and some of Wollstonecraft's personal letters, enslaved bodies are employed metaphorically to expound the socio-political, psychological and spiritual position of white European middle-class women. It is here that Ahmed's theory of "stickiness" comes to the fore. Wollstonecraft's rhetoric of enslavement ostensibly holds its roots in republicanism and rational dissent, as noted by scholars Laura Brace and Carol Howard, but her repeated description of and emphasis on enslaved bodies at times evokes the sexually inscribed figure of Stedman's enslaved African woman as well as, more overtly, the aforementioned erotically charged, subaltern eastern body.[351] Unlike in Stedman's *Narrative*, these stickily applied figures are directly connected to and located in white female bodies. Voices like Brace and Howard insist that the rhetoric of the enslaved body operates in such a way as to reinforce arguments of political and social liberty; and yet Wollstonecraft's language, in its Ahmedian stickiness, calls on and recuperates traces of Stedman's racist erotic rhetoric: that is, it reinscribes the fetishized Black and brown bodies of actual enslaved women onto politically and legally disadvantaged but free white European women. This in turn erases the true lived and corporeal realities of enslaved

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[348] Morrison, pp.74-76.

[349] Londa Schiebinger, 'The Anatomy of Difference: race and Sex in Eighteenth-century Science' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 23 (Summer 1990), pp.387-405), p.399.

[350] Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies' in *Social Text*, 22 (Summer 2004), pp.117-139.

[351] See Carol Howard, 'Wollstonecraft's Thoughts on Slavery and Corruption' in *The Eighteenth Century*, 45 (Spring 2004), pp.61-86. Brace posits the influence of both anti-slavery and pro-slavery texts on Wollstonecraft's comparison of fashionable women to enslaved individuals. Brace does not consider the erasure such comparisons cause and the repercussions this has for Wollstonecraft's moral philosophy and ideas of liberty. Brace cites Joyce Zonana's research on feminist orientalism, but does not discuss or elaborate on Wollstonecraft's employment of this racist strategy. I will discuss Brace's work towards the end of this chapter. See Laura Brace, 'Wollstonecraft and the Properties of (Anti-)Slavery' in *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft*, (eds) Sandrine Bergès and Alan Coffee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.117-134.

individuals – individuals, it must be noted, who do not reap the supposed political and social liberties that Wollstonecraft demands for white European women. By looking at the rhetorical and sticky resurfacing of the enslaved African and eastern female bodies, as well as her earlier direct references to slavery, Wollstonecraft's own anxiety over the body, particularly othered bodies, becomes apparent. Furthermore, by tracing and unpicking the rhetoric of the enslaved female body in her work, the complex relationship between white, Black and brown bodies will be better understood.

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One of the earliest instances of Wollstonecraft addressing the issue of slavery can be found in the *Analytical Review*. From 1788 to 1797, Wollstonecraft was a reviewer for Johnson and Thomas Christie's literature periodical. She reviewed everything from the religio-philosophical work of Necker to the latest scientific ideas of Erasmus Darwin. Whilst she worked on longer manuscripts and translations for publication, it was journalism that became Wollstonecraft's bread and butter, enabling her to live independently and finance trips to London, Paris and Scandinavia. But her reviews also provide the modern reader with a catalogue of the books she read and used to educate herself, and an index to her opinions on politics, art, religion and society at large. They also reveal her attitude to race, slavery and the enslaved African body. In the late 1780s and early 1790s, Wollstonecraft reviewed at least three books that were connected to the growing abolitionist movement in Britain and France: Olaudah Equiano's self-titled spiritual autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), a translation of Joseph Lavallee's French fictional work, *The Negro equalled by few Europeans* (1790) and Jacques-Pierre Brissot's *Nouveau Voyage Dans Les Etats-Unies de L'Amerique* (1791), the author of which Wollstonecraft met in Paris.[352] Although all the reviews betray differing degrees of sympathy for the abolitionist cause, her critical response to Equiano – the only Black author to be reviewed by her, it must be noted – betrays both fascination with and anxiety over the affective power and performativity of enslaved Black bodies, thus paving the way for her later rhetorical strategy.

Wollstonecraft's review of Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* begins by reflecting on the novelty of a literate Black African man whilst denouncing those who see darker skinned individuals as inferior and only fit for the 'mark of slavery' (p.100):

> The life of an African, written by himself, is certainly a curiosity, as it has been a favourite philosophic whim to degrade the numerous nations, on whom the sun-beams more directly dart, below the common level of humanity, and hastily to conclude that nature, by making them inferior to the rest of the human race, designed to stamp them with a mark of slavery. How they are shaded down, from the fresh colour of northern rustics, to the sable hue seen on the African sands, is not our task to inquire, nor do we intend to draw a parallel between the abilities of a negro and European mechanic…

Here, Wollstonecraft intentionally alludes to and effectively pastiches philosophical theories debated between environmentalists and biological determinists in the 1790s. In doing so, she ostensibly distances herself from the 'degrading' and developing nationalistic interpretations and scientific classifications of race.[353] By parodying categories that environmentalists like

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[352] All quotations of Wollstonecraft's reviews are taken from *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Vol. 7, (eds) Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989); see p.392, for her review of Brissot's *Nouveau Voyage*; pp. 100-101, for her review of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*; and p.130, for her review of Joseph Lavallee's *The Negro equalled by few Europeans*.

[353] Schiebinger, p.399.

Blumenbach observed – categories that were dependent on factors such as climate, diet and cultural customs, which he believed played a part in determining racial features and groups – Wollstonecraft appears to discredit such philosophies and withdraws from this kind of philosophizing. But there is no outright disagreement with this 'favourite philosophic whim'; there is no proper aversion towards the tendency to see African people, literate or otherwise, as 'inferior to the rest of the human race'. This attitude is still present, albeit latently so, in her review, and is seen again when she contradicts her own intention *not* to 'draw a parallel' between a Black individual and a white 'European' one. Overriding her intention not to compare men of different races, she proceeds to argue that Equiano's abilities equate him with the 'general mass of men, who fill the subordinate stations in a more civilized society'. This statement somewhat compromises her initial denunciation of contemporary race theories offered by environmentalists (since physicians like Blumenbach believed class to be a contributing factor in the development of racial characteristics) and shows that her stance is still one of Euro-centric superiority: the hypothetical '"civilized"' society points back to the "uncivilized" one Equiano 'was thrown into at…birth'. This hypothetical equation sees the subtle overlaying of the slavebody with the blackbody, even when the conflation of the two is seemingly being denied. That Equiano, a self-educated man who published the eighteenth-century equivalent of a bestseller and essentially invented a genre, only amounts to the 'general mass of men' and only proves himself fit to fill 'the subordinate stations' in (European) civilized society, is a baffling conclusion to arrive at, especially for a critic who argues passionately for the innate intelligence of men from lower classes. That a whole paragraph, almost half of the review, is given over to arguing with and against theories of race science and weighing up Equiano's mental powers proves the underlying discomfort towards and anxiety prompted by reviewing a work by a Black writer.

On closer inspection, Wollstonecraft's language and syntax hovers uncomfortably close to problematic arguments about race. In the passage above and throughout the entire opening paragraph, we see a latent delight in her rhetorical approach to the relationship between skin tone and intellect. Perhaps what resurfaces here is an unconscious weighing up of ideas and opinions, a subtle accumulation of contradictory concerns, which touch on her own preoccupation with genius and its manifestation in the physiognomy and lineaments of the body. Again, ostensibly, she reproaches those who argue that skin tone is synonymous with and an indication of 'nature', yet her frequent employment of contemporary descriptors such as 'sable' and 'negro' – descriptors that expose an interlocutor's awareness of racial difference and were predominantly deployed by Europeans to describe and differentiate Black bodies from white – other Equiano and distance her readership from him as a subject and author. Although she does insist that it is 'not' her 'task' to 'inquire' into 'how *they* are shaded down, from the fresh colour of northern rustics, to the sable hue seen on African sands' (my italics, p.100), Wollstonecraft quickly evokes a scene of a hotter isle, a hotter climate where 'sun-beams more directly dart' on bodies not her own. Then again, not only is Equiano othered by an emphasis on his bodily differences, but also by his supposed cultural similarities. The last few lines and footnote to Wollstonecraft's review refer to 'earthen vessels', which Europeans 'have' too, such as 'tobacco pipes'. Her emphasis here is to stress the similarity between cultures, the affinities diverse peoples share, but in doing so she betrays not only her awareness of cultural dislocation and disparity, but an ethnographic eye towards those who are not ethnically European. This lengthy opening, which begins by patronisingly othering Equiano – 'The life of an African, written by himself, is certainly a curiosity' (p.100) – assesses the author's abilities not in spite of his Blackness, but *because* of it. In highlighting Equiano's inherent ethnic and racial differences, as well as the supposed cultural similarities, and linking them to the surprisingly strange, rare, 'curious' act of writing himself into being, Wollstonecraft's initial denouncement of re-emerging theories of race science does not quite hold.

Subsequent paragraphs implicitly question the veracity of Equiano's authorship. His 'ingenuity' and 'activity' may 'conspicuously appear in the character of Gustavus' (perhaps a sly suggestion that his multiple names and identities hide a multiplicity of authors and hacks) but Wollstonecraft finds 'a kind of contradiction' apparent 'in the first pages'. According to her, Equiano's 'childish stories and puerile remarks, do not agree with some more solid reflections'; since there is no quotation from the text itself, it is hard to know which 'remarks' and 'stories' she is referring to. However, she asserts that 'in the style' exists 'a striking contrast', and promptly concludes 'a few well written periods do not smoothly unite the general tenor of the language' (p.101). Wollstonecraft does not note any possible discrepancies in the dates and times of Equiano's journey from Nigeria to North America – a timeline, it must be added, that throws the literal veracity of his account into dispute and remains a hotly debated issue amongst historians Vincent Carretta and Paul Lovejoy – but she questions the desultory and eclectic style of the work.[354] Again, not only the veracity, but the literary ability of a once enslaved Black African man is called into question.

For contemporary Wollstonecraft scholars, this review remains a yardstick with which to judge her opinions on race and slavery. At times, the discomfort that can be detected in Wollstonecraft's own writing presents itself in the remarks and analysis of white scholars Taylor and Tomaselli, and in the unblinking determination of other critics (Ferguson, Brace and Ware, see below) to frame her as an anti-slavery champion. Acknowledging across her biography Wollstonecraft's exploration of the slave-master paradigm and abolitionist sympathies in her work, particularly in *Rights of Men*, Taylor finds the review 'favourable', but considers the remarks on Equiano's intellectual capabilities evidence of the 'unselfconscious racism common in abolitionist circles' and 'obnoxious'.[355] Tomaselli, on the other hand, dismisses any charge of prejudice and overrides the uncomfortable aspects of Wollstonecraft's review. For her, commentary on Equiano's intellect may 'offend modern sensibilities', but, Tomaselli says quoting Taylor's observation, it would be a mistake to believe it indicates racism.[356] Rather, her criticism of Equiano and his work showed Wollstonecraft to be 'her usual critical self when assessing style and the rest of its content'.[357] Although one critic acknowledges the problematic prejudicial seam of thought within the review, what Taylor and Tomaselli's comments reflect overall is a need to recuperate and reemphasise Wollstonecraft's reputation as a pro-abolition philosopher who advocated for the rights of *all* humans.[358] But by cushioning their brief observations about the problematic language and tone of the review with encomiums on Wollstonecraft's anti-slavery ideas and actions, the very issue of bias, however 'unselfconscious', shows up even more. That Tomaselli, especially, tries at once to justify and diminish Wollstonecraft's critique of Equiano's style and language highlights the critic's complex feelings towards discussing the uncomfortable minutiae found within this review, a discomfort very much in keeping with Wollstonecraft's own.

Today, the intertextual richness, polysemy and heterogeneous style of *Interesting Narrative* are celebrated and acknowledged as just some of the reasons it remains on university syllabi around the Anglo-speaking world and African diaspora. Carretta asserts that Equiano's 'slave narrative'

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[354] See Douglas Chambers' article, which follows Carretta and Lovejoy's debate closely: Chambers, Douglas, 'Almost an Englishman: Carretta's Equiano' in *H-Atlantic* (November 2007). Also, Vincent Carretta's biography, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-made Man* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005) and his introduction (pp.ix-xxx) and notes (237-377) to his edition of Equiano's *Narrative*, full citation below.
[355] Taylor, p.240.
[356] Tomaselli, p.70.
[357] Tomaselli, p.70.
[358] Tomaselli, p.70; Taylor, p.240.

was one of the first of its kind.[359] The *Interesting Narrative* paved the way for future manumitted African individuals to write their own stories and continue the revolution against pro-slavery advocates. Equiano's text – and this includes his "contradictory" style and language – was not only a brave act of self-definition and a smartly conceived form of self-marketization, but a beautifully crafted template which Africans, African Americans, British Africans and Atlantic Creoles could inherit and use to their own ends. His work made it possible for Mary Prince and Frederick Douglas to have their respective stories published and heard on both sides of the Atlantic. This is largely thanks to Equiano's striking style, which set a precedent for Douglas' own rhetorically and structurally purposive use of intertextuality (both quote heavily from the Bible and late eighteenth-century poets from Pope to Whittier). Quoting from Milton, Homer, Pope, Cowper and Day, as well as including his own verses, Equiano proved his high level of literacy and assured readers that his was a mind, a 'nature', not removed from their own.

Perhaps Wollstonecraft's objection to Equiano's style and her scepticism over his authorship were owing to the fact that his was a text set apart from others. Autobiographical accounts by enslaved individuals were scarce in Britain, and the lives and voices of enslaved individuals were imagined mainly in the fictional, ethnographic and travelogue literature of white British writers (from Richard Steele's *Inkle and Yarico* (1711) to Stedman's *Narrative*). Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* would have been utterly new to critics like Wollstonecraft.[360] It presented not only the barbaric story of a formerly enslaved African man, but a turning point in the genre of life writing, a departure from, as Equiano observed after Samuel Johnson, those 'histories' about saints, heroes or tyrants.[361] In its sheer ground-breaking individuality and self-penmanship, *Interesting Narrative* would have appeared unique to the British reading public. That is not to say Wollstonecraft's problematic othering of Equiano as a Black writer should be ignored or excused, but that his textual innovativeness, not to mention his business acumen, was unusual in the realm of life writing and the newly created genre of 'slave narratives'.

Of course, Equiano's text contains what is now considered a defining characteristic of slave narratives: the spectacle of the brutalised Black body. Although Wollstonecraft does not directly discuss the bodily oppression and violence detailed in the *Interesting Narrative*, she does, rather interestingly, prefer these parts of the narrative to 'the latter part of the second volume' (p.100), where Equiano relates his life as an emancipated individual. Interestingly enough, it is these scenes of brutality and abjection that she appreciates and extensively quotes from in her review of Lavellee and Brissot's works. Instead of finding Equiano's impassioned account of converting to Methodism an act of empowerment and self-actualisation, or realising that his life as a manumitted man sadly rarely differs from that as an enslaved one, Wollstonecraft finds these parts 'tiresome', 'flat' and sees him 'entangled in…insignificant cares' (p.100). What attracts her to Equiano's story, what keeps her reading is 'the lively impression made by the miseries of the slave'. This is a telling remark, one that demonstrates the highly charged and performative appeal of the enslaved Black African body to the white European eye.

It also hints at her own imaginative connection to enslaved African men and women. Wollstonecraft would have encountered images of enslaved African people through the literature and iconography produced by the abolition movement, much of which emphasised the physical

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[359] Vincent Carretta, 'Olaudah Equiano: African British abolitionist and founder of the African American slave narrative' in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, (ed) Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.44-60.

[360] The first slave narrative was by Ukawsaw Gronniosaw; it was not written by Gronniosaw but 'related by Himself'. See *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, as related by Himself* (Bath: W. Gye, 1777).

[361] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, (ed) Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 2003), p.31.

horrors inflicted on enslaved Africans in the colonies. For instance, by the time Wollstonecraft had reviewed the *Interesting Narrative*, Josiah Wedgwood's Anti-slavery medallion (also termed 'Slave Medallion') was already being reproduced, handed around and sold to the fashionable middle classes in support of the Society for the Effective Abolition of the Slave Trade (fig.15). Designed by William Hackwood, the neo-classical cameo featured a jasper relief of an enchained (enslaved) Black African man who, kneeling in a supplicatory position, asked the viewer, 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?'. Playing off the startling and rather beautiful contrast between white and black (not so unlike Wollstonecraft's opening paragraph in her review), the medallion was supposed to appeal to the humanity of men and women, whilst, albeit unintentionally, reinforcing the differences between Europeans and Africans, not just free men and enslaved. To make matters worse (although not necessarily for the campaign), the medallion was rather distastefully made into brooches, set into gold-lined snuff boxes, worn on lapels, hats and necklaces. It became a politicised fashion accessory, the eighteenth-century equivalent to today's 'Corbyn: Just Do It' or 'We Should All Be Feminists' t-shirts. It was a striking symbol, one that signalled the wearer's stance on a debate slowly gaining traction in Parliament and in political spheres around the world. This was so much the case that engraved and illustrated derivatives found their way into the parlours and onto the bookshelves of consumers via sugar bowls, dinner-ware and cheap tracts. Despite the Society's benevolent intentions, the medallion became a new way to imagine, consume and own the brutalised Black body.[362]

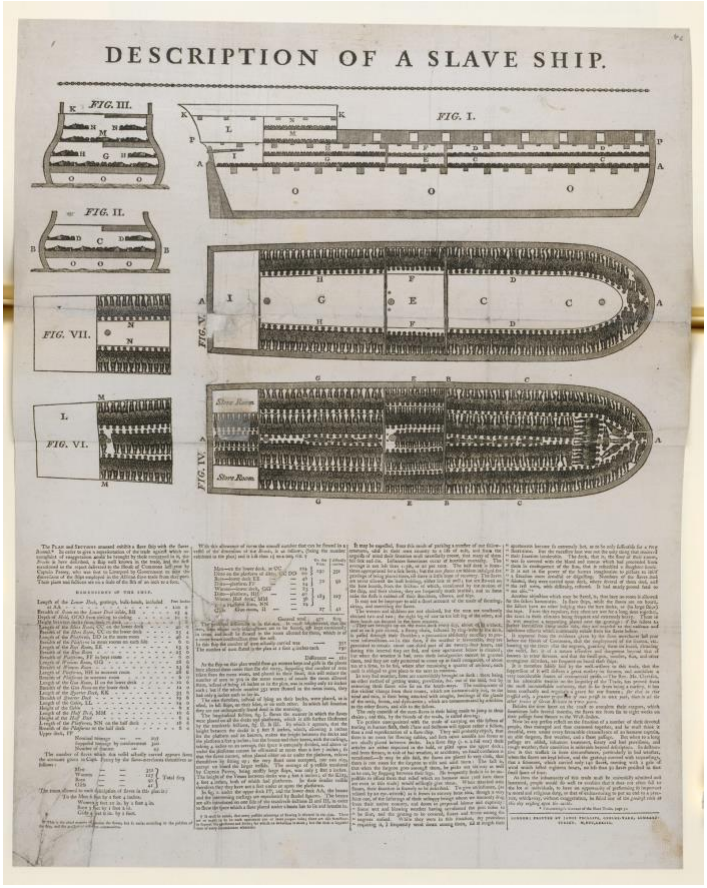

Fig.14, Thomas Clarkson, *Description of a Slave Ship*, 1787, engraving. Image courtesy of the British Library.

Fig.15, above, Josiah Wedgwood (modelled by William Hackwood), *Anti-slavery medallion*, c.1787. Image courtesy of the British Museum Trustees.

362 For more on the history of the Wedgwood medallion see Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp.22-23; and Mary Guyatt, 'The Wedgwood Slave Medallion: Values in Eighteenth-Century Design' in *The Journal of Design History*, 13 (2000), pp.93-105.

The ubiquity of this image could not have escaped the attention of Wollstonecraft. But the medallion was not the only object to project the enslaved, brutalised African body into the public imaginary. Thomas Clarkson issued another distressing graphic for public notice – and consumption – late in 1787. Quaker abolitionists based in Plymouth (another infamous port that produced and harboured slave ships bound for the coast of Africa) had issued a leaflet with a blueprint of the 'Brookes' slave ship. Clarkson appropriated the image for the London-branch of the Society, expanding the infographic and including painstakingly researched factual details about the 'Brookes' and other slave trading vessels made in Britain.[363] His version, together with Hackwood's design and actual instruments of slavery, has become one of the most well-known propagandistic visuals to survive the movement. The 'Brookes' infographic (fig.14) not only encapsulates Britain's significant involvement in the Atlantic slave trade but has come to symbolise the horrific state of slavery itself. Depicting hundreds upon hundreds of Black bodies tightly packed into the hold of the ship, the diagram was designed to inform, educate and move – as well as to shock – viewers into action. Circulated amongst the high and low (Hannah More famously took it to dinner parties, and Clarkson himself showed the diagram to Necker), the Brookes diagram brought the horrors of the slave trade, the fatal barbarity of the Middle Passage and the violence enacted on the Black body close to home.[364] It could no longer be ignored and dismissed as an offshore issue; distance was no excuse for ignorance: Clarkson's diagram had brought the sinister underside of Britain's burgeoning economy and imperial successes into the light, and the truth was ugly.

Much like the medallion, the 'Brookes' infographic was disseminated far and wide. Published in newspapers, pamphlets and eventually made into a model to be shown in Parliament, it was also hung up in shop windows and pasted onto the walls of coffee houses, shops and public houses. Unlike the medallion, which was tantamount to a luxury item and circulated mainly amongst the middle and upper classes, the 'Brookes' print could reach different social strata quickly and with less expense. Its display in spaces of sociability also meant the diagram shared the same exposure and audience as satirical prints of Black figures. Clarkson's image could, therefore, sit side by side with James Gilray's *Wouski* (fig.16, 1788), a print that mocked the pro-slavery advocate, Prince William Henry, and his love for a Black woman he met in Jamaica and supposedly brought back to England.[365] Named after a character in George Colman's play *Inkle and Yarico*, Wouski is depicted as a sexually alluring, Europeanised Black woman. Dressed in a yellow speckled gown, a colour associated with venereal disease, with nipples peeping over her bodice and arousal fully displayed in her flushed red cheeks, Wouski would have been a recognisable caricatured 'type' of African woman: the prettified and palatable black Venus. Gillray's satire paints a different kind of body trafficked in the hold of a ship: the sexualised and sexualising African or Atlantic Creole who both lures and is lured by the sexually deviant Prince. He, in turn, is tempted and tainted by the immorality posed and presented by slavery, his advocacy for which is literalised in his physical manhandling of Wouski. Gillray evidently others Wouski, exploits the sexual stereotypes prevalent at the time, and renders her a "good" to be consumed by Prince and public alike. She is, therefore, not so dissimilar to those naked, chattel-like bodies, mute but emotively expressive, stacked up in the cramped bowels of the 'Brookes'. Wouski betrays the Prince's lewd and "unBritish" behaviour rumoured to have occurred in the West Indies; but she is a reminder, an embodiment of the sexual economies inherent to and instigated by the slave trade. Like

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[363] James Walvin, *Slavery in Small Things: Slavery and Modern Cultural Habits* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), pp.173-191; p.181. For more on the inherent problems of abolitionary visual and material culture, see also *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, (eds) Cora Kaplan and John Oldfield (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).

[364] Biographies on Hannah More devote chapters to her support of the abolitionary campaigns and her close relationship with Wilberforce. See my bibliography for full references to Jones and Meakin's biographies.

[365] See Temi Odumosu, *Africans in English Caricature 1769-1819: Black Jokes, White Humour* (Begijnhof: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), which offers excellent analysis of this print and many others by British satirists.

Clarkson's diagram, Gillray's print brings home the threatening and pernicious "realities" of the slave trade, realities all too evident, his sketch would have us believe, in the bodies of colonised Black women.

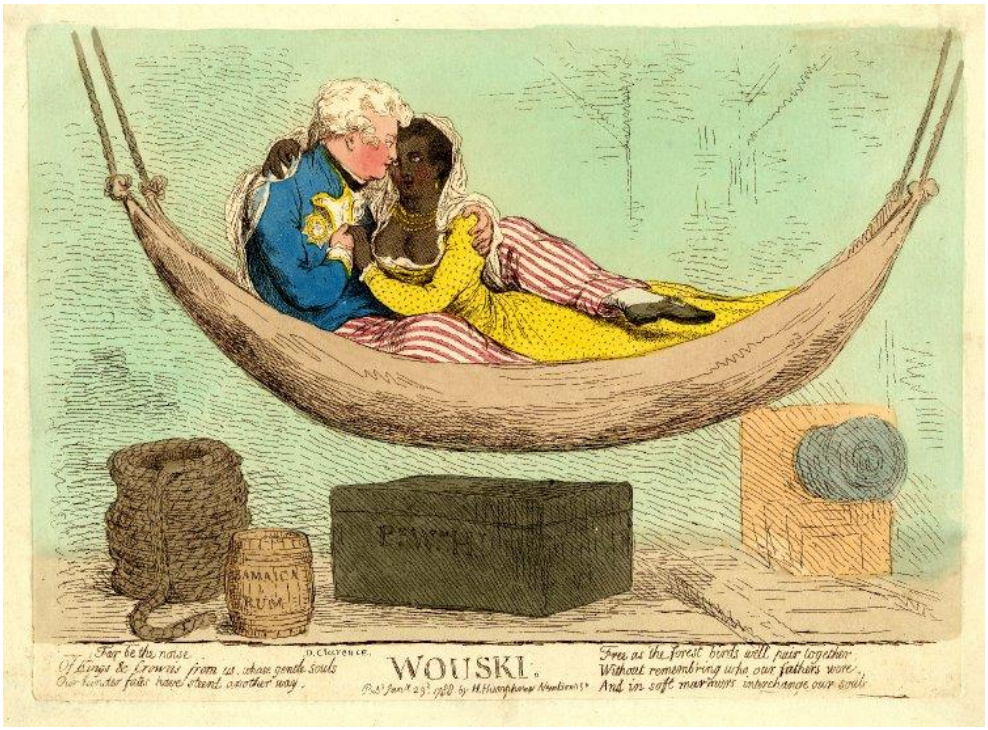

Fig. 16, James Gillray, *Wouski*, hand coloured etching, 1788.
Image courtesy of the British Museum.

In tone, however, Gillray and Clarkson's prints dramatically differ. The accent of their respective works remains on the Black body, but whereas Clarkson's infographic emphasises abjection and victimisation, Gillray's signifies humour and humiliation. *Wouski* makes much of the Prince's "depraved" proclivities and laughs at his debasing and "base" urges, but the nub of the matter – or rather the punchline of the joke – is Wouski herself. The shaming of the Prince rests on her (his body is not expected to be found in the hold of a ship; hers is), and importantly, the set-up of Gillray's satire leads to and revolves around what she epitomises and expresses in British social spheres and parlance. Whilst Clarkson's tally-like rows of Black corps are supposed to reflect back onto the white trader, slaver, owner and reader, Wouski's available body, as Gillray's work figures it, *is* its own onus, bears its own shame, outside of either prince or viewer.

There is no direct evidence that Wollstonecraft would have seen either Clarkson's diagram or Gillray's print. What I am attempting to highlight is the pervasive nature of such imagery, how it would reattach "blackness" (as conceived by Europeans) to slavery, and thereby encode enslaved African bodies with certain values, ideas and stereotypical notions. The visual culture of the period, of which I have surveyed a very slim sample, does not problematize the visual and rhetorical figuring of the Black body; rather it demonstrates the inherent racialized thinking and problematic ideologies behind such representations, whether by ardent pro- or anti-slavery advocates. From the classical tropes shaping Wedgwood's medallion (tropes all too often used against African individuals as further justification for the continuance of slavery) to the different though no less reductive portrayal in Clarkson's 'Brookes' diagram and Gillray's incendiary *Wouski* print, the sense that the white European body is the authorial, the original, the superior form still thrives. Wollstonecraft would not have been impervious to this. Whether through philosophy or material and visual culture, she would have approached Equiano's narrative off the back of such representations. This, in part, goes some way to explaining her review, and why

the first half of Equiano's narrative, before he obtains his freedom, made 'more of a lively impression' on her. To exist in a world where the Black body is shown either in a position of grave passivity (Wedgwood's medallion), abjection and brutalisation (Clarkson's 'Brookes' diagram), or entertaining sexualisation (Gillray's *Wouski*) inevitably plays a part in what a white reader finds engaging and familiar.

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So what of Equiano's presentation of the 'miseries of the slave' which Wollstonecraft found compelling? Did Equiano pander to the prevailing portrayals of enslaved African men and women circulated in the late 1780s and early 90s? Did Equiano fashion himself into a submissive and brutalised body, one that found salvation in the land of the free? Despite the inclusion of letters and reviews by prominent white figures – the usual paratextual verification now associated with narratives of slavery – Equiano presents himself as a chosen and self-actuating individual, set apart by providence and, despite the terrors and traumas of the slave state, often averting the full physical brutality that those around him suffer. Frequently he observes and testifies to the bodily atrocities other enslaved individuals meet with, but he is rarely whipped, maimed, cut or corporeally punished like those he encounters. For instance, when enduring the Middle Passage Equiano is more eye than body, surveying the 'wretched situation' of the cramped, 'loathsome' and 'pestilential' hold.[366] On two occasions he narrates from *within* the traumatised body of a fettered individual: initially when commenting on the overcrowded spaces of the hold (that almost suffocated 'us'); and again when detailing the suicides of several chained men ('in this manner we continued to undergo more hardships than I can now relate').[367] But Equiano also separates himself from this tableau of suffering, so determined is he not to present himself as the cowed enslaved man cast on Wedgwood's medallion. Instead, he is separated from those in the hold and brought up on deck, without suffering the torture and humiliation of fetters. This is, of course, small recompense for what he has endured (multiple kidnappings and being sold into Atlantic from domestic slavery); what he continues to endure (the brutal sights, sounds, smells and forces of the slavers; the fading vision of the African shoreline and the growing realisation of the imperilled existence awaiting him in the Americas), and what he is yet to endure (on plantations and voyages abroad). The dehumanisation and brutalisation of the body is, nonetheless, a nightmarish panorama that often occurs around and before him, never directly *to* him. Equiano maintains his dignity and to some extent denies the white reader any possible secret relish that may come through the performance and spectacle of the abused Black form. Stripes and lashes are at a remove, maintaining a kind of ontological and disembodied distance from the corporeal and psychological reality of Equiano. The vivid impression of misery wrought by slavery, as observed by Wollstonecraft, is not diminished; rather it is projected onto other forms who are referred to, described and reflected on, but do not occupy the foreground of Equiano's life and words. This strategy of distance forces us to be critical; to be truly 'informed, educated and moved', without a re-enactment of colonial inscription, objectification and consumption. Equiano tells readers what they need to know, but not at the cost of his humanity, dignity and autonomy. He is not about to re-enslave himself in his own memoir; neither will he allow us a cinematic view into the bodily and psychic pain of others.

In Chapter three, Equiano employs the same technique of projection but to different effect. On arriving in Virginia, a young Equiano is taken to a plantation and there separated from his native Africans. Quickly falling further into dejection at the prospect of having no one to speak to,

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366 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, (ed) Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 2003), p.58.
367 Equiano, pp.58-59.

Equiano 'grieves', pines and wishes for death.[368] Deprived of companionship, of linguistic intimacy and cultural togetherness, he languishes and is effectively gagged. As if the first-person narration did not properly capture this state of isolation and deprivation, Equiano continues to describe a 'black woman slave' who was 'cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines' one of which 'locked her mouth so fast she could scarcely speak…eat or drink'.[369] This painful portrait of the enslaved African woman with the 'iron muzzle in her mouth' (iron bit) is another example of Equiano physicalizing his own psychic pain and displacing or sublimating it onto the bodies of those around him. Her enforced wordlessness grotesquely exaggerates his own. Both have been rendered violently voiceless, coerced into labour (Equiano fans an ailing gentleman; the woman is forced to cook food she will never taste) they cannot verbally refuse.

Throughout the *Interesting Narrative*, this desire to speak is offset by Equiano's inability to do so in a language recognisable to those around him. Attempts at articulation, speaking up, speaking out, speaking against slavers, traders, customers, troublemakers, costs Equiano dearly. This is evident when he insists on being referred to by a different name to the one his first master calls him, all the way through to his frequent iteration, in the face of extreme danger, that he is a freeman.[370] Utterance as an enslaved individual, particularly one of disagreement or refusal to one's master, could result in the arbitrary punishment of a muzzle, iron bit or even having one's tongue cut out. The distant recollection of a woman physically silenced through a torturous instrument not only highlights what many enslaved individuals were subject to, but throws into sharp relief how important and powerful Equiano's narration – and style – is.

The image of the enslaved muzzled woman is one of the last examples of extreme physical cruelty that Equiano witnesses before being sold to Pascal. Far from having the same erotic effect as the brutal bloodied whipping of Aunt Hester described in Douglass' *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), the figure of the muzzled woman speaks of the degradation and hints at the sexual bondage experienced by African women at this time.[371] And, whilst women are not the only brutalised bodies cited, described and lamented in the *Interesting Narrative*, they are the only figures invoked in relation to sex. In Chapter five, Equiano opens up a catalogue of bodily atrocities that are inflicted on other enslaved individuals he encounters. Ferrying 'my unhappy fellow slaves' on Mr King's boat, Equiano recalls the 'whites' and their 'violent depredations on the chastity of the female slaves'.[372] The recount of white men, their debased sexuality and amorality, not only serves to convey to an eighteenth-century British audience the barbarity perpetuated by the institution of slavery, but also speaks of Equiano's sense of helplessness and thwarted masculinity. Writing a lengthy paragraph on the molestation and violation of Black women, Equiano concludes with the brief anecdote of a Black man staked, mutilated and cut up for being involved with a white sex worker. Outraged that a Black man's 'passion of nature' is seen as barbarous, culpable and capitally punishable, Equiano is equally bitterly incredulous that white brutality and sexual violence are deemed as 'no crime'.[373]

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[368] Equiano, p.62.
[369] Equiano, p.63.
[370] Equiano, p.64.
[371] The episode with Aunt Hester offers a front row cinematic view, a veritable bloody baptism into the erotics of violence enacted on the female enslaved body. The reader sees it through Douglass' young eyes; it is both initiation and satiation, through which the Black male body becomes conduit. Though there is a silent horror about the lone muzzled woman, her muteness renders it emblematic of Equiano's suffering rather than an on-repeat spectacle he remains outside of but contributes to. A connection should be made with the paradoxical "voicelessness" of the narrator as accentuated by the truly voiceless, nameless woman. See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) for more on this scene, as well as Douglass' *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.18-19.
[372] Equiano, p.104.
[373] Equiano, p.104.

But there is also a sense that white predatory sexuality and sexual violence emasculates or further de-masculinises the enslaved Black man, who, as an enslaved individual, already occupies an effeminised position. Witnessing the continued traffic and violation of young enslaved African women, Equiano is as physically inhibited and disempowered as he was verbally in Chapter three. Again he remains corporeally "sealed off" and unharmed, but the passive position he is forced to adopt in this instance has psychological repercussions, the scars of which run corporeally deep. Equiano may not be literally 'cut' and 'staked' like the man he describes, but he is metaphorically "tied up".

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In Toni Morrison's essay 'The Site of Memory', she discusses multiple autobiographies written by formerly enslaved individuals.[374] Aware of the important legacy these works hold in terms of style, political intention and representation (the print origins of Black literature in America are found in such narratives), Morrison finds the absence of a subject's 'interior life' problematic. 'No slave society in the history of the world wrote more – or more thoughtfully – about its own enslavement,' she concedes. However, for her, 'the milieu…dictated the purpose and the style' of such works.[375] This is to an extent true of Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*. Time and time again he writes for and addresses his white European and American readership; time and time again he implicitly acknowledges that they have the power to delay or bring about abolition. He code-switches depending on who and what is being spoken about: early on in his narrative he refers to other enslaved individuals as 'black', but on occasions the cant of his white audience can be heard when he terms men and women 'negroes'. But Equiano's descriptions of brutalised Black bodies problematise Morrison's claim about satiating the whims, mores and egos of white audiences. Equiano neither draws a 'veil "over proceedings too terrible to relate"', nor does he gratuitously and sensationally hover over garishly bloodied wounds, titillating cries and yelps, and the grotesque tortures suffered by many.[376] Instead, the brutalised Black body is invoked to exemplify and metonymically encapsulate the psychological pain, trauma and subjection of Equiano himself. The 'interior life' that Morrison misses in narratives by Douglass, Bibb, Jacobs and Equiano, is not obliterated by graphic scenes of body horror in the latter's narrative; rather, the inexpressible reality of Equiano's own 'interior life' is displaced onto and magnified by the atrocities and hostilities inflicted on the bodies of others. As mentioned above, this strategy of projection and deflection creates a distance between Equiano, the painful reality of his past and the newly negotiated authority of his retrospective narratological and present self; it lets us view the pain of others from this complex vantage point. That Equiano's rhetorical strategy overlaps with that of white European artists and writers is, undoubtedly, problematic. But there is some difference of intention, of authorial licence and control, of experience and expression that sees Equiano's use of the Black body differ to that of Wollstonecraft, Wedgwood, Clarkson and Gillray. The muzzled woman appears tragically, hauntingly, reproachfully in our imaginations; she is a raw node of trauma and presents the kind of hauntology, the kind of mourning that both Equiano and his readers cannot – and should not – suppress or overcome. In the renegotiation of our own identities and positionalities to such history, spectres like the muzzled woman or the staked man, should not be overcome or ignored: instead, in their silence they should be heard, and regarded in their pain. This is what Equiano offers us in the relating of his *Narrative* and in the complex corporeal strategy he adopts.

Yet something must be said of the voicelessness of the muzzled woman. We must observe that innumerable accounts written by Black men started to proliferate in the literary marketplace on

[374] Morrison, pp.233-245.
[375] Morrison, p.236.
[376] Morrison, p.237.

both sides of the Atlantic, but those by Black women were not heard or published until Mary Prince's 1831 *History*.[377] In archives and on library shelves her silence and absence is felt. When attempting to address the past violence and continued silencing of lives only recounted in the slaver's 'ledger…or in an overseer's journal', Saidiya Hartman asks if it is possible to use the imagination and narrative to 'embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know?'[378] How can scholars, authors and artists use language and the act of storytelling to 'resurrect lives from the ruins', to listen to 'the unsaid' without re-enacting and perpetuating further violence, without overlaying our own needs, prejudices, desires and errors of judgment over the bodies of the dead?[379] Can any narrative take off the muzzle, anticipate the voices and utterances of these unknown and unaccounted for women? The rich thoughts, feelings, cries and speeches of a Sethe and Cora will never fill the void, let alone make up for the systemic, archival and physical abuse suffered by Equiano and the figures he relates. But novels by Morrison, Colson Whitehead, Yvonne Battle-Felton and Sara Collins to name a few, take us a step closer to confronting this gap, to *imagining* an attempted recovery, to unsilencing the silenced stories and denied personhoods of enslaved Black women.[380] These narratives have replaced 'curious' catalogues of 'slave' misery, not so much for the formerly enslaved, but for those who choose to reckon with this painful legacy. Their lives, imagined though they may be, come a little closer to ours. They are seen neither through the eyes of the oppressor, nor through the warped and uncomfortably differential and racialized figuration of white European colonial thinkers, but through the eyes of those trying to make out themselves, tenderly trying to catch sight of and embrace what came before them.

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I have tried to allow Equiano's voice – and the voicelessness of fellow enslaved African men and women – to speak back, be heard and centralised in this chapter. I have also briefly discussed how Equiano's employment of the brutalised Black body differs in tone, intention, positionality and effect from that of white abolitionists and abolition writers in general. His recount of slavery, let alone its actuality, could easily skewer the perception of the beholder, implicating him or her in the described atrocity and performance of pain on the page. Nevertheless, for Equiano the trauma of positionality – the pain of perception and grief of witnessing such acts – is carried over and worked through in his strategy of distance. What happens, however, when these sites and sights of bodily pain become rhetorical fodder for political agendas beyond the sphere of Atlantic slavery and the formerly enslaved? What happens when the bodily abjection of enslaved African men and women is politicised for anything other than the cause of abolition? In *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft employs the rhetoric of slavery to such ends. When confronting Edmund Burke about his views on property, social customs and the French Revolution, direct references are made to the slave trade, slave labour and the corporal punishment suffered by enslaved individuals. Her situating of Atlantic slavery within the very oppressive power structures that she believes Burke sycophantically supports and embodies is not entirely wrong; the institution was upheld by both French and British politicians, and Burke's own pro-abolition stance on the slave

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[377] This of course excludes Phyllis Wheatley, the first African American woman poet, whose *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London: A. Bell, 1773) were published on both sides of the Atlantic before Equiano and Prince's narratives on slavery. I have not included this work as the majority of her poems from this collection do not explore or divulge her feelings about enslavement and it is, of course, not a slave narrative.

[378] Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts' in *Small Axe* (June 2008), pp.1-14, 1.

[379] Hartman, pp.2-3.

[380] Some recent texts that beautifully represent an enslaved individual's 'interior life' and unearth the long lost stories of women from the African diaspora, to use the words of Toni Morrison, are Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (London: Doubleday, 2018), Esi Edugyan, *Washington Black* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2018), Yvonne Battle-Felton, *Remembered* (London: Dialogue, 2019) and Sara Collins, *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* (London: Penguin, 2019). See my bibliography for full references and more examples.

trade was at odds with the ameliorist policies proposed to parliament in his 'Sketch of a Negro Code' (1780) and his later chilling belief that 'the cause of humanity would be far more benefited by the continuation of the trade and of servitude, regulated and reformed, than by the total destruction of both or either'.[381] However, the rhetoric of slavery and direct references to the Atlantic slave trade also reinforce Wollstonecraft's gendered attack. In *Rights of Men*, Atlantic slavery is mentioned on several occasions in relation to white European women and it is here that Wollstonecraft begins to play on the multiple meanings, connotations and socio-political connections of the enslaved African body. By embedding references to the Atlantic slave trade in her overall critique of Burke himself, Wollstonecraft exposes the manifold bodies (political and literal) that benefit from and depend on the enslaved African body and paves the way for the eroticised enslaved female body invoked in *Rights of Woman*.

From the outset the gendered body is integral to *Rights of Men*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, by publishing the first edition of the pamphlet anonymously and in omitting her own gendered corporeal identity – and evading all the cultural associations (and restrictions) the latter entails – Wollstonecraft writes from a supposedly "neutral" position. In this instance, the shroud of anonymity is an advantage in her polemical assault on Burke. She can adopt a 'manly plainness' (p.35) of style and tone without incurring the ridicule and scepticism of critics. And she can scathingly accuse Burke of being an effeminised figure – one whose exceedingly 'infantine sensibility' (p.60), 'sentimental jargon' (p.29) and 'torrent of shining sentences' (p.61) aligns his bodily identity with vain "women of fashion" – without (initially) having that same attack thrown back onto her. What is more, Wollstonecraft's act of disembodiment/gendered embodiment here allows for the literal and metaphorical bodies of others – labouring men and women, the affluent middle and upper classes, the French aristocracy, the British monarchy, the clergy and, of course, enslaved African peoples – to become more rhetorically prominent as politicised Ahmedian sites of affect. By withholding her own bodily identity in the first edition – or allowing readers to assume she is male – Wollstonecraft turns our focus to the interrelationship of such bodies, to the institutionally endorsed dynamic of oppressor and oppressed, and how this is represented by and enacted on the physical form in Burke's work and the wider world.

Then again, as Eileen Hunt Botting has observed, speculation over Wollstonecraft's gender identity was already in motion after the publication of the first edition.[382] Quoting from the cover page of the *Kingston Daily Advertiser* (11 January 1791), Hunt Botting demonstrates that the reception of both texts in colonial Jamaica conveyed awareness that the author of *Rights of Men* was a woman ('there are no less than two ladies of considerable literary fame, who have written against him') and that Burke had been no less humiliated by the response.[383] The text also mocked Burke for his 'eloquent defence of the *Rights of Women'*, a humiliating reference in 1791 not to Wollstonecraft's forthcoming work, but to the politician's stylistic and moral alignment with an effeminised position. Prior to this, in the *Gazetteer* (24 November 1790), speculation had been made as to whether *Rights of Men* had been written by a 'defrocked' Catholic priest, Alexander Geddes; then, in a December issue, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Catherine Macaulay were cited as the possible 'advocates for the rights of men'.[384] After this, Hunt Botting finds, Wollstonecraft was identified as the author in an advertisement placed in the Whitehall Evening

[381] Edmund Burke, 'Sketch of a Negro Code' (9 April 1780) found in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Vol.3, (eds) Warren M. Elofson, John A. Woods, and William B. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.563-581. The quotation declaring a desire for the continuation of slavery was in the draft of a speech found in his correspondence, published in Vol. 7, p.124, of this same collection of writing.
[382] Eileen Hunt Botting, 'Wollstonecraft in Jamaica: the international reception of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in the *Kingston Daily Advertiser* in 1791' in *History of European Ideas*, 47 (9 March 2021), pp.1304-1314.
[383] Hunt Botting, 2021, p.1305.
[384] Hunt Botting, 2021, p.1305.

Post (14-16 December 1790). What the comments in the *Kingston Daily Advertiser* reveal, irrespective of the issue of Wollstonecraft's authorship, is that the gendered body was central to the tone of these arguments, and that Burke was perceived, much to the editors' delight, as the one undone and unmanned by them.

This process of 'unmanning' Burke begins by aligning him with fashionable 'ladies' who 'retail in theatrical attitudes many of [his] sentimental exclamations' (p.6). For Wollstonecraft, Burke's denouncement of the National Assembly and his pro-monarchical arguments about the French Revolution are not underpinned by patriotism, 'manly' rationalism or rationally synthesised feelings, but by an obsequious regard for the established order and the sanctions it demands. That the toasts of London (not its philosophers) should voluptuously regale in and repeat his words renders him and the sentiments found in *Reflections* a passing novelty for a morally feeble, fashionable world. It is these unfeeling rococo bodies – political, but corporeally and effeminately figured in her text – that spread a malaise of ineffectuality and indifference towards the lower classes and any other marginalised group. The political bodies of Britain and France 'have sacrificed the many to their vices', 'pampered' their 'appetites' and 'supinely exist without exercising mind or body' (p.8). They have, Wollstonecraft sharply asserts, 'ceased to be men' (p.8). Burke's passionate defence of corrupt and effeminate institutions divests him, therefore, of the masculine action and sympathy he claims in *Reflections*. This, together with the disingenuous, self-indulgent emotive style of his text, leaves Burke effeminised ('like a celebrated beauty' p.6) and on a par with the (poorly educated) middle-upper class women of his time. It is a blow Wollstonecraft levels at Burke throughout *Rights of Men*, one designed to belittle him and destabilise the text's purposiveness, as well as its emotional and rhetorical impact.

In direct contrast to effeminate political bodies are those of workers, labourers and enslaved individuals. Diametrically opposite to the supine bodies of the ruling classes, these bodies work and till the land (land they do not benefit from or own); live by the 'sweat' of their brows (p.13), and are often homeless and vulnerable to the elements (p.130). Dialectically concealed within the effeminate monarchic body, these neglected bodies of the lower orders form part of a tyrant-slave paradigm as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4. To further emphasise this Wollstonecraft refers to the 'clogged wheels of corruption' which are 'continually oiled by the sweat of the laborious poor, squeezed out of them by unceasing taxation' (p.20). In France these disregarded forms threaten to break bounds and turn on the effeminate and parasitically ruling body politic, as seen in the poissardes' March to Versailles described by both Burke and Wollstonecraft. But in Britain, this tyrant-slave paradigm is merely reinforced and extended outwards to its literal consequence in the British colonies. That Wollstonecraft sees Britain's dominant involvement in the trade and institution of slavery as part of this socio-political dialectic is evident when she both indirectly and directly addresses the topic throughout *Rights of Men*. She addresses the hypocrisy of Burke supporting American Independence but not fully advocating for the revocation of slavery on page 13, observing that it is his 'plausible arguments' for the revolution across the Atlantic that are used to 'settle slavery on an everlasting foundation'. Wollstonecraft continues by weaving this attack into her argument about the overall structure of oppression which *Reflections* defends; it is Burke's 'servile reverence for antiquity', his unquestioning loyalty to patriarchal institutions and 'sanction[s]' of the past ('our ignorant forefathers' as Wollstonecraft calls them) that ensure the 'native dignity' and 'reason of man' are ignored and that 'inhuman customs' like the 'slave trade' remain as Burke would have them: 'never to be 'abolished' (p.13).

Later in the text she criticises Burke's notion of moral instinct ('inbred sentiments' p.31) and uses the lawful sanctioning of slavery to disprove his theory and highlight the prominent role affectivity plays in perpetuating the institution. Frequent employment of a republicanised rhetoric of slavery also punctuates the text when discussing primogeniture and marriages of

propertied alliance, as arranged by parents 'who have treated [their children] like slaves' (p.21). The vocabulary of slavery here, though republicanised and indirect, conflates diversely gendered and racialized bodies through legalised notions of property, all of which is enabled by the same socio-political system praised by Burke. But her specific reference to the real horrors of Atlantic slavery brings us back to another gendered attack on Burke and his unmanly ethic of emotion:

> Where is the dignity, the infallibility of sensibility, in the fair ladies, whom, if the voice of rumour is to be credited, the captive negroes curse in all the agony of bodily pain, for the unheard of tortures they invent? It is probable that some of them, after the sight of a flagellation, compose their ruffled spirits and exercise their tender feelings by the perusal of the last imported novel. — How true these tears are to nature, I leave you to determine. But these ladies may have read your Enquiry concerning the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, and, convinced by your arguments, may have laboured to be pretty, by counterfeiting weakness. (p.45)

Here, Wollstonecraft overtly connects the brutalisation of the enslaved African body with white women. Physical fairness – specifically the 'fair' white femininity that Burke extols – belies the gross *un*fairness and unjust treatment Black African bodies suffer at the hands of such women. Interestingly enough, Wollstonecraft does not place the onus on male European planters, overseers, traders and masters; it is women, specifically Burke's female readership, that dictate where and on whom the whip falls. It is a portrait of aberration: white genteel femininity – typically associated with qualities of compassion, gentleness, softness, care, love and civility by the conduct books of the time – is now the inventor of 'unheard of tortures' and cruelly delights in the 'sight of a flagellation'. Again Wollstonecraft deflates Burkean sensibility and beauty by contrasting the human pain of the 'captive negro' with the inhumanity and inhumane action of a white woman; the agonised body of the enslaved individual therefore becomes, in its enforced abjection, a politicised site of affection next to the tyrannically affected body of a white woman. Using the enslaved brutalised Black body, Wollstonecraft creates a rhetorically charged comparison of true emotion (the cries and curses of the 'captive negroes') with an inhumane and corrupting form of sensibility that, to her mind, Burke espouses, and which is central to the wider republican master-slave paradigm. In the shadow of anonymity, Wollstonecraft is able to further deflate, debunk and effeminise Burke's authorial body; he is complicit in this monstrous femininity and egregious effeminacy, the callous softness of which 'blots' and corrodes Britain's 'immaculate' constitution (p.13). As Christina Sharpe remarks, when reflecting on the Atlantic Ocean, slavery and queerness, 'blackness throws into crisis, whether in these places one can ever really think together, Black and (hetero) normative'.[385] She continues, 'Black life, in and out of the "New World" is always queered and more…we might say that slavery trans all desire…'.[386] Brought into contact with Sharpe's argument, her consideration of the excess 'writ large on Black bodies,' Wollstonecraft's passage gains deeper significance.[387] Queering Burke, not just through his proximity to white femininity, women and their affected affectivity but in his (literary, political and legalistic) closeness to the suffering eroticised Black body, Wollstonecraft dwells in the excess of subjection and abjection that defined slavery. All who are delineated in this perverse gendered and racialized abject chain of subjection are queered – and not in a liberatory sense – but in a blurry vision of affectation brought about through the unfreedom of the enslaved and enslaving state. In an emotional and literal economy of slavery, the 'excess writ large' on the backs of Black bodies is here, once again, pronounced.

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[385] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), pp.30-32.
[386] Sharpe, p.32.
[387] Sharpe, p.32.

This excess through proximity to the enslaved Black body and the abusive white female form was not unique to Wollstonecraft. Prominent writers Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Hannah More, both of whom supported the abolition movement, described scenes in their work similar to that found in *Rights of Men*. In her 'Epistle to William Wilberforce' (1791), written after parliament rejected the first bill for abolishing the slave trade, Barbauld paints another scene where 'pale Beauty' reclines on a sofa with 'voluptuous ease' and where 'languid tones imperious mandates urge'.[388] Akin to Wollstonecraft's tyrannical figure of white femininity, Barbauld describes a woman 'contriving torture, and inflicting wounds'.[389] Barbauld goes further by associating corrupt and abusive femininity with eastern bodies: 'see her, in monstrous fellowship unite / At once the Scythian, and the Sybarite'.[390] Barbauld's feminist orientalism precedes and pre-empts Wollstonecraft's in *Rights of Woman*, and reiterates the "unBritish" excessiveness ('repugnant vices, misally'd') of this figure. Situating this scene in the hot and 'balmy air' of a Caribbean plantation, Barbauld's embodiment of vicious luxury eclipses the bodies the white woman is said to take pleasure in torturing.[391] 'Shrieks' and 'yells' are heard, but the enslaved brutalised body is not conveyed.[392] Barbauld's intention is to stress the unnatural transformation of femininity in the unnatural context and economy of slavery. Her use of orientalism, however, demonstrates that she is less concerned about accounting for the experiences of enslaved Black or brown individuals, and more about the corruption – corporeal, moral, social and political – that falls on British women, the nation's pride and honour. The geographical locale may displace Barbauld's emphasis, but her point is clear: Britain's involvement with slavery endangers white femininity at home, corrupts the soul and dirties the conscience. Political intervention in the form of abolition is essential if women are to be safe from the 'vices' slavery entails and inflicts.

That Barbauld and Wollstonecraft's portrayals of corrupted white femininity are found in addresses made to two prominent male political figures further elides and erases the enslaved Black subject's experience. If one aims to emasculate their addressee (Wollstonecraft to Burke) and expose a political system posited on a slave-despot paradigm, the other extols its abolitionist dedicatee (Barbauld to Wilberforce) while throwing contempt on the male compatriots and politicians who blocked the first bill of abolition in parliament. That such impassioned exchanges are held and brokered over Black and brown bodies demonstrates how enslaved and colonised individuals are both in the background and foreground of Wollstonecraft and Barbauld's work. To echo Brown's point, Black and brown bodies are visible in their rhetorical impact, yet invisible in the acknowledgement of their real experiences. They are central to the affective and moral economies, which in the name of patriotism and national identity Wollstonecraft and Barbauld want to restore, but are decentralised when it comes to the political aims and philosophical ambitions of white figures, orators, authors and readers.

Unlike Equiano's use of enslaved Black bodies to convey his own circumstances and psychological predicament, Barbauld and Wollstonecraft's white female figures obscure the autonomy and subjectivity of the Black subjects they ostensibly seek to liberate. Wollstonecraft's politicisation of Black bodily pain demonstrates how the didactic and rhetorical power of her polemic rests on such bodies – but only in how they relate to white subjects (Burke and white women). Barbauld's relegation of the enslaved form to the background of her text – bodily pain is implied throughout with sounds, chains, whips and blood – means that her rhetorical

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[388] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *The Poems of Anna Laetitia Barbauld*, (eds) William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (London: University of Georgia Press, 1994); see also, Hannah More, *Slavery, A Poem* (London: T. Cadell, 1788) and *The Sorrows of Yamba; or the Negro Woman's Lamentation* (Bath: S Hazard, 1795), (L57, 67).
[389] Barbauld, L70.
[390] Barbauld, L61-2.
[391] Barbauld, L63.
[392] Barbauld, L83.

emphasis falls on the indolent and narcissistic body of a white woman. She is most interested in what the institution of slavery has done to those at home. Neither writer seeks to deny the involvement of women in the trade and enslavement of Black African people. Their pointed inclusion of a satirised social type, however, does suggest a more parochial concern about national identity, morality, sympathy and, in the case of Wollstonecraft, spirituality.

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Stedman's *Narrative* ends in the same way it began: with the sexualised naked bodies of enslaved and colonised women. What fundamentally differentiates the close of his book from its opening is the inclusion of a white woman. The white woman in question is not his (second) Dutch wife, Adriana Wierts van Coehorn – though Stedman's inclusion of her has its own importance. The white woman cited and pictorially figured is Europe (see fig.13). Sketched by Stedman but engraved by William Blake, the image 'Europe Supported by Africa & America' is the final "word" on the issue of slavery in all editions of *Narrative*. Designed to be 'emblematical' of the 'friendly' relationship between the three continents, Stedman's sketch captured the established order in an asymmetrical structure not unlike that described in Barbauld and Wollstonecraft's aforementioned works: women created alike, but with a white European standing central and superior to them all.[393] Echoing Burke's comments in 'Sketch of a Negro Code' and his later 'Speech on the Abolition of the African Slave Trade' (1789), Stedman believed Africa and African individuals were in a 'state of savage barbarity' and in need of the civilizing force and presence of white Europeans.[394] He was pro-slavery, but supposedly against the extreme corporal and capital punishment that Surinamese plantocratic life was renowned for.

However, these ameliorist-sounding attitudes jar somewhat against the reality of Stedman's time in South America. As his log book and 1790 manuscript show, he frequently participated in the sexual economy of Surinam, relishing his "escapades" and encounters with enslaved African and Surinamese women. As a free white European man, access to enslaved Black and brown bodies was limitless, legally permissible and virtually a given from the moment he stepped foot on South American soil. Stedman himself confirms this brutal truth when 'stepping on land' and seeing 'a most miserable young woman in chains simply covered with a rag round her loins', who had been lashed in a 'most shocking manner' and was condemned to carry a weight around her ankle for not being able to 'fulfil her task'.[395] Though horrified by this treatment, Stedman stares 'riveted by fascination' at the 'beautiful negro maid'.[396] Horror turns to fascination turns to arousal, in a manner typical of the white male colonial gaze. Stedman's eyes linger on her bare breasts, the loose loin cloth, which was 'like her skin', the 'cut' and 'carved' body lashed by a whip, and the '3 score pounds' weight (reminiscent of a type of punishment given to those who resisted sexual violence in trading forts along the West coast of Africa) attached to her ankle but held aloft above her head.[397] If violence is not overtly eroticised here, it is in an engraving of the

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393 Price & Price, pp.316-317.
394 Edmund Burke, 'Speech on Abolition of the African Slave Trade 21 May 1789' in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* Vol. 3, (eds) John A. Woods and William B. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.278.
395 Price & Price, p.39.
396 (from the 1790 manuscript), Price & Price, p.39.
397 Price & Price, p.40; Stella Dadzie, *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery and Resistance* (London: Verso, 2020), p.16. Dadzie travels to Elmina fort, Ghana, and describes the conditions of the dungeons into which women awaiting the horrific middle passage were kept. Upon seeing the canon-ball-like weight in the courtyard, she is told it was used as a form of punishment to those who resisted their captors' advances. The fort was designed in such a way as to ensure early European traders from the African Trading Company could have direct access to the abducted African women, with a trapdoor leading from the women's dungeon, via a staircase, directly to the governor's bedroom. This is also explored in the BBC documentary, *Enslaved with Samuel L Jackson* (2020). See my bibliography for the full entry.

'draft' Stedman makes of her at the scene. That this initiatory description and image are followed a page later with a recount of a lavish feast involving bare breasted and decorated Surinamese and African women catering to the European planters' every whim emphasises the pervasiveness of seeing and treating enslaved Black and brown women in a sexualised, objectified and commodified manner. The 'excess writ large' on the bodies of Black and brown women here was very much Stedman's own.

This sexual economy was fused together with violence, coercion and greed. The erotically tinged violence runs throughout *Narrative*, and, although downplayed, is still perceivable in the final pictorial coda, 'Europe Supported by Africa and America'. Stedman's inclusion of the white woman (Europe) in the final image does not mitigate this violent sexual economy, but furthers it, complicating the 'friendly' triadic 'alliance' the illustration attempts to celebrate. His framing of Europe's relationship with Africa and America in the form of the three graces not only implicates Europe's neoclassical sense of its own civilised identity and enlightened modern selfhood, but also its women. White women, the image metaphorically implies, are central to this economical "partnership" and its success. They are key to its smooth exchange of products, accumulation of profit and subsequent production of luxurious commodities. In this, they are also implicated in the perpetuation of abuse which upheld the institution of slavery and the capital it produced.

Though used in texts by academics like Clare Midgley to illustrate women's involvement in the British abolitionist campaigns of the 1780s, Blake's engraving was not an attempt to equate the position of white women with those of enslaved Black and indigenous peoples, nor was it conceived to raise awareness of the white European woman's abolitionist convictions – he would save both for his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793).[398] Yet in true Blakean style the image does, nevertheless, implicitly critique European neo-classical conceptions of whiteness and ideals of classicism. Stedman's design implicates Europe's sense of civilised selfhood and enlightened modernity, and draws attention to white women's significance to this construction and economy. Blake's engraving problematizes this further, adding another layer of complexity to the interrelationships between the women (and continents). In the place of grace, beauty and mirth are Africa, Europe and America, and instead of a perfectly balanced partnership, these three figures are precariously interlinked and unequally supported. Standing in the central foreground, slightly ahead of the other continents, is Europe, and to her left and right are America and Africa, who lend Europe their strength, agility and support irrespective of their marginal position. Without their physical labour and supportive presence, Europe would not stand, like the economies of her actual nations. But this allegory goes further, beyond metaphors for the imperialistic and colonial endeavour of wider Europe to the enterprising spirit and consumer attitude of white European women specifically. As the work of Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers has demonstrated, white women were as much embroiled in the institution of slavery as white men.[399] Though her recent research focuses specifically on white European settlers in the American South, and demonstrates that white American women owned and sold enslaved Africans and African Americans in addition to investing in the trade and institution itself, what Jones-Rogers expounds is also true of white British women, who, albeit mostly from afar, invested in the slave trade, owned enslaved individuals and benefitted from their labour as

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[398] Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns* (London: Routledge, 1995). Linda Freedman also briefly uses the image as evidence of Blake's abolitionary sympathies and ideas on emancipation in her work *William Blake and the Myth of America: from the Abolitionists to the Counterculture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.4-6.
[399] Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). See Jones-Rogers' research in Anna North, 'How white women's "investment" in slavery has shaped America today' in *Vox* (19 August 2019). See my bibliography for the URL to this article and Jones-Rogers' podcast, 'White Women and Slavery' in Yale University Press Podcast.

consumers. In Blake's engraving, therefore, the white woman representative of the "superior", "civilising" and centralising European force would be nothing without the productive and enforcing "inferior" labouring bodies of Black (African) and brown (Indigenous American) individuals.

'Whiteness has more value and accords them more power, than their gender', Jones-Rogers has observed of white women.[400] This is certainly true of Stedman's design too. The myth of white femininity – faux vulnerability, weakness, modesty and innocence – which Wollstonecraft herself attempts at once to dismantle and re-enforce in *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, is inscribed in Blake's engraving. Europe casts her eyes down demurely, her cheeks slightly flushed, her long golden hair coiled around her body, fortuitously hiding her vulva. Like Botticelli's *Venus*, Europe just about masters the art of standing, coyly leaning into her attendant continental maids-in-waiting in an infantile fashion, her left arm draped around America, her right clasping the hand of Africa. Ironically, it is just the kind of show of 'feminine weakness,' espoused by Gregory and Rousseau, that Wollstonecraft so frequently despised in *Rights of Woman*. The other women, meanwhile, have no such veil or show of modesty, although the odd rope – perhaps intended to invoke slave-produced hemp? Synecdoche for a fraying social compact? – goes some way to obscuring the full frontal view. Africa and America are not only assisting Europe into wealth (as implied by her draped necklace), but into being, into her profitable sense of whiteness, into her racially differentiated sexual and gendered identity. Staring directly at the viewer, Africa and America smile suggestively, immodestly, with an awareness antithetical to that ascribed to the myth of white femininity. Courting the male gaze, these women are used to being looked at as much as they are to being used. They are there for your consumption, for your pleasure. Slave bands – not decorative golden bracelets, as some critics have claimed – are fastened around their upper arms, reminding them – and us – of the constrictions they are under, of who and what possesses them, and of their fundamental, though subtly engraved, differences to Europe. This is exactly the kind of sexualised imperial fantasy on which Stedman would like to end ('Asia' was supposed to be included in the final design, which reaffirms this even more). It is exactly the kind of myth and sexualisation white women, as well as men, associated with Black and brown bodies. Like Sharpe, bell hooks has discussed the different forms of sexualisation Black women, particularly enslaved Black women, endured from white women (whether pro-slavery or abolition advocates).[401] Not only did white women consider Black women to be inherently sexual in nature but, suggests hooks, they also punished Black women for the sexual violence of white men or looked the other way so as to avert it from their own person.[402]

Encoded with the racial biases and racialized ideals of its time, Blake's engraving successfully demonstrates how ideas around white femininity are intrinsic to those around enslaved Black and brown bodies. Stedman's design visualises how discussions around white femininity – how to protect, preserve or reform it – inevitably pull on sexualised versions and devalued examples of Black and brown women as a means of distinction, subsequently othering, fetishizing and exoticising these bodies again. This image, like Wollstonecraft and Barbauld's descriptions above, processes and reformulates slavery and enslaved bodies through the privileged figure of white femininity and womanhood, through the enslaver rather than the enslaved, and subsequently provides a visual cue to the occasions where Wollstonecraft privileges and centralises white femininity in *Rights of Woman* and *Rights of Men*. As we have discussed in Chapter 3, in her main polemic the sexualised figure of the enslaved individual – whether Black or brown, on a plantation field or in a 'seraglio' – is invoked repeatedly to draw out the emotionally stultified,

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[400] Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers and Michael Hoak, 'White Women and Slavery', Yale University Press podcast, episode 70.
[401] bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp.36-39, 52-53.
[402] hooks, pp.52-54.

intellectually regressive, morally corrupt and physically diminished predicament that middle class European women endure. From the side-lines and margins of her theoretical framework, the enslaved Black and brown body is called on and brought into focus, not to consider it in and of itself, but as an indication of the poor state and social status of British white women. The rhetorical emphasis is, as Brown states above, located in the bodies of Black and brown women. The reality and subjectivity of these enslaved bodies are rarely thought of or fully considered unless in conjunction with the bodily and spiritual futurity of white women. The rhetoric of slavery does, as Howard notes, connect to protestant republicanism; nevertheless, Wollstonecraft reapplies it to bodily excesses that connote, overlap with and are approximate to racialized ideas about Black and brown bodies, enslaved or otherwise. Brace underscores this by arguing that Wollstonecraft's descriptions of white women show evidence that she was influenced by pro-slavery and anti-slavery pamphlets which described the behaviour and "nature" of enslaved African peoples.[403] Indirectly and directly, Wollstonecraft's rhetoric of slavery decentres the bodily realities of Black and brown women, in favour of prejudiced, exoticised and, at times, eroticised approximations that serve to bring the condition of white women only to attention and effect their reform.

Howard argues that Wollstonecraft's language of slavery 'derives from…Protestant political discourse' and that the slave in question throughout *Rights of Woman* is 'an individual who is morally corrupt…and complicit in his or her ongoing corruption'.[404] 'Wollstonecraft sees moral corruption – 'slavery' – at work everywhere she turns,' Howard continues, 'among British women, men of wealth, soldiers, servants, and the inhabitants and rulers of empire.' Her argument is persuasive, valid and appreciative of a centuries old trope used by political women writers – but it is not the complete and final word on the matter, and it does not consider the true nature, dynamics and effects of relationships between 'inhabitants and rulers of empire'. Wollstonecraft does conceive slavery and despotism to be mutually inclusive, the one constantly inferring and corrupting the other, as touched on above in her analysis of neglected groups and their position in the slave-despot dialectic. But the Caribbean, like France, America and the Middle East, is not so remote from her thinking or separate from her concerns about republicanism. Hunt Botting has noted that *Rights of Woman* was written against the backdrop of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and shown that its references to slavery and resistance were written in the infancy of this political event.[405] During her time spent composing *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft would have been aware of the agitation from abolitionists that culminated in the House of Commons voting in favour of the abolition of slavery in 1792, only for the House of Lords to overturn this rule. Republicans in France had campaigned for an end to slavery since the beginning of the revolution and eventually succeeded in realising its abolition across its territories in 1794; the beginning of this campaign and its leadership by Brissot would not have been lost on Wollstonecraft during her writing of the *Rights of Woman*. Despite the geographical distance then, the cause of enslaved African peoples was before Wollstonecraft through both of these political setbacks and developments, as well as the visual, material and media culture of the time. Even so, Howard fails to connect Wollstonecraft's general republicanism to the slave-despot dialectic being brutally realised in the British and French colonies. She fails to take into account how both convictions and rhetorical strategies can work in tandem in the prose of an author prone to literary polysemy and cross referencing of a socio-political nature.

Of course, direct references to slavery blur the line between republican tropes and those involving enslaved African individuals. That is, references to slavery in Wollstonecraft's writing can function simultaneously as both incisive commentary on an existing racist political reality

[403] Brace, pp.120-122.
[404] Howard, p.1.
[405] Hunt Botting, p.1304.

and as rhetorical tropes indicative of a universal project of emancipation. What is interesting is that citations of 'slaves' and 'slavery' appear in passages decrying the 'excess' Sharpe outlines in her work on Black embodiment and ontology.[406] Denouncing the 'trifling' employments, 'indolence' and over-attention to dress of the middle-class white woman (p.148), markers that successive chapters have shown to be significant of excess and emptiness, Wollstonecraft rounds off the paragraph by arguing that men will endeavour to 'enslave such a woman'. '[W]ho can tell', she rhetorically asks, how many 'generations' it will take 'to give vigour to the virtue and talents of the freed posterity of the abject slave' (p.148). Wollstonecraft may be working within the bounds of a republican slave-master dialectic here, but the conclusive remark about freedom, posterity and a kind of evolution of virtue reminds the reader of ameliorist debates about gradualist approaches to freeing the enslaved (educational "programmes" and "apprenticeships" to further "civilize" them). That the footnote to this exclamation is a quotation from Knox about voluntary slavery and women only serves to complicate the matter, not clarify it, showing that what was also in Wollstonecraft's mind when penning this remark was the involuntary slavery of African individuals. In the fine print of her outwardly republicanised philosophical figuration, enslaved Black bodies are surreptitiously folded into the predicament and reform of white ones.

When critically dissecting Rousseau's words on women in Chapter five, the same parallel between excess, Black bodies and white femininity is made. Rousseau's claim that women should have 'little liberty' lest they 'indulge themselves excessively in what is allowed to them' smacks of sexual suggestiveness, anxiety around unrestrained femininity and social transgression. Yet Wollstonecraft's immediate response is not to caution this misogyny – though she does obviously disagree with the model of 'obedience' Rousseau proposes – but to agree that 'slaves and mobs have always indulged themselves in the same excesses, when once they broke loose from authority' (p.155). Like the previous quotation, this undeniably strays from a republican figurative lexis to employ a racist trope about enslaved individuals breaking bounds. Triggered no doubt by the excess and indulgence described by Rousseau, the Black subjugated form is revived as an unruly figure that immodestly over-satiates itself. Brace's research about Wollstonecraft's exposure to pro- and anti-slavery pamphlets comes into the fore here, since pro-slavery advocates sought to dehumanise enslaved individuals by describing behaviour they deemed to be excessive, indecent and immodest. According to Brace, these pro-slavery advocates framed enslaved individuals as being 'listless', 'incapable of supporting themselves' and 'unable to see beyond their immediate wants', much like the white women in *Rights of Woman*.[407] In Wollstonecraft's prose, therefore, stereotypes and tropes concerning enslavement are employed to castigate white male theories of femininity and feminine conduct, as well as to reform white female bodies at risk of descending into such 'extremes', all the while eliding the actual subjectivities and bodily realities of Black individuals.

Ostensibly Wollstonecraft's observations attempt to dismantle a system that white European bodies benefit from and preside over. Her referential compounding of Caribbean and republican slavery seeks to interrogate the systems of oppression to which both belong. But rhetorical instances that bring slavery of the Caribbean to the attention of her readers often either preclude or misconstrue the bodily reality of the enslaved. A tired overreliance on material and bodily luxury associated with Black and brown bodies is repeatedly employed to reiterate the socio-political positionality and improper education of white women. In her final chapter this is relayed again where ignorance concerning one's body, a predilection for passing trends such as astrology and psychics (rather than physic), the reading of sentimental novels, and a fondness for 'dress'

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[406] Sharpe, p.32.
[407] Brace, p.120.

and the art of 'pleasing' through appearance (pp.274-275) are all denounced. Wollstonecraft develops such thought further:

> 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 tattooing or painting. 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 commonly expended in a little tawdry finery. (p.275)

What jolts the reader in this passage is Wollstonecraft's latent belief that slavery may have some kind of civilising effect. Yes, it is depicted as a 'hellish yoke', but it is one that has failed to 'stifle' and restrain the 'savage' desire to care about clothes and appearance. That enslaved Black people may 'inherit' a desire to care for dress is also a questionable assumption on the part of a philosopher who sympathised with abolitionists (though here borrows from pro-slavery narratives). The awkward ambiguity of this passage and rolling syntax of the second sentence are such that it is hard to believe Wollstonecraft's argument remains one of how uneducated mankind returns to "baser" instincts and 'inclinations' alone. Still, even this is problematic, harkening back to her awkward conception of Blackness and modern selfhood found in her review of Equiano's *Narrative*. Instead of only paralleling the position of free white women with unfree Black 'heroes', Wollstonecraft ends up highlighting the latter's bodily and mental difference, aligning Blackness with savagery, primitivism, vanity (that imprint of excess Sharpe highlights) and an inherited, barbarously uncivilised identity that even the institution of slavery fails to curtail. To further exemplify that Blackness and African bodies were, unfortunately, deemed uncivilised and regressively different, and dwelled in the 'extreme', these ideas are present, albeit fleetingly, in her early didactic work, *Thoughts*, where she uses the idea of a 'Hottentot' (an Europeanised, hence erroneous and problematic title in and of itself) and their cultural customs as a reminder of how white European women turn to excess, vanity and over-attention to their physical appearances (p.17) without proper education.[408] It is shocking that Wollstonecraft cannot conceive of how clothing to an enslaved individual, far from being about vanity, status and a degenerate mentality, might actually be about dignity and survival.

Brace's argument that *Rights of Woman* shows evidence of Wollstonecraft having read both pro-slavery pamphlets and abolitionist literature may shed some light on the inclusion of such passages. Brace observes that 'slaves on the West Indian plantations were characterized by the pro-slavery lobby as obsessed by gaudy trappings…'. She supports this by turning to Moira Ferguson's work on Wollstonecraft and slavery, and her confirmation that 'their clothes were their riches'.[409] Aside from Ferguson's slightly perplexing confirmation – it is commonly known that any money enslaved peoples earned was often put toward manumission or the subsistence of their family – Brace's assertion that Wollstonecraft's ideas on enslavement, dress and this corporeal preoccupation derive from pro-slavery arguments stands considering the language Wollstonecraft employs. When even anti-slavery advocates like Clarkson saw enslaved Africans as 'reduced men, who had once the power of reason, to an equality with the brute creation', it is highly likely Wollstonecraft was unable to conceive of African individuals, under the institution of slavery, in any other way.[410] For Brace, Wollstonecraft's continual equation of white women with 'barbarism' and a form of slavery that reduces them to 'brutes' again confirms the influence of pro-slavery propaganda.[411] If Wollstonecraft did lift her lexis of slavery and descriptions of

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[408] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, (eds) Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: William Pickering, 1989).
[409] Brace, p.124.
[410] Brace, p.122.
[411] Brace, p.122.

enslavement from the writings of pro-slavery advocates, not only does this somewhat compromise her ideas on freedom and reform, but it again overlays the Black body, albeit a racist construction of one, with a white form. This is done, again, at the expense of the Black corporeal and psychological experience during this time.

When Wollstonecraft does take into account the bodily reality of Black bodies, it is still to expound the oppression suffered by white women. In response to male writers like Rousseau, who see women as subordinate to men and who argue that they should be subject to 'severe restraint', she asks why this should be so when woman has reason – a 'nobler spring' – and is an 'heir of immortality' (p.225). This retort swells into a passing reflection on different forms of enforced subordination, abjection and subjection, and the oppression, exploitation and suffering that women and enslaved Africans experience:

> Is sugar always 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 woman reason? For a gift is a mockery, if it be unfit for use. (pp.225-6)

To flit between the oppression of European women and that of African slaves seems grossly inappropriate, but what Wollstonecraft indirectly does is bring to bear the contemporary associations of sugar production, consumption and slavery on the bodies of European women themselves. Sugar cane was one of the main productions on Caribbean plantations. Much of the arduous, not to mention dangerous, work around the cane distilleries was conducted by Black women. Dadzie relates how women could work twelve to eighteen hour shifts, 'risking life and limb as they fed the huge rollers with cane or tended the boiling vats of cane juice'.[412] Exhaustion from overwork often resulted in injuries and even death, when overtired women fed the cane into the three-roller mills. Horrific tales of severed limbs, bodies being mangled and heads being decapitated were written at the time by visitors to the colonies.[413] Far worse were the illnesses and diseases – known to Parliament at the time through abolition campaigns – that plagued women through such hazardous work; debilitating diseases, gynaecological disorders, miscarriages, sterility and pelvic dislocation were frequently endured by Black women during cane-holing.[414] 'Vital blood' was indeed expended during the production of sugar, and Wollstonecraft would have known something of the taxing regime Black women were under through the rise in abolition-inspired sugar boycotts taken up by middle-class white women and the literature surrounding this movement.[415] Nonetheless, sugar is not only figured literally in this paragraph, but metaphorically and allusively. Critics Ferguson and Jeanette Ehrmann have seen a latent reference to sexual exploitation and violence, with Ferguson arguing that this passage in particular is Wollstonecraft's way of speaking against the sexual abuse endured by enslaved Black and brown women.[416] Seen in this light, sugar unites the bodies of Black, brown and white women once again, but, as Ehrmann has also stated, this feels deeply problematic considering the conditions in which Black and brown women endured physical and sexual violence from white European men *and* women – and the ends for which this violence occurred (not just for

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412 Dadzie, p.79.
413 Dadzie, pp.79-81.
414 Dadzie, p.81.
415 For more on the sugar boycotts of the long eighteenth-century see Charlotte S. Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792' in *Representations* (Autumn 1994), pp.48-69.
416 Moira Ferguson, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Problematic of Slavery' in *Feminist Review*, 42 (Autumn 1992), pp.82-102; see also her extended study, *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Jeanette Ehrmann's 'Between Enlightenment, Feminism, and Abolitionism: Mary Wollstonecraft's Thoughts on Women and Slavery' in *Political Ideas of Enlightenment Women, Virtue and Citizenship,* (eds) Lisa Curtis Wendtlandt, Karen Green et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp.189-202.

the pleasure and control it gave men, but in order to increase enslaved reproductive labour, which in turn led to infant fatalities, divided families and continued enslavement of children for unpaid labour, children that Black women could not legally call their own). Thus, no sooner does Wollstonecraft show solidarity and awareness of what Black women endure than it becomes obscured or displaced by the more present predicament and experiences of the white female body.

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Excess and scarcity, proximity and distance become the axes upon which the bodies of Black and white intersect in Wollstonecraft's writing. In noting the excess of one, the simultaneous inference and diminishment of the "other" is found. Does understanding the proximity of whiteness to Blackness inevitably result in diminishing the bodily realities and histories of resistance that are still being discovered? In writing this chapter, I have not set out to dismiss Wollstonecraft's abolitionist sympathies or the impact her work may have had on actual events of revolution or successive campaigns for women's rights and abolition in the nineteenth century.[417] Rather, in order to fully appreciate her work, especially that concerning the unfree human body and its potential for liberation, it is important to acknowledge her problematic attitude to other "corporealities"; to those bodies more racialized, gendered and queered than the white female-inscribed European form. This chapter has endeavoured to briefly examine the cultural traces and residues – from abolitionist iconography through to racist satire, narratives and tracts – that helped to form her ideas of enslaved Black corporeality and ontology. It has attempted to highlight the issues inherent to her employment of the rhetoric of slavery, and its decentring of enslaved Black bodies and their liberation – a decentring that then questions her larger philosophy of universal rights and its place in today's discussions over bodies, agency and law. These philosophical and ethical strands cannot be ignored, however sparse they may be and however uncomfortable they may leave the twenty-first century reader, when critically considering and appraising her work.

[417] Hunt Botting, pp.1301, 1314; see also Hunt Botting and Christine Carey's 'Wollstonecraft's Philosophical Impact on Nineteenth-Century American Women's Rights Advocates' in *American Journal of Political Science*, 48 (October 2004), pp.707-722.

Section 3: Corporeal Legacies

Hidden Figures, Painted Bodies: Portraying Wollstonecraft, from Opie to Hambling

Fig.1, Stewy, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, stencil graffiti on the New Unity Church, Newington Green, London, c.2013.

Nestled in the leafy area of Newington Green, on the border of Hackney and Islington, is the old Unitarian Chapel. Now named the New Unity Church, the chapel still lays claim to its eighteenth-century dissenting origins. There is the capitalised lettering above the small red door, 'ERECTED A. D. 1708 / ENLARGED A. D. 1860', the large arched windows either side of the entrance, the subtle relief of acanthus leaves – a hint of what lightly decorates its modest interior – and the proud, hand-painted words across the door frame: 'UNITARIAN'. If the architecture alone does not speak of a time a world apart from our own, modern details manifested on its façade put this to rights. Initially a brown plaque, small and negligible, appeared, citing Mary Wollstonecraft as an attendee of the church in the late 1700s. In 2011, a plastic banner trailed along the railings at the front of the chapel, proclaiming it as 'the birthplace of feminism' and attributing this to 'Wollstonecraft'. Something was afoot behind the closed doors of the church and it was eager to make itself heard. The past was certainly catching up with the present – or perhaps the reverse. This convergence of two realities came to a head one morning in 2013, when an apparition appeared on the outer wall of the church. Timed perfectly to mark International Women's Day, a more prominent commemoration of Wollstonecraft was seen, albeit in an altogether contemporary style (fig.1). Floating serenely above the pavement, observing passers-by and meeting the stares of locals, was a graffitied version of Wollstonecraft, complete with cap and floor-length dress. Hands neatly held behind her back, feet noticeable beneath the hem of her dress, she looked prepossessed, poised even, despite hovering precariously on the side of an old building. To those unaware of who she was, she seemed familiar: there was something about her indirect gaze, her calm yet upright demeanour, her assertive side-facing posture that they had seen before. To the few who recognised her, she was a most welcome sign of the chapel's once radical past, a striking reminder of ideological battles fought and won and still worth fighting for. This fittingly anarchic portrait of Wollstonecraft, one readily available for our selfie age, caught the public's imagination in ways that a plaque or name plate could never have done. It became a prompt to forgotten histories long-ingrained and

buried in the material and socio-political structures of our times and a symbol of what lies behind the surface of our public spaces.

But who chose Wollstonecraft? Why did she reappear hauntingly and subversively on the side of the New Unity Church? Why did the artist not choose the poet and educator Anna Laetitia Barbauld or her minister husband Rochemont Barbauld, both of whom had considerable standing amongst the Newington Green dissenter community in the early 1800s, stronger ties to the chapel itself, and therefore more pressing claims to commemoration?[418] And why choose a visual depiction of Wollstonecraft rather than display her name or a placard explaining her connection to the site? Although in simple 1790s garb, Stewy's stencil design of Wollstonecraft emphasises her contemporaneity, her relevance, her enduring power in that place. His reimagining is more than an echo of the political ideals and achievements of Wollstonecraft and her milieu; it is more than a condensation of social historical details and manners, a psycho-geographical focal point of all she stood for and represented then: it is a statement of intent, a confrontation of what she *has* stood for – educational and socio-political emancipation for all genders – and what she *still* stands for, at least according to the Mary on the Green campaign, the grassroots organisation who commissioned Stewy's design.

Wollstonecraft is presumed to have attended the Unitarian chapel in the mid-to-late 1780s, when she lived and ran a school for girls on the Green (from 1784-86). Whilst neither formally committed to rational dissent nor calling herself a Unitarian, it is evident from her writing that she was influenced by Unitarian beliefs and teachings; her work, particularly *Rights of Men* and *Rights of Woman*, explores aspects of millenarianism, advocates strongly for universal rationalism and the perfection of the human mind, and evinces a deep determination to see this brought about through educational reform and advancement. She was also immersed in the burgeoning community of rational dissenters through acquaintances such as Sarah Burgh, a local woman married to the writer James Burgh (author of *Political Disquisitions*, a treatise read by Wollstonecraft and which was influential for her work), Price, the chapel's minister, and Johnson, her publisher (eventually she would go on to marry a lapsed Unitarian minister, William Godwin). Despite settling in the more central areas of London (Store Street and the Polygon) in the 1790s, Wollstonecraft's stay in Newington Green was formative, both intellectually and socially, and it provided a supportive network within which she could determine upon her chosen vocation: writing. Stewy's commemorative graffiti design of her must, therefore, be seen not only in light of what she meant to the chapel, but what *it* and the locale meant to *her*, and what both could mean to *us* now. Anchored in the past of her experiences, yet pulled into the present by its medium, Stewy's design invites the viewer to step back into the late eighteenth-century in order to fully fathom the current world they live in.

This is definitely what Mary on the Green set out to achieve. By inviting Stewy to stencil his design onto the side of the chapel, the committee were also signposting both the cause and what they hoped to accomplish through it: a sculpture of Wollstonecraft herself. Since establishing the campaign in 2010 and the appearance (then disappearance in 2018 and reappearance in 2022) of Stewy's spectral street art, Mary on the Green has refined the specifics of this goal, aiming to create a 'public statue / work of art' which is '*symbolic* of her legacy'; a memorial that will be 'a *tangible* way to share Wollstonecraft's vision and ideas' (my italics). Moving away from Stewy's

[418] Insofar as the Barbaulds are concerned, both have local estates and nearby roads named in their honour, and are already commemorated inside the chapel with a marble monument and pew. Even with their radical and reformist leanings, it is not the Barbaulds or this aspect of the past the New Unity Church and local residents want to resurrect; it is not their lives that resonate with contemporary Londoners. For more on Anna Laetitia Barbauld's life see William McCarthy, 'Barbauld [née Aikin], Anna Letitia [Anna Laetitia] Barbauld (1743-1825)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

life-size and life-like representation of Wollstonecraft, the Mary on the Green campaigners chose a decidedly abstract design for the sculpture, proposed by renowned British artist Maggi Hambling, over sculptor Martin Jennings' realist submission. Though the campaigners still desire to have 'her presence in a physical form', they have done away with a literal and realistic depiction of Wollstonecraft. This is curious considering the prevalence of her image throughout the ten years of their campaign trail and the near-ubiquity of Stewy's design around the UK (he has made greeting cards and screen prints which were sold in auctions to raise funds for the campaign and similar charities and feminist events around Yorkshire and Manchester). In 2012, an image of Wollstonecraft was projected onto the Houses of Parliament and in virtually every newspaper and magazine article written about the campaign the same portrait – or rather engraved derivatives of it – was included. The portrait in question, which clearly inspired Stewy's own design despite his inability to acknowledge it, is by the late eighteenth-century British artist John Opie.[419] Opie painted at least two attributable portraits of Wollstonecraft during the 1790s, the last of which was completed in 1797 before her death, when she was pregnant with her second child (see fig.20). It is this painting (one of four housed in different public galleries around the UK) that remains the most well-known, frequently used and influential image of Wollstonecraft to date. That Mary on the Green should depend on the portrait and invest and associate it – and Stewy's derivative – with Wollstonecraft's 'vision and ideas', only to turn away from this with Hambling's abstract, though amorphously bodily, model, is interesting. It also begs the question why Opie's image has endured and still endures today. What is it about this particular portrait that makes it the go-to image of Wollstonecraft? Does it symbolise 'her legacy'? Does Opie's portrait succeed in making tangible 'Wollstonecraft's vision and ideas' where older paintings he made of her, and indeed those slightly more neglected portrayals by John Keenan and John Williamson, do not? Why have artists – the eighteenth-century engraver James Heath, twentieth-century feminist artist Judy Chicago, illustrator Louisa Albani and street artist Stewy amongst others – turned to this portrait over others to capture Wollstonecraft's person and the spirit of her work? More importantly, what does Opie's 1797 portrait elide and highlight about Wollstonecraft's personal and intellectual history, and how have these "elisions", outright omissions and exposures impacted on her legacy as evinced in campaigns by collectives and organisations like Mary on the Green?

By looking further into the embedded and accumulated histories of Opie's 1797 portrait, such questions will be answered. An examination into the history and historiography of the work will also demonstrate that it is not the sitter, nor to some extent even the artist, that will be revealed, but the viewer. Our repetitive reframing of Opie's painting reveals our own history, our own preoccupation with certain aspects of Wollstonecraft's story and ideas. Much like Opie's portrait, the viewer – and I include the multiple artists and organisations who have adapted and re-appropriated the work in this term – picks and chooses how the work is read, where the work belongs – both institutionally and conceptually – and which audience it speaks for. That this painting has had and continues to have multiple afterlives is testimony not so much to its aesthetic power, but to our desire to see, frame and effectively hold Wollstonecraft in a particular light. My interest in this chapter lies in highlighting those aspects of Wollstonecraft, some of which are forcefully bodily, that generations of viewers have wished to overlook, suppress or omit. What happens to Wollstonecraft's legacy when a particular representation of her is held up by a certain group and used to express their concerns? What happens to the interpretation, expression, reception and accessibility of her ideas when a curator uses one portrait over another and ties one portrayal to other figures and themes of the past and present, particularly in an

[419] In Dominic Wade's short documentary, *Stewy, Wollstonecraft and Graffiti* (2015), Stewy's discussion of the design is interspersed with footage of his process. On his computer is a file of John Opie's 1797 portrait of Wollstonecraft and yet not once does Stewy acknowledge or cite the painting as inspiration for his design. See my bibliography for further details and a link to the film.

exhibition-context? Gesturing towards art historian Marcia Pointon's argument that portraits are 'imaginative documents' and 'stability, reassurance and predictability are part of portrayal's betrayal', I will draw attention to the practitioners (artists, patrons, commissioners, curators, academics), structures (chapels, museums and exhibition spaces) and collective viewers (organisations, the public) who reimagine Wollstonecraft, her life and work, again and again through the 'slipperiness' of visual portrayal and the elisions such replication endorses.[420] Many of these elisions and erasures concern gendered identity and "messy" bodily issues – Wollstonecraft's views on or experience of sexuality, motherhood, pregnancy, dress and consumption. In suppressing these facets through painterly and sculptural commemoration what is lost and found? Who is denied or gains access to Wollstonecraft's work, and who does portrayal betray?

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It has taken almost two hundred years for a woman artist to depict Wollstonecraft. Mary on the Green's selection of Hambling's abstract design is a significant move away from the problem that most portrayals of Wollstonecraft were painted by men. With the exception of Judy Chicago's inclusion of Wollstonecraft in *The Dinner Party* (1979) and Louisa Albani's recently self-published illustrations, all representations that are widely circulated, published and included in exhibitions around the world, were commissioned, owned and painted by men. What is more, all the dominant images of Wollstonecraft, such as those by Opie, date back to the late eighteenth century, aside from Stewy's version. Portrayal's first betrayal of Wollstonecraft is, therefore, that men have controlled her pictorial construction, which may have inhibited any self-direction, expression and ideological embodiment she may have wished to convey. This is not to say that pictorial representations of her are subsequently invalid – most were, after all, made with her consent. But that, adding to Pointon's argument that portraits are not faithful socio-historical and biographical maps of their sitters, paintings of Wollstonecraft have the additional problematic layer of being indexes to the men in her life. This is certainly true of two earlier paintings of her, both made around 1790-91, after the publication of *Rights of Men* and just before that of *Rights of Woman*. One is by Opie and has created its own mythos of Wollstonecraft amongst nineteenth-century women's rights activists and twentieth-century writers, Emma Goldman and Virginia Woolf. Outside of Wollstonecraft scholarship, this image is used more now to illustrate Opie's own life and social circle. The second painting is attributed to the painter John Williamson, who was less known and less commercially successful than his contemporary, but who was based in Liverpool and had links to the banker and cultural innovator, William Roscoe. Williamson's portrait has been used in a recent project, Pride and Prejudice, which celebrated LGBTQ+ lives and icons, and was held in collaboration with the Walker Art Gallery (where most of Roscoe's art collection is stored and exhibited). Roscoe, Wollstonecraft's friend and admirer, was the original commissioner and owner of the work. Both paintings capture a pivotal, 'revolutionary' moment in Wollstonecraft's life and ideas, but both paintings are embedded with histories not entirely belonging to their sitter. These paintings are encoded, not so much with the male gaze, but with the male prerogative; they accrete significance by association, and cultural capital from the (male) personae they reference.

Wollstonecraft was of course coming into her own when both paintings were created. She was between two polemics, the first of which had been received well by critics, while the second was to be translated and read widely around Europe and America in her own lifetime and after it. She had prospective projects in mind, was teaching herself French and German in order to complete commissioned translations of Necker, Salzmann and Lavater, and was busy reviewing and editing

[420] Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), pp.21-22, 9.

for Johnson and Thomas Christie's *Analytical Review*. She had a community who, to an extent, understood and recognised her needs and abilities. She was heard and seen, as much as a woman in the early 1790s could be. Yet she was not as well remunerated and established by such literary ventures as the men who commissioned and painted her portrait. Portraiture signifies power; it signifies significance. That she was considered a worthy subject to be painted in the first place speaks volumes about her standing amongst friends and acquaintances, among whom Opie and Roscoe were to be counted. Still, her rising status was, at that time, secondary to the political sway, financial security, institutional inclusion and social clout enjoyed by men like Opie and Roscoe.

Both men, however, enjoyed something of an affinity with Wollstonecraft. Opie had come from a humble background of mine carpenters in St Agnes, Cornwall, and had gone against his father's wishes in pursuing drawing.[421] Despite proving to be a talented pupil at his local village school, Opie was apprenticed by his father. He nonetheless persisted in drawing whenever the opportunity afforded him, copying prints and using scrap wood and other materials as paper and charcoal as a stylus, unbeknown to his father. At the age of fourteen he caught the eye of Dr John Wolcot, an amateur artist and critic (known today mostly by his poetic moniker Peter Pindar), who, upon seeing one of Opie's artistic attempts spotted an opportunity and decided to assist in the advancement of the young boy's career by becoming his mentor and patron.[422] After years as an itinerant portrait artist, Opie secured (via Wolcot) an interview with George III and a commission to paint Mary Delany, one of the king's favourite Bluestockings and a talented botanical artist and collagist. Opie's entry into London's fashionable elite was secured thanks to this commission and in part to Wolcot's plan to promote him to the curious and novelty-hungry cosmopolitan eye as a rough-mannered, rustic prodigy. Despite anecdotes of his rough manners, Opie entered into a programme of self-improvement, reading Shakespeare, Milton and contemporary poets in order to refine his ideas and be on an intellectual par with his acquaintances. Wollstonecraft may not have been the talk of the town in the way Opie was as a young artist; and she certainly did not receive support and recognition from the king, but she shares Opie's self-fashioning as an autodidact, and his status as one who had the impetus to raise himself up from poverty, ignominy, overbearing paternalism and social expectation.

Another shared passion was for nature, both in terms of rural spaces and the true essence of a person. Mary Peters has argued that Opie's use of colour – 'the rich earthy reds and velvety dark tones, the sharp malachite greens…and blacks relieved by a flicker of white' – was influenced by the Cornish 'landscapes of the mines' and the 'colours of the mineral'.[423] This is evident in both his portraits of Wollstonecraft, where the glooming background envelopes her only for the luminosity of dress or complexion to shine through (see figs.17 & 20). Opie's sense of colour and naturalistic application of it; his sensitivity to light and handling of chiaroscuro, has the effect of intimacy, of drawing the viewer into the warm atmosphere. In his 1790-1 portrait of Wollstonecraft, the viewer is not so much drawn in, as directly positioned in the room facing opposite her. They have disturbed her work; perhaps the viewer has called out to her, so she turns from all the possibilities a gleaming white page might hold to look at them, forcefully, intensely, a flash of inspiration still visible in her dark eyes, the inkwell and quill at the ready to the right-hand side of her desk. That Opie's 'mineral' inspired palette has caught this contemplative, visionary version of her is no coincidence. Not only did Opie share in a love for the influence of natural surroundings on the senses, he also shared an interest in seeing individuals free from the frippery and trappings that often cloaked a subject's true face. As an

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421 Robin Simon, 'Opie, John, (1761-1807)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
422 Simon, 2004.
423 Mary Peters, *John Opie 1761-1807* (Plaistow: The Cerwen Press, 1962-3), p.7.

itinerant painter around Cornwall he remained faithful to Wolcot's instructions: 'look to originals, stare folks in the face, canvas 'em from top to toe…mark their features, air, manner, gesture, attitude…'.[424] This advice proved a double-edge sword for Opie's career, with Joshua Reynolds likening him to 'Caravaggio, but finer' while his one-time mentor, Wolcot, observed that 'to him at present elegance appears affectation, and the forms of Raphael unnatural'.[425] Unlike the established portrait painters known to high society – Gainsborough, Romney, Reynolds and the ever-ascending Lawrence – Opie would not flatter his sitters with smoothed over portrayals. As his later biographer, Ada Earland, put it, 'he was unable to sympathise with the whims of fashionable ladies'; on this, Opie and Wollstonecraft would most definitely agree.[426]

Fig 17. John Opie, *Mary Wollstonecraft (Mrs William Godwin)*, c.1790-1791, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Tate Collection, London.

What is unusual in Opie's early painting is the up close and active position Wollstonecraft occupies. Paintings of women at work, seated at a desk, in the middle of 'manly' activities of reading, writing and contemplation, were uncommon. In British and French portraiture, when women were shown with a book they were often placed in a domestic or romantic setting – in a window seat, indoor niche, pleasure garden, bower or seated in situ with other family members. Their position as thinkers, doers, contemplators of complex and abstract thoughts was denied in the framing of their subjectivity: they were objects beholding and absorbed in objects, their consumption of texts replicated by the viewer consuming and gazing at them. Book in hand, passively looking down, denying the gaze of the artist, viewer or intruder, yet all the while being available to them in their pose. Portrait artists that did represent and honour the intellectual achievements and activities of women often portrayed them in a classical fashion, as if to distance viewers and the subject from the works of their mind and to render such activities palatable, all the while restoring modesty to the working middle class woman.

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[424] Peters, p.5.
[425] John Jope Rogers, *Opie and His Works* (London: Paul & Dominic Colnaghi and Co., 1878), pp.18-20.
[426] Ada Earland, *John Opie and His Circle* (London: Hutchison, 1911), p.19.

This is particularly true of paintings which depict the Blue Stockings, as typified by the famous group portrait (1778) by Robert Samuel. Robert Edge Pine's 1775 portrait of the historian Catherine Macaulay is no exception (fig.18). Leaning on a pile of books atop a pillar with the inscription 'Government / A/ Power Delegated/ For/ The/ Happiness / Of/ Mankind', which are words taken from her own work, Macaulay holds a quill and averts her gaze from the viewer by looking to the left of the composition. Holding a quill in one hand and a slip of paper (dedicated to the portrait's commissioner, Revd Dr Thomas Wilson, whose connection to Macaulay brought great humiliation to them both) in the other, the viewer is further reminded of the work she has been busy doing in the name of republicanism. This is a non-threatening fashioning of republicanism, however, devoid of direct allusions to the Whiggish Republican politics she espoused, yet encoded with Roman republican signs and symbols (the purple sash worn by Roman senators; the toga-like blue dress and tunic reminiscent of a Roman matron) for the knowing viewer. Such material accoutrements problematize the expression of Macaulay's power, authority and femininity: she is at once statesman, senator and matron; woman and man. She is modest in her classical garb, dressed hair and averted gaze, but stridently proud in a senatorial sash, nonchalantly resting on large volumes of work she has authored for the 'happiness of mankind' and the betterment of government. To the eye, such contradictory codifications do not clash; rather they merge together on the surface of the work to create an upright, dignified and femininely modest version of Macaulay, a version she struggled to claim later in life. The politically contentious and assertive aspects of this portrait are tempered, suppressed and flatteringly folded in with the drapery of classicism. It is rendered acceptable through the acceptability of this kind of portrayal and its association with the Bluestockings.[427]

Opie's early portrait of Wollstonecraft has no such protective posturing. Unlike Macaulay's carefully conveyed political sympathies, Wollstonecraft's are on show in her loosely powdered hair, her white neckerchief, and demure dull blue and sepia striped dress. Her hair and elegant yet simple attire were, at the time, associated with French revolutionaries and the neo-classical styles they espoused.[428] Even more audacious is that Wollstonecraft is caught in the act of working at what is clearly a writing desk. Laying claim to the page, turning her face fully towards the viewer, Wollstonecraft is avowedly a thinking, working, actively employed woman. She is a subject who looks back at the viewer; a woman who breaks formal and pictorial 'convention', despising the etiquette of pretence and false modesty, and owning the occupation she had planned to devote her life to. Thus an altogether different game to the one Macaulay and Pine ask us to play is at hand, one an eighteenth-century spectator would be taken aback by. The spectator is encouraged to confront, acknowledge and accept the woman behind the work (book and painting) without the gauze, veils, drapes and well-placed sashes of propriety. Viewers are invited to see what and who a 'manly' writer could look like.

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[427] Guest explores the fashioning and public reception of educated women, particularly the Bluestockings, in her work, *Small Change: Women, Learning and Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For a fascinating chapter that touches on the oft satirised, sometimes celebrated, public depictions of Catherine Macaulay, see pp.176-220.

[428] Aileen Ribeiro, *A Portrait of Fashion* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2014), pp.150-51.

Fig.18, Robert Edge Pine, *Catherine Macaulay*, c.1775, oil on canvas, (NPG 5856). Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

In saying this I am in no way abandoning my argument that this early portrait is, in part, an index to Opie's life and work. On the contrary, the masculine attributes and 'natural' aspects of his painting sit in line with what contemporary critics, recent commentators and those closest to the artist thought characteristic of his work at the time. It was commonly understood that Opie, unlike Reynolds, Gainsborough and other esteemed contemporaries, was unable to depict women in a "soft" light. Whether this was owing to his mineral-inspired palette, predilection for painting sitters as he found them or because much of his training as an itinerant painter had been taken up with creating images of working men and character-type portraits, is unknown, but his "masculinisation" of female subjects no doubt cost him commissions.[429] One point biographers are unanimous on is that his second marriage to Amelia (née Alderson) Opie saw a change in his approach to and depiction of women. Peters, Earland, Rogers and Alderson herself all observe a change in the painter's work, a growing softness when painting the features of women. Rogers quotes Alderson's own words when relating the stylistic change and approach, which she saw as an 'indulgence' to her as a wife and an attempt 'to make himself popular as a portrait painter in that difficult branch of art, female portraiture'.[430] Amelia Opie also recounted how his fellow artists often attributed this new found 'grace' in his painting of women to her.[431] However, Opie did not marry Alderson until 1798, well after both portraits of Wollstonecraft were completed. When Wollstonecraft first met Opie he was married to Mary Bunn, a woman he would later separate from and who eloped with another man years later. He would not meet Alderson until after his divorce, in 1796. His somewhat masculinised portrait of Wollstonecraft in 1790-1 does not stem from an unhappy marriage and a lack of influence from Bunn on his artistic practise; rather, it marks a stage in his own developing style and approach to painting more generally, a style that may – or may not – have found its match in the "manly" work and attitude that pre-

[429] Rogers, p.26.
[430] Rogers, pp.36-37.
[431] Rogers, p.37.

occupied Wollstonecraft at that time. What must be said is that the inscription of gendered identity in this portrait is as complicated as that found in Pine's work of Macaulay. It is almost impossible to meet Wollstonecraft's eye as one would an object, as a passive occupant of another's gaze; she must be met head on, literally, as Opie has directed; the viewer, then, must be taken in by her gaze and receive it back. All formalities are suspended; this Wollstonecraft does not stand – and in this case, sit – on ceremonies. In this "masculinised" and male-conceived vision, there is a strange equality, one that Wollstonecraft would no doubt have approved.

The depiction of a gendered body and identity becomes further complicated when situated in exhibitions and gallery spaces. Unlike Opie's later 1797 portrait of Wollstonecraft, his early painting is not widely used on the front of academic and trades publications, apart from Taylor's philosophical biography, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (2003). The early portrait is used, however, in exhibitions and displays, concerning both Wollstonecraft and Opie's life and work. The 1790-1 portrait was recently included in the Tate's free display of Opie's work in a small, vestibule-like space accessible via the main Duveen Galleries.

Even the free display held from October 2019 to February 2020 was overshadowed by the smash hit (ticketed) retrospective of Blake's work. This was one of the Tate's 'blockbuster', crowd-drawing shows devoted to an artist who did not share half of Opie's reputation or financial security, and yet has managed to surpass him, as well as Reynolds and Wright, in popular influence and scholarly interest. The Tate's display of Opie was an attempt to air some long-unseen works by a long-forgotten artist who, once upon a time, helped to found the National Portrait Gallery and took Reynolds' own title of Professor of Painting at the RA. This, however, was not the focus of the display; instead, it offered a small introduction to his roots and his diverse styles of portraiture. Though the display fashioned Opie as a 'working class Cornish painter', who defied convention and the usual trajectory taken by aspiring artists amongst the upper-middle classes, it nevertheless included 6 portraits of women, many of whom were either close family members or friends. This is strange considering that one of the main wall panels attempted to situate Opie in the 'radical' context of the 1790s. Mention of Godwin and Fuseli, both of whom were good friends with the artist and were far more 'radical' in terms of thought and artistic output, was not complimented with the inclusion of portraits he made of them in the politically tumultuous time of the 1790s. Instead, the 1790-1 portrait of Wollstonecraft hung next to the 'radical context' wall card. In short, it was his portrait of Wollstonecraft, his 'masculinized' realisation of an intellectual woman, that was to carry Opie's 'radical' credentials. But was Opie really so radical? Certainly his rise to fame and fortune was; his largely self-taught genius – the 'Cornish wonder' as he was known at the time – was indicative of the social shift that the rising middle class made possible, and his milieu definitely leaned towards, if not the radical, then the liberal. But Opie was not entirely liberal-minded; for example, he agreed with Burke's anti-revolutionary stance in *Reflections*, the work Wollstonecraft stridently tore apart in *Rights of Men* in 1790, at the time Opie painted his portrait of her (perhaps the very work she hints at in the painting).[432] Wollstonecraft's ideas on the Revolution, education and marriage were radical; Opie's representation of her is radical in and of itself (especially when positioned opposite a pious portrait of his religious mother and close to a romanticised conception of his wife), but whether the painting should represent and prop up Opie's own questionable radicalism, and whether Wollstonecraft should become visual synecdoche for his more radical male friends and acquaintances is still open for debate.

The inclusion of the portrait in the display is, nonetheless, attributable to a resurgence of campaigns – like Mary on the Green – that have raised Wollstonecraft's profile as a pioneering

[432] Ada Earland, *John Opie and His Circle* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1911), p.96.

proto-feminist. Mary on the Green styles Wollstonecraft as the 'mother of feminism', as do innumerable books by Eileen Hunt Botting, Virginia Sapiro and others.[433] In their display, the Tate declared her 'a ground-breaking feminist' too. Yet the title given to her early portrait somewhat undermines this legacy and further problematizes Opie's representation in the context of institutional spaces and practises. *Mary Wollstonecraft (Mrs William Godwin)* is the full title of the early painting – hardly the epithet befitting a 'ground-breaking feminist'. But there's more: the title of the work is incongruous to the date it depicts and was painted. Between 1790 and 1791 Wollstonecraft was married to no one, and had barely registered Godwin as a potential acquaintance let alone marital partner. The title is, therefore, anachronistic and highlights another way in which curatorial practice and art history have loaded, even encumbered, this image with different interpretations. Not only is Wollstonecraft's image a signpost to Opie's (doubtful) radicalism and a representative of the majorly male republican set, she is also tethered to a marital status she was patently averse to at the time (to a proposal in 1790 she responded, 'I could not think for a moment of *prostituting* my person for a maintenance; for in that point of view does such a marriage appear to me', p.174).[434] The gendered body, identity and authority of Godwin, therefore, come into view, obscuring and curtailing Wollstonecraft's independent status, her prerogative *not* to marry and her own radical position. This, of course, is ironic given that it was Godwin's candid memoirs of her life that damaged her reputation. The title 'Mrs William Godwin' did not bring the respectability and social approval, neither before nor after her death.

But it was a title that stuck, particularly when it came to her painted portrayals. Opie's later portrait from 1797 (fig.20), was titled interchangeably as 'Mrs Godwin', 'Mary Godwin', 'Mrs Mary Godwin' and 'Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin' throughout the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Perhaps this is unremarkable considering the painting was made just after her marriage. Initially bequeathed to the National Portrait Gallery in 1899 by Lady Jane Shelley, the portrait had stayed with Godwin and was placed in his study above his desk well after she had died and he had remarried. It has been speculated that Godwin commissioned Opie to paint the 1797 portrait as a wedding gift to her (it has also been suggested that Opie's 1790-1 portrait was painted much later, and was also commissioned by Godwin, but that it remained with the artist because he was unable to pay).[435] Irrespective of the nature of the commission, the painting spawned multiple engravings by Heath, all titled 'Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin', in 1797, and another caricatured stipple engraving by John Chapman in 1798 titled 'Mrs Godwin' (notice how caricatured representations were circulated once revelations about Wollstonecraft's life were made public after the publication of Godwin's memoir). A subsequent copy painted by John Keenan (who had painted Wollstonecraft reading a book in c.1787, again with powdered hair) and commissioned by the US vice president, Aaron Burr, which now resides in the New York Public Library's Pforzheimer Collection, was also produced in 1804. Whenever there was a copy

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[433] See Hunt Botting's introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (ed) Eileen Hunt Botting (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp.1-18, 261-279, 315-322.

[434] The letter is not properly dated, but Todd argues that it was written in the summer of 1790, p.174.

[435] This argument hinges on the fact that the 1790-1 portrait had remained in Opie's family and was sold after his death in 1807, presumably because Godwin was still unable to pay for it. But the material and bodily details captured in the painting – the revolutionary-inspired powdered hair, style of gown, youthful appearance – do not correlate with the appearance and dress of Wollstonecraft at the peak of their relationship, as evinced in the 1797 portrait. Opie's 1790-1 painting shares more in similarity with the Roscoe commissioned portrait, assumed to be painted by John Williamson, and also painted in the same year. What is more, William Ridley's stipple engraving of Opie's earlier portrait (NPG D2787) was published early in February 1796 and was titled 'Mrs Wollstonecraft'. The engraving was made and published before Wollstonecraft and Godwin had properly entered into a relationship (see Todd's edition of Wollstonecraft's letters, where despite meeting in February 1796, a proper meeting between just the two of them did not occur until mid-April and a sexual relationship did not occur until the summer. Letters showing their involvement do not appear until 1st July 1796, p.342).

of the 1797 portrait, Godwin's name followed, and this is true right up until 2011. One only has to look at the National Portrait Gallery's archival material on the conservation and exhibition history of the painting to see that the current title restored to the painting – that of 'Mary Wollstonecraft' – is a later "framing" of the work and its sitter. In 1986, the painting was still being referred to as 'Mrs Godwin' and 'Mary Godwin' interchangeably, with a postcard being sold (despite the painting not being on show in their actual galleries) in the National Portrait Gallery shop with the latter title. Forever legitimised by her husband's name, reputation, work and identity, Wollstonecraft's status as a writer, thinker and 'ground-breaking feminist' continued to be undermined. The visual representation of her work and life continued to be shaped and controlled by men well into the twenty-first century.

The title of John Williamson's painting (fig.19) sits outside of this curatorial history. Like Opie's portrait, Williamson's painting of Wollstonecraft was completed in 1791, before she was married or had met Imlay. Unlike Opie's portrait the title has always remained 'Mary Wollstonecraft', with no appended 'Godwin' at the end or before it. One reason for this, other than the painting's provenance, is that it has remained in the collection of a gallery which does not directly work with the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB). The National Portrait Gallery (NPG), however, has worked closely with the ODNB for well over 100 years, allowing for its portraits to act as a biographical index to key historical figures of interest. This is translated into the Dictionary's entries, many of which open with a portrait from the NPG. The current entry for Wollstonecraft, the third one to date by Barbara Taylor, is introduced by the 1797 Opie portrait and not his earlier work from the Tate or Williamson's painting from the Walker Art Gallery. Taylor's 2014 entry sees Godwin's name placed in brackets, but the first entry, written by Leslie Stephen in 1890 (nine years before the National Portrait Gallery received the painting), is titled 'Mrs. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin' and she is referred to throughout as 'Mary' and 'Mrs. Godwin'.[436] It is possible that this biography determined the National Portrait Gallery's choice of title and reading of the painting. Opie's work and the curatorial presentations and scholarly interpretations of it, which frequently involve male directors, curators and biographers, always bring Godwin back into the picture.

Williamson's portrait (fig.19) tells a *slightly* different story, since the painting has not been subject to the same kind of institutionalisation. This is, in part, because it remained in Roscoe's family until 1950, when Mrs Agnes Muriel Roscoe bequeathed it to the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, together with many other works of art.[437] What is interesting about the Walker Gallery's late receipt of this work is that it had stayed in the Roscoe family for so long. Much of Roscoe's art and book collection was sold during his lifetime after he went bankrupt in 1816, but this portrait appears to have remained in the family, possibly because of the regard Roscoe had for Wollstonecraft. The existence of the painting is testimony to this and shows the light in which Roscoe saw her and himself. The artistic endeavours of London-based artists appear to have been the door through which they met also. During the 1790s John Boydell's overly ambitious Shakespeare Gallery was slowly coming to fruition thanks to artists as disparate as Fuseli, Opie, Reynolds and William Blake. It is thought that Wollstonecraft met Roscoe either through Johnson or Fuseli, but it is the latter that features a lot in her letters to the Liverpudlian solicitor, and it is discussions of art, particularly her own work, *Rights of Woman*, and Fuseli's involvement with Boydell and his ill-fated Milton Gallery, that dominates several epistles (pp.193-197). Wollstonecraft may have already known of Roscoe thanks to his moralistic and pro-abolitionary poems *Mount Pleasant* (1777) and *The Wrongs of Africa* (1787). He, in turn, would have known her

[436] Taylor, 'Mary, Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition 2014); Lesley Stephen, 'Godwin, Mrs Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Archive* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1890; online edition 2014).
[437] Walker Art Gallery Archive records, WAG154.

from the recent publication of *Rights of Men*, which he celebrated two years later in his poem 'The Life, Death and Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke' (1792). But his commissioning of the Williamson painting, perhaps when he was a solicitor in London in 1791, goes beyond a relationship of mutual admiration and support. In their recent display, the Tate may have wished to frame Opie as a radical artist, one who was abreast of all the revolutionary changes and ideas at work in the metropolis, especially in the Johnson set, but it was Roscoe who used the portraits and artistic affiliations he had with London-based artists and writers to express his own radical sympathies and artistic inclinations. Unable to fully vocalise his republican convictions and support for the abolition campaign in his native city, he was forced to do so through poetry, letters and by becoming the patron of Fuseli and, in some respects, Wollstonecraft. Having a painting of her encapsulated and solidified both their revolutionary credentials.

Fig.19, John Williamson (Attrib.), *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 1791. Oil on canvas, (WAG 1541). Courtesy of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

In a letter dated 6th October 1791, Wollstonecraft mentions 'sitting for the picture' Roscoe had commissioned (pp.190-1). The epistle is full of characteristic wit and playfulness in its discussion of the painting and Fuseli's Milton project. There is an openness too, an ease to share with Roscoe concerns about her younger brother, who, according to Wollstonecraft, was 'loitering away his time in Wales'. On comfortable and friendly terms with him, she ends her letter by asking if he could 'procure' a station in Liverpool for her brother Charles. In one page of writing, Wollstonecraft ranges from the political to the personal, from the artistic to the domestic and menial, which is apt considering the painting would remain in Roscoe's home and family line for over 150 years. Jesting with him, she suggests her 'head and heart' are more likely to be found in her new book – a work she requests must remain a 'woman's secret': 'I do not imagine that it will be a very striking likeness…if you do not find me in it, I will send you a more faithful sketch…in which I myself…shall certainly appear'. It is telling that Wollstonecraft felt that words would carry her 'likeness' more than paint; that the painting would not necessarily hold her likeness, as if pre-empting Pointon's concerns about portraiture. Her un-mirroring of Williamson's portrait and translation of biographical, intellectual and emotional ('head and heart') reflection into her writing conveys the weight and light she invested in her work. But it also underlines that her sitting for the painting in the first place is at Roscoe's behest: 'Be it known unto you, my dear Sir, that I am actually sitting for the picture…'. Whether she sat once or several times for

Williamson's painting is unknown; whether he worked from sketches after returning to Liverpool cannot be determined. What is evident in the work, however, is Roscoe's perception of Wollstonecraft and his own republican convictions.

Looking directly at the viewer, her left arm resting on a red cloth and her hands tentatively touching, Wollstonecraft is every bit the revolutionary 'Amazon' Roscoe sees her as in his 'Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke' (1792).[438] Wearing an austere black gown, a crisp white neckerchief (akin to the one seen in Opie's 1790-1 portrait) with white frilled sleeves and heavily powdered curled hair, Wollstonecraft appears markedly and unapologetically in the style of a French revolutionary, some of whom she admired and supported in her two *Vindications* and in subsequent letters. The black background almost plays a trick on the viewer, since her stark white icon-like face, hair, neckerchief, and hands appear at first glance to be torso-less (hauntingly and distastefully reminiscent of a severed head, many of which would be visible in revolutionary France on pikes, lampposts and squares, and possibly visible to her during her sojourn there). It also has the effect of emphasising the face and head, and relegating the body, particularly the physical body, to the background: here she is, all mind and staunch rationalism. Accents are placed on the eyes, the (foregrounded) capable and expressive hands, the slight upturned lips, as if the sitting is a joke between viewer and subject. Like Opie's early portrait our eyes cannot take Wollstonecraft in as an object because she is too busy regarding us as one. But her gaze creates distance, the folded arm, clothed in black and just about visible, a barrier to her person. In the Walker Gallery this portrait is hung up high and creates an impression of Wollstonecraft looking down, imperious, slightly smirking at and surveying her visitors. She is relaxed, comfortable, but also ready, conscious of the impression she is giving and that she means to give, which she holds up protectively, like armour (the powder, the hair, the sweep of white cloth concealing her neck, the restrained dress dissolving into the austere black backdrop: minimal, controlled, powerful, emphatic). There is no vulnerability in this work, apart from the tension in her fingers, resting but not completely at ease. She seems to be all too aware of what she is indicating, of the dramatics and language embellishing the canvas; and yet she remains, as she hinted in her letter to Roscoe, unknowable, invisible in terms of a 'likeness'.

Roscoe's lionization of Wollstonecraft in his poem 'The Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke' comes at the expense of an effeminate Burke, who, in the first few stanzas is depicted lying indulgently 'on his bed', beholding a Marie Antoinette-style vision of 'Gallia' calling him to 'vindicate' her 'cause'. Burke is all 'shrivel'd skin', 'spindle limbs' and stirred in more ways than one by Gallia's visitation.[439] In what is evidently a satire of Burke's own famous description of the French queen's 'diamond eyes' and declarative announcement that 'the age of chivalry is dead' in his *Reflections*, Roscoe has his anti-hero venture forth on a chivalric quest to defend the honour of the French monarchy and its hereditary interests. Burke's bumbling knight succeeds in his jaunt until he crosses paths with Wollstonecraft (and later Thomas Paine), who with 'an oaken sapling in her hand / full on the foe she fell'.[440] Despite his 'coat of rusty steel' (rusty should be read as Burke's retrogressive weakness for all things gothic), Burke cannot 'repel' Wollstonecraft's 'vigorous strokes'.[441] Roscoe brings us back to Wollstonecraft's love and potent use of 'manly prose' in *Rights of Men*. It is Wollstonecraft – her words, her phallic power and pen – that wins, felling an already-emasculated Burke. This mock-heroic fight earns her a 'verdant wreath', another sign that Wollstonecraft's language and ideas have triumphed over Burke's

[438] William Roscoe, 'The Life, Death and Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke, A New Ballad, By the author of The Wrongs of Africa' (Edinburgh, 1792), pp.1-10.

[439] Roscoe, pp.4-5.
[440] Roscoe, p.7.
[441] Roscoe, pp.6, 7.

unconvincing and effeminising grandiloquence. All this is captured almost as if it were a cartoon (one could easily imagine Gillray or Cruikshank bringing this battle of wits to gaudy life in a shopfront window). Roscoe's comedic ballad borrows from Wollstonecraft's own former assaults on Burke's manliness by aligning his words with vapid women of fashion: '…like a celebrated beauty, to raise admiration on every occasion' (p.6). For Roscoe, Wollstonecraft, like a kind of Liberty, represents republicanism in all its force and vigour, and therefore licences him to write forcefully in his satirical denunciation of Burke. Written at the time when Williamson's portrait was undergoing finishing touches or had just been completed, Roscoe's poetic depiction of Wollstonecraft is a radical, masculinising and heroic one, and, as if to reaffirm his perception of her, it is complimented and confirmed by the commissioned painting.

Of course, this is why Roscoe had the portrait made in the first place. Wollstonecraft vividly and unapologetically spoke for him. She represented views he held, ideas he characterised in his poems, but was unable to fully articulate aloud amongst merchant acquaintances, banker colleagues, clients and neighbours. As Arline Wilson outlines in her study of Roscoe, he was committed to reimagining and developing Liverpool into a city of culture, perhaps one inspired by the Florence of the Lorenzo Medici era.[442] The outside world saw Liverpool as a city ruled and marred by commerce, particularly that built around and generated by the slave trade. As the second largest city in Britain, boasting a coast that granted access to the Atlantic and Irish seas, Liverpool was one of the main ports for the slave trade and consequently much of its wealth was generated by it. Roscoe's own banking partner, Alderman Thomas Leyland, was a slave trader; his bank would inevitably have held, exchanged and invested money that came directly from the trade too. Roscoe was, therefore, not only intent on transforming this singular reputation of his beloved city, but also on advancing attitudes and policies that would see an end to the very trade and institution that had significantly marred it in the public eye. He could, nevertheless, only move forward in his plans for cultural and political change with caution. Allowing his poems to be used by the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in London, Roscoe's public stance on abolishing a trade so fundamental to the wealth and prosperity of his home city was one of gradualism.[443] Privately he believed in the complete abolition of the institution, publically he tactfully and strategically endorsed gradualism in attempt to appease detractors and hostile merchants who saw his pro-abolitionary attitude as a threat to their livelihoods. He also realised that an argument for gradualism was more likely to be heard by parliamentarians and significant figures in the commercial community of Liverpool than one of total abolition (he detailed this to the London-based society in his 'An account of the opinions that prevail in Liverpool respecting the African reform'). Having encountered hostility towards his pro-republican views on the French Revolution (again because of its threat to commerce), Roscoe saw gradualism as a pragmatic step to secure the outcome he and many closet abolitionists desired in Liverpool and around the UK, as well as a way of avoiding the violence he would later encounter from traders as an MP when signing the 1807 bill to abolish the trade.

All of these private and public negotiations are inherent in Williamson's portrait of Wollstonecraft. The painting, though pre-dating Roscoe's signing of the 1807 Abolition Bill, is part of a complex network of political and cultural affiliations used by him to work through, articulate and reaffirm what he believed. Commissioning paintings of Fuseli, Wollstonecraft and other important figures from democratic circles was as much about fashioning himself, the Liverpool he envisaged, and the beliefs he held dear, as it was about the subject staring out from the painting. His own radicalism was played out and asserted through the portrait of Wollstonecraft, and through his connection to her. Unable to fall 'full on the foe' – whether in the guise of Burke, the slave traders, politicians or royalists with whom he had to work –

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[442] Arline Wilson, *William Roscoe, Commerce and Culture* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p.5.
[443] Wilson, p.154.

Roscoe's weapon of choice was his literary writings, the artwork he bought and commissioned, and the figures he commemorated in them. That this portrait has been used recently on the cover of books casting Wollstonecraft as a radical figure – Janet Todd's *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (2014) and Gary Kelly's *Revolutionary Feminism* (1996) – reemphasises what Roscoe saw and celebrated when it came to Wollstonecraft and her work.

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I have so far argued that eighteenth-century portraits of Wollstonecraft were an index to the men in her life, whether those be the artists themselves, close acquaintances or romantic partners. In doing so, I do not wish to further obscure or displace her achievements and life story. Instead, I have attempted to draw attention to the dynamics of power at work in public and private visual conceptions of eighteenth-century female subjects. I wanted to bring to light the nexus of personal, social and political motivations embedded in a portrait, motivations that extend outwards, away from those held by the subject. In such a light, portraits of Wollstonecraft reduce her to a language of symbolism, thus eroding her own private thoughts and feelings regarding self-representation, self-assertion, embodiment and the individualism portraiture supposedly affords and attempts to solidify. Such symbolism and signification are not inherently wrong in themselves, and they are to an extent unavoidable where portraiture is concerned, but when this visual symbolism is seen as a contributing factor in celebrating or rebuilding the legacy of Wollstonecraft, it must be scrutinised and its components and their origins must be understood, lest the language does not speak of or for her all along. That there is a complex "male" visual language operative in the aforementioned paintings is to both the advantage and disadvantage of Wollstonecraft's work and any interpretation of it in legacy-building projects. But what if Wollstonecraft herself chose to participate in this symbolic language of reduction, elision and evasion? What if her 'wild wish' of feminism and the confounding of sex in culture was translated and highlighted in a seemingly contrary mode, one compatible with contemporary male tastes and ideas? If the earlier works reflect the likeness of male confidantes, lovers, artists and acquaintances, and there was some complicity in this (consent to sit for the portrait first of all), what of subsequent rewritings and adaptations of the Opie image? Do these catalogue her life, desires and convictions, or the artists attempting to represent them? Do they elide the bodily and intellectual reality of her work or realities she wished to convey?

To come close to any kind of answer, it is imperative to go back to Opie's famous 1797 portrait of Wollstonecraft (fig.20). Behind the oft-replicated formal portrait exists another painting, ironically of an older white man, now hardly noticeable but for the conservator's x-ray vision of detection. Common as it was to paint over former paintings, that an older man in elaborate dress lies behind an elegant and soberly attired Wollstonecraft serves as a metaphor for the history of her portrayal. Although conservators have now restored the painting, the National Portrait Gallery's website still displays an image of a portrait whilst under the conservator's eye and brush, as the male figure lurking behind Wollstonecraft threatens to make himself known (see the flecks of red appearing in the far right hand corner, near her left arm and stomach; the flecks belong to an elaborately decorated red jacket, the kind a soldier or admiral would wear).[444] At the time of painting, both Opie and Wollstonecraft had newly married: he to Amelia Alderson and she to William Godwin. Scholar Kenneth Neill has, somewhat crudely, chosen to read into Wollstonecraft's rosy complexion the flush and joy of pregnancy and married life; while, according to Alderson and multiple biographers of Opie's work, the soft brushwork used in this painting is evidence of his wife's influence on his representation of female subjects.[445] Both are

[444] RP 1237 (Wollstonecraft). (NPG46/13/39) in the National Portrait Gallery Archives.
[445] Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley and His Circle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961); Amelia Alderson's comments are quoted in John Jope Rogers' biography referenced in full above.

conjecture, gendered, perhaps sexist, readings that cannot be confirmed (or entirely denied) by scholarship. However, that Wollstonecraft was pregnant during the painting of this work is indisputable; that she wanted this fact to be fully on view and public knowledge at the time is not.

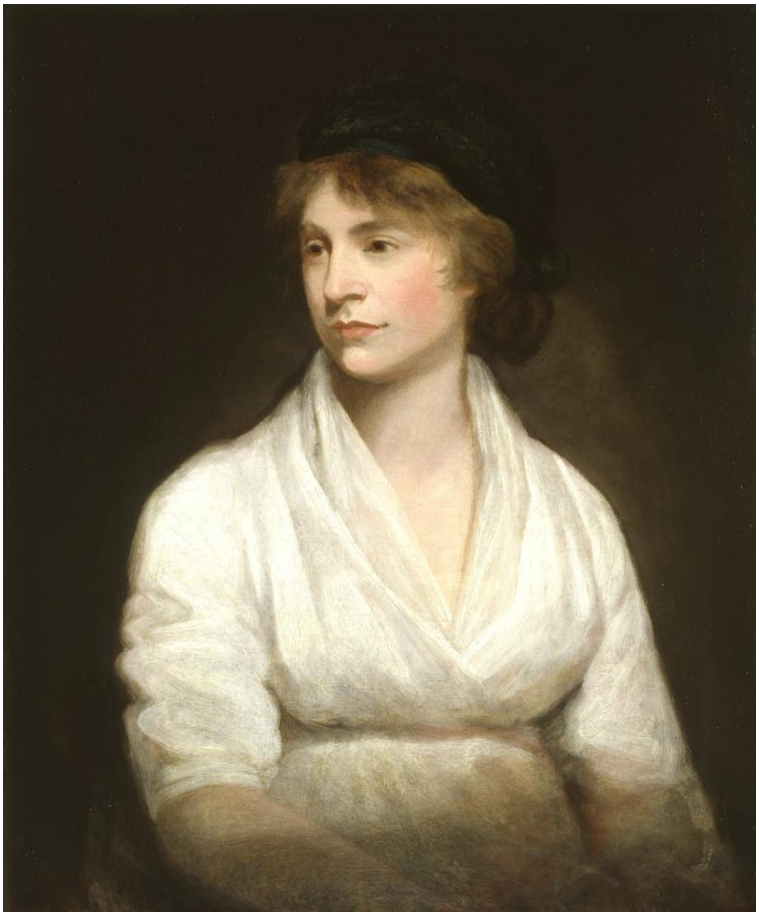

Fig. 20, John Opie, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, c.1797, oil on canvas, 768mm x 641mm, bequeathed by Lady Jane Shelley in 1899 to the National Portrait Gallery. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

When it comes to the issue of the pregnant and maternal body, the public writer and private individual are, sometimes, at odds. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argued that having children was one of the first duties expected of women and one best suited to marriage. This is encapsulated in one of Wollstonecraft's visions of the ideal family found towards the end of her polemic, where she describes the 'maternal solicitude' of a 'reasonable affectionate woman' to her child and husband (pp.223-224). This warm yet rationally guarded unit comes, however, after a long and persuasive argument for the politically radical and spiritually edifying reformation of education. What appears the reaffirmation of a middle-class woman's place within the domestic sphere turns out to be a reorientation – a potentially liberating repositioning in the home and polis – that gives 'independence' and 'self-governance' to both wife and husband, mother and father, woman and man (p.223). It's a plan that works beautifully in theory, an ideal Wollstonecraft holds onto in her polemical works, yet the reality, as born out in her novels, her own life and the lives of her sisters and friends, is far from beautiful.

By 1796, after two suicide attempts and a painfully drawn out separation from Imlay, the father of her first child Fanny, this revolutionary domestic idyll was far from realised in her own life. When she met Godwin and became pregnant with her second child they lived at separate addresses, reluctantly married despite their aversion to the state, and kept a maid to help with

their growing family. Wollstonecraft was struggling financially, determined to live by her pen, yet unable to make ends meet. In her biography, using correspondence with Godwin and Parish records from the late 1790s, Todd has described this time in Wollstonecraft's life as difficult and desperate, one where she was still dependent on (and indebted to) the kindness of Johnson, and, despite her pride and credo of independence, had to look to Godwin for financial support too. Todd has speculated whether a 'Mary Wolsoncroft' with 'bastard child aged 5' in the parish of St Pancras recorded in an account book after having appealed for public charity could have been Wollstonecraft herself.[446] With the idyll of a rationally governed, mutually independent but supportive family crumbling in the breakdown of her relationship with Imlay, a child with Godwin, a man who, though appearing to be faithful, was also without a stable income to support her and a second child, probably did not restore her faith in this familial vision. What is more, the criticism and rejection she encountered from those around her after her messy separation from Imlay and then again when her marriage to Godwin became public, was enough to sink former expectations about family security, dignity and independence. The reality of the 'artless picture' imagined and outlined in *Rights of Woman* was utterly different. 'Independence', 'self-governance', and the 'chastened dignity' of the maternal in marriage was costly and never guaranteed – even with the best of partners. Wollstonecraft would have been one of the first to know that a woman trying to have it all came at a high price.

In her letters this anxiety and uncertainty around her position and future with Godwin is apparent in the deliberate concealment of her pregnancy. Having married in March because of the pregnancy (losing friends in the process because her marriage to Imlay was subsequently seen as a sham), Wollstonecraft and Godwin chose to conceal her state from their friends and associates. Even in the privacy of their letters the child is referred to with metaphors and cursory references to Wollstonecraft's gradually changing shape. In December, after mentioning Fanny's asking after Godwin, Wollstonecraft ominously hints at the possibility of a child: '– As to other perhaps – they must rest in the womb of time' (p.386). In January, when writing about a 'fever' on her 'spirits', Wollstonecraft berates Godwin for not making 'sufficient allowance for the peculiarity of my situation' – a situation that takes on both a general and specific meaning when she adds dramatically 'but women are born to suffer' (pp.389-390). Through the early months of 1797, her letters frequently reference her 'indisposition', but always obliquely, so that the reality of her pregnancy becomes mixed and almost indecipherable from citations of a 'depression' she was known to intermittently struggle with. Always these bodily lows, fits, fevers and disorders are punctuated with the same philosophically bleak conclusion that women have been cursed with the harder lot in life: 'Poor Women' she opines to Godwin, mid-January 1797, 'how they are beset with plagues – within – and without' (pp.389-391). Initially struggling to confront the multiple changes and challenges that being pregnant with a child entails, Wollstonecraft turns to an alternative bodily language, one that she was all too familiar with and which reminded her of former childless life: that of neurophysiology. By rehearsing the code of nervous physiology, Wollstonecraft is able to deflect from the probabilities and possibilities of a future with a child and to move away from the precarity of life with Godwin, her current near-indigent state, the material, emotional and psychological resources needed to bring-up another child and the bodily manifestations attendant on all three. Referring to symptoms through a neurophysiological lens also affords her a degree of individualism: it is *her* complaint, *her* 'indisposition' alone, *her* strength and nervous vigour that will overcome it; she will not be dependent on any other party or body – 'within – and without' hers (p.391).

Come April, when she can no longer deny the pregnancy to herself, Wollstonecraft is still concealing it from close friends and confidantes. In a letter to Opie's second wife, Amelia

[446] Todd, 2000, p.409.

Alderson, she carefully hides her pregnant state when discussing her own independence and her preferred methods of educating children: 'I still mean to be independent, even to the cultivating sentiments and principles in my children's minds, (should I have more,) which he disavows' (pp.408-409). She signs the letter, 'femme Godwin', as if to remind her friend that she, too, is respectably married (p.409). Slowly – perhaps moving past the early stages of morning sickness, fear of miscarrying and an anxiety over or reluctance to have another child – the couple begin to refer to the 'indisposition' as a living being; they start to think of the foetus as a boy, call the unborn child 'master William' and accommodate the new burgeoning reality of pregnancy and another developing life entering their own (pp.416-418). By June, Wollstonecraft's pregnant state is no longer a secret she can keep from others, let alone herself. Embracing her state and the familial prospect their child will bring, she gushes to Godwin that she 'begins to love this little creature' and loves him better than she 'supposed she did, when [she] promised to love [him] for ever' (p.417).

All this continues in the background of Opie's 1797 portrait, which Wollstonecraft intermittently sat for until and possibly after late June (p.423). With this history of concealment in mind, the painting hangs between disclosure and nondisclosure; it neither confirms nor denies outright her pregnant state. Rather, the painting takes part in Wollstonecraft's own code of admittance and uses her own language of repressed revelation as found in her private correspondence. Opie's style, composition and the clothes worn by Wollstonecraft conspire simultaneously to reveal and conceal the pregnant body beneath. The "softer" brush work and the lighting of her figure against a darker backdrop both foreground her person and present her to the viewer in a non-confrontational mode, unlike the assertive earlier portraits made by Opie and Williamson discussed above. This portrait, especially as potential marital gift and commemoration, is formalised and simplified. There are no theatrics in Wollstonecraft's direct and intimidating gaze. Here she looks away, to her right (our left) with her body twisted to her left (our right), perhaps to divert our attention away from her body and what her gaze may have disclosed. This oblique pictorial syntax neither fully announces nor suppresses her pregnant body. Unlike the earlier paintings, the viewer may stare at her uninterrupted, but the composition of the portrait, not to mention the composure of its sitter, do not completely give the game away.

Clothing is another way in which the painting helps to elide her pregnancy. Fashion historian Aileen Ribeiro has noted how Wollstonecraft dresses in keeping with her own theories on clothing the body. As outlined in her didactic literature, particularly *Thoughts* and *The Female Reader* (1789), dress, in Wollstonecraft's own words, 'ought to adorn the body not rival it.'[447] Across her earlier texts, she admonishes those who draw attention to the body through elaborate clothing, powdered (!) and pomaded hair, make-up and trifling adornments like jewellery:

> The body hides the mind, and it is, in its turn, obscured by the drapery. I hate to see the frame of a picture so glaring, as to catch the eye and divide the attention. Dress ought to adorn the person, and not rival it. It may be simple, elegant, and becoming, without being expensive; and ridiculous fashions disregarded, while singularity is avoided. The beauty of dress (I shall raise astonishment by saying so) is its not being conspicuous one way or another; when it neither distorts, or hides the human form by unnatural protuberances. (p.16)

Here, dress, like words, is a transparent aid to the inner person, a layer that compliments and expounds the mind within. An emphasis on simplicity, elegance and neatness, both in appearance and economy, is stressed – and practised in Wollstonecraft's own neat periods (the

[447] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Vol. 4, (eds) Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989).

convoluted, satirically figurative and reference-laden paragraphs found in *Rights of Woman* have not been adopted in this early work; instead the high tone and syntactical and linguistic restraint of a moralist are employed). In Opie's portrait, Wollstonecraft's high-waisted white cotton dress and muslin kerchief is certainly 'elegant', modest and 'becoming', but it is also, as Ribeiro observes, 'portrayed with ostentatious simplicity'.[448] The dress becomes a statement in itself, noticeable, not just to critical eyes looking for stereotypical signs of pregnancy – a baby bump, the prenatal "bloom" and rounder face, neck and limbs – but a didactic sheet with which to neither confirm nor deny her marital and sexual status; to use Wollstonecraft's own words it theatricalises its 'not being conspicuous one way or another', neither distorting or hiding the 'human form' – or two human forms – by 'unnatural protuberances'.

Yet the painting is read by scholars, writers and subsequent artists as a window into her character. Stripped of the complicated and painful history of her pregnancy, Lyndall Gordon believes that 'Opie's light is on the promise of womanly intelligence' while the issue of pregnancy remains firmly in the 'shadows'.[449] Taylor twice repeats the story of Ruth Benedict's encounter with Opie's 1797 painting, in which the anthropologist 'took courage from Wollstonecraft's visage'.[450] Looking for connection, for reassurance, for hope on the eve of the First World War, Benedict saw in Wollstonecraft's 'auburn hair…sad, steady, light brown eyes, and gallant poise of the head' a woman who had 'saved her soul alive'. Benedict's epiphanic experience of the painting does connect the portrayed 'gallantness' and strength of Wollstonecraft with 'the price…that life had demanded of her.' She also sees a contentedness in the subject, when sitting 'for the picture': 'in the light of that content, I still spell out her life', Benedict concludes. But in Taylor's citing of the American anthropologist's anecdote and in the anecdote itself, there is no direct mention of what life had exactly demanded of her: the prospect of having a child in economically and socially difficult times. Benedict's impression, her sense of affinity with the work, solidifies what the portrait would become: an embodiment of Wollstonecraft's ideals, courage, anachronistic strength (the type associated with 'gallant' men and radical masculinity) and revolutionary individuality, at the expense of eliding those social and personal details that both sustained such strength and threw it into question. Turning her into the 'founder', 'forerunner', 'pioneer', and most ironically 'mother' of feminism, Opie's conspicuously inconspicuous portrayal of a pregnant struggling woman was not the image audiences would choose to see in the work.

Stewy's graffiti design, the visual language of which owes much to Opie's 1797 portrait, continues to elide the messiness of Wollstonecraft's life and body at this time. Louisa Albani's mixed media pamphlets, which explore Wollstonecraft's earlier life and works (her Scandinavian letters and her walk through Versailles when living in revolutionary France), take the style of Opie's 1797 conception, but leave out both her pregnancies. There is no trace of her ill-fated daughter in Albani's pamphlet, *Ghost Ship: An art project inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft's Letters from Norway* (2018), a trip that Wollstonecraft undertook with the infant Fanny, who became the centre of many poignant reflections in Wollstonecraft's own *A Short Residence*.[451] A pregnant philosopher, an *actual* mother, does not seem to be a popular look in written and pictorial adaptations of Opie's work and recent representations of Wollstonecraft. Why is this? Is this a matter of privacy, an honouring of Wollstonecraft's own ambivalence over others knowing of her pregnancy and sexual status? Is this, as Gordon observes, a respectful spotlight on her 'womanly intelligence', leaving her personal life – its penury, contemporary conundrums and

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[448] Aileen Ribeiro, *The Gallery of Fashion* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2000), pp.148-9.
[449] Lyndall Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus* (London: Little, Brown, 2005).
[450] Taylor, 2004, pp.19-20, 251.
[451] Louisa Amelia Albani, *Ghost Ship: An art project inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft's Letters from Norway* (London: Night Bird Press, 2018).

slanders, its social shame and eventual tragedy – to the shadows? Or is it simply a divestment of the messy bodily and sexual identities she assumed at the time; is it a turning away from the complexities of a philosopher whose motherhood sat problematically and uncomfortable at the centre of her life's works, amatory relationships and eventual legacy. Do artists, curators, scholars and campaigners see the pregnant and maternal body as the dividing of a solitary "genius", the re-gendering and sexualisation of a woman who fashioned herself as a rational, divinely vindicated being? A too-bodily embodiment of the 'thinking' woman's feminist philosopher? Is it possible to see Wollstonecraft on her own terms – whatever they may be – to see her as a 'new genus', a figure who 'saved her soul alive', a proto-feminist – when the mother of the situation remains so firmly in the pictorial and figurative shadows?

Feminist artist Judy Chicago did not think so. In her monumental work, *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), Wollstonecraft the mother – of feminism, but also two actual children – is invited to participate in the symbolic repast (fig.21). Created in the mid-to-late seventies, at a time when women artists were using their work to fight pre-existing patriarchal systems, particularly in the art establishment, and to fight for civil and reproductive rights, Chicago created a stridently feminist installation on a scale unlike any other to date. Everything about *The Dinner Party* (fig.21), which she styles 'a symbolic history of women in western civilization and a tribute to the many achievements of women even in the face of difficult circumstances', simultaneously invokes and inverts past artistic traditions, tropes, languages, materials and spaces, many of which women artists had been unable to access or properly harness for themselves.[452] Using "decorative" arts and crafts techniques – artistic practices that had been denigrated in art history *because* they were deemed too "feminine" and associated with women and domestic work – such as painting ceramics, embroidering cloth, creating tapestries and wall hangings, Chicago began to create a stridently female language of art for her female-centric, body-positive work. This female language was controversially and emphatically female-centric in its use of vulvic and vaginal-looking plates, which formed the centrepiece of each 'place' made especially for an iconic woman, whether mythical, legendary or historical. Choosing 39 key figures, from the Primordial Goddess to Elizabeth I and ending with Georgia O'Keeffe, Chicago tried to represent and gesture towards women from different cultures, social strata, belief systems and professions. Underneath each figure on a 'heritage floor' were the (999) names of contemporaries or other female figures who had significantly contributed to that which the "placed guest" had done in her lifetime. *The Dinner Party* represents 1038 figures in total and Wollstonecraft, a "placed guest", is number 30 on the third wing (titled 'Wing III: From the American to the Women's Revolution') of the triangular banqueting table. Literalising the metaphor 'having a seat at the table', Chicago provides visual metonymy in the form of a specially made plate, runner (like a ceremonial cloth akin to that found on a church altar), goblet and spoon. No literal bodies are there and yet they are everywhere figured. Subverting da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (c.1490s) and inspired by the Salonnières of the eighteenth century, Chicago allows multiple bodies, lives, narratives and legacies to meet and intersect, creating a space for past stories to interact with present ones and to dictate those of the future. In what is also a decidedly vulvic or uterine formation, *The Dinner Party* unashamedly centres world history and art history in the female body, specifically the female genitalia.

[452] Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History* (Brooklyn: Monacelli Press, 2014), p.9.

Fig.21, Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, c.1974-1979, mixed media, 48 x 48 ft., Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Collection of the Brooklyn Museum. Copyright of Judy Chicago.

This vulvic language was not without its detractors, with multiple institutions banning the work or consigning it to the basement. Critics Lynda Nead, Hortense Spillers and, more recently, Esther Allen, in addition to artist Cornelia Parker, have found Chicago's work to be extremely reductive, biologically essentialist, a white washing of western feminist history and, in Nead's view, an inadequate response to the male gaze and the history of the nude.[453] But as a pictorial portrayal of Wollstonecraft, *The Dinner Party* does something daring and unorthodox in refactoring her motherhood and pregnancy back into her life story and achievements. For Chicago, Wollstonecraft's pregnancy, prenatal ideas and post-partum death, are inseparable from her reformist vision of educational equality, political parity and human rights. With one side of the runner (which uses an eighteenth-century form of embroidery) depicting her school for girls, the other her death after giving birth to her second daughter, and the border displaying animals, flora and fauna found in *Original Stories* (1788), Chicago not only connects disparate parts of her life with different works and achievements she is known for, but links education with motherhood, life with death, the infinite spirit with the pleasures and pains of the body.

[453] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.63-70. See also Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), pp.322-323, 346.

Fig.22, right, Judy Chicago, *Wing Three* from *The Dinner Party*, c.1979, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Collection of the Brooklyn Museum. Copyright of Judy Chicago. Wollstonecraft's place is the fifth one down, after Anne Hutchinson, Sacajawea and Caroline Herschel. Seated on the right hand side of her place is Sojourner Truth.

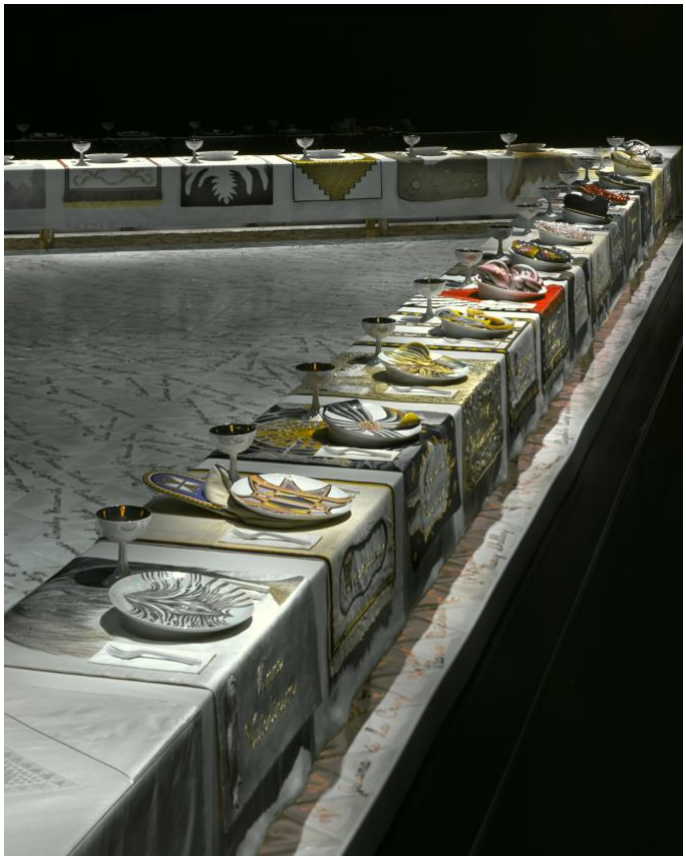

Fig.23, above, Judy Chicago, Wollstonecraft's plate, 1974-1979, china paint on porcelain, 14 in. diameter. Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Collection of the Brooklyn Museum. Copyright of Judy Chicago.

That Chicago enlisted a whole host of women to help create *The Dinner Party* (going against the solitary male genius trope associated with artists and art-making), and the work itself summons the presence of a whole host of women from the past (and still invites a new generation of viewers), demonstrates its far-reaching power. But it also says something about how Chicago views the (maternal) bodies and lives of women like Wollstonecraft: they are generative, communally oriented and now part of a public monument, no longer fighting for space, but taking and filling it up. For all its problems, Chicago's work insists on both literalising and symbolising her feminist foremothers, as well as inviting us to embrace their generative minds *and* bodies.[454] Accused by politicians of creating pornography, the 'Cunt Art' of a 'lesser' seventies art scene, Chicago proudly and unapologetically places a portrait, a nude, a public

[454] Chicago has been accused by some critics and artists of exploiting the unpaid labour of the women who contributed to the making of *The Dinner Party*. Chicago's defence is that she "paid" contributors with her own time and by gifting them with an education in feminist history and the work of women artists and writers throughout the artistic process. In the studio, women volunteers would 'practice feminism' immediately, according to Jane F. Gerhard. 'During orientation, volunteers received a suggested reading list in feminist theory that included Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. They learned that everyone in the studio participated in historical research.' Consciousness raising groups and pot-luck dinners encouraging discussions about 'women's history, art history or feminism' also occurred on a weekly basis. Unpaid labour may directly contradict the battles feminist activists are fighting today, but during the 70s Chicago evidently thought that what she was doing was inherently feminist in its grass roots organisation, community-building and overt challenge to male-dominated and capital-led art institutions around the world. See Jane E. Gerhand, 'From Controversy to Canonization: *The Dinner Party*'s Journey to Brooklyn' in *The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History* (Brooklyn: Monacelli Press, 2014), pp.265-275, 270.

memorial to generative bodies before us (no longer *de*generative, as enlightenment thinkers deemed it) and toasts to the women of yore.[455]

Which leads us to the public memorial of Wollstonecraft commissioned by the Mary on the Green campaign. No longer looking to Opie – or Stewy's Opie-inspired graffiti – the campaign's choice of Hambling's sculpture (fig.24) is a politicised paean to the gynaecology and implicit genealogy of the "foremother of feminism", as they have deemed her. It, therefore, does not enter into the concealment and revealment of Wollstonecraft's pregnancy in the 1797 portrait. But the Hambling commission does have a generative effect: the mock-up image below shows an amorphous bodily surge rearing up like untransmuted organic matter, shooting into the sky, with its furthest point ending in the upright figure of a woman – a problematic 'everywoman' as the campaign have called it. In their own way, Hambling and the campaign have echoed Chicago's point, minus the vaginal flourishes and ellipsis: that one woman, one body represents and contains a multitude; that behind every portrayal are several more, each with their own story and claims to authenticity; that from one woman's works, both mental and bodily, spring forth a generation's worth and more. Wollstonecraft's actual motherhood is absent from this portrayal, but in its gesture to gestation and regeneration, to a metaphorical matrescence bubbling beneath history's surface geology, something of the philosopher's own struggle rises up and comes to the fore.

Fig.24, Maggi Hambling, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, digital design for the Mary on the Green statue commemorating Mary Wollstonecraft. Courtesy of Mary on the Green.

[455] Frances Borzello, 'An Art History Sit-In: The Dinner Party in its Artistic Context' in *The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History* (Brooklyn: Monacelli Press, 2014), pp.257-264, 262.

Coda: 'Schlongs' & Thongs; the Naked Issue with Women's Bodies Today

'It is hard to imagine a male writer or thinker being "honoured" by a sculpture of a tiny naked man, schlong out for all to see, ripped like a Ken doll, emerging from a mass of what we are told is "organic matter",' wrote Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett in *The Guardian* on the day the Mary on the Green Campaign unveiled its sculpture.[456] Many echoed Cosslett's sentiments. Outrage came in the form of placards being left at the foot of the statue's pedestal, tiny woollen clothes being clandestinely placed on the figure, and a plethora of articles and op-eds circulating in national news outlets. I return to this sculpture, the endpoint of my last chapter and the ostensible goal of the campaign, not because I find in it a crystallisation of Wollstonecraft's ideas on the body, freedom, women's rights and access to education – though Mary on the Green continues to see the commemoration as a conversation starter around these preoccupations in her work. I return to it because the outrage and controversy that still surrounds Hambling's work points to an important issue at the centre of the thesis and in the writing of Wollstonecraft and her milieu, her philosophical inspirations and forebears: the problem of the female-encoded body.

Hambling's unfazed response, typical of one once dubbed the enfant terrible of the British art scene, was to point out that 'there are plenty of schlongs in art'.[457] Perhaps a provocative deflection, this comment also highlights the irrational distraction and discomfort surrounding the nude female form – indeed any female encoded body (trans, queer, non-binary, femme-presenting). Hambling's everywoman is problematic: she is idealised, able-bodied, white-passing and cis-seeming; she stands atop many a (subjugated?) bodied being not quite come to "full" corporeal fruition, and, though she looks out, over the heads of even the tallest passers-by, she can be surveyed from every angle, opening her up to a tradition of historical 'objectification' that may bypass her literal, monumental, victory in surmounting the oppression of patriarchy, as Cosslett sees it. But in the outrage, and the strange digitally mediated exchange between two different generations of creatives – an older artist and a younger writer – there simmers a conflict not just about the 'right' representation of female-encoded bodies, but the complicated visibility of women's bodies in particular and all this entails.

Hambling's sculpture, for all its troubling representational details, calls into question our own expectations about (public) artistic representation, the continued interaction with women's legacies through such representations, and the discomfort contemporary audiences feel when women's bodies, not just their 'works', come into view. In its chaotic reassignment of power to the material and the corporeal, as well as the symbolism they both hold, twenty-first century viewers are thrown into the same maelstrom about the place of the body as in Wollstonecraft's work. Bodies, the presence of the bodily, especially in close proximity to its supposed opposites, the intellectual or spiritual, invites trouble, courts anxiety and claims unsettled and unsettling discursive terrain. This is seen in Wollstonecraft's own work both when she struggles with the rococo form or the coquette's heart *and* when she asserts the right of women to be embodied, nervously fit subjects. Anxiety occurs in the presence of othered or racialized corporealities from different nationalities, ethnicities and geographies, even when those corps are only encountered in print. This is also evinced when she battles against the relegation of women to the body alone – as well as the subjugation to which women's bodies are inherently expected to adhere. Grappling with the bodily legacies of the past, Wollstonecraft imparts complicated new ones through her writing to us at a time when women's bodies and the autonomy they should be able to enjoy and exert have never been more under threat.

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[456] Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett, 'Why I hate the Mary Wollstonecraft Statue: would a man be 'honoured' with his schlong out?' in *The Guardian* (10 November 2020).
[457] Stuart Jeffries, 'There are plenty of schlongs in art' – Maggi Hambling defends her nude sculpture of Mary Wollstonecraft in *The Guardian* (16 December 2020).

Cosslett's disgust with Hambling's nude form is certainly about this historic relegation of women to their bodies, and the socio-political oppression to which this subsequently opens them up. But it is also an age-old disgust springing from a duality that cannot see liberation in the bodily at all. Looking out into the distance, divested of clothes – because as Hambling says, almost echoing a Wollstonecraftian dictum, 'clothes define people' – this problematic embodied everywoman poses a question, a query, a quarrel to us and to the past: where does the body fit in Wollstonecraft's work, and why is the naked issue of women's bodies still considered perplexing, threatening and problematic today?

Conclusion: the 'Peculiarity' of the Body

> I am not well – I have a fever on my spirits that has tormented me these two night's past. You do not, I think make sufficient allowance for the peculiarity of my situation. But women are born to suffer. ([1st January 1797], p.389)

In a letter written to Godwin after a night together, Wollstonecraft endeavours to convey 'the peculiarity of her situation'. What this 'peculiarity' is, is not directly stated. What is Wollstonecraft struggling with? What ails her enough to make such gloomy pronouncements on the fate of women? And why does this complaint, as it specifically pertains to her, not garner enough support and consideration from Godwin?

In my previous chapter I have discussed the veiled language employed by Wollstonecraft when discussing her pregnancy with Godwin in their letters. Unable to completely avow this gravid and grave situation, whether in writing or in the visual depictions produced by others, Wollstonecraft hid this 'peculiarity' from those she knew and, to an extent, from herself, since the pregnancy came at a point in her life when she and Godwin were yet to confirm the status of their relationship, and were already facing financial difficulties and social scrutiny. At the time of writing this epistle – which Todd dates Sunday morning, January 1st 1797 – Wollstonecraft was not yet married to Godwin and still signed her name to mutual acquaintances as 'Mary Imlay'.[458] This epistolary excerpt captures Wollstonecraft's conflicted position towards pregnancy and matrescence in general, but also acknowledges a period of great change, stress and upheaval in her own life during the winter of 1796 to 1797.

In the ambiguity and intimacy of Wollstonecraft's lexis, the complexities of the body and its socio-political ramifications are apparent. In the evasion and drama of her diction, Wollstonecraft positions her state between the physiological and the psychological. Blurring the bodily with the mental – is the fever an actual ague brought about by sitting in wet clothes the previous day or is it a metaphorical application of the phrase, one designed to underscore unease rather than disease? – she demonstrates how sickness collapses seemingly binary states, as well as the language employed to describe them. As the passage above demonstrates, the corporeal and psychological continually overlap in Wollstonecraft's thinking, and this intersection often challenges linguistic and figurative representation, particularly when it concerns the most marginalised of bodies. Similarly, Wollstonecraft's body is simultaneously a site for personal sensation and political negotiation: suffering may not simply be the physiological and biochemical changes encountered by a pregnant woman but also a response to what this means socially and politically for her too.

This thesis has argued for a renewed appreciation of the corporeal ideology found in the works of Wollstonecraft. The first section, Corporeal Parts, examined metaphors of the heart, nerves, and embodied soul in order to excavate the medical and philosophical theories that underpinned Wollstonecraft's corporeal politics. Bodily realities are often rooted in metaphors and rhetoric, and the examination of the 'peculiarities' of words in Wollstonecraft's construction of a reformed corporeality or future bodily ideal illuminates her political vision. In the second section, Corporeal Strategies, the chapters on the rhetoric of the enslaved body and Francophobic forms address specific bodily types, their 'peculiarity' in wider international and national political contexts, and consider how these are excluded or included in Wollstonecraft's

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[458] Todd, *Letters*, pp.389, 385, 387.

thought on freedom and progress. Some of these bodily types, like Black, brown and indigenous bodies, are employed to prop up, castigate or benefit the corporeal realities of white women; others, as described in Wollstonecraft's revolutionary writings, become political sites anchored in national prejudice and propaganda.

Across all of these chapters, addressing the 'peculiarity' of the body itself has been of paramount importance. The female-encoded body – and its 'peculiar situation' as a hyper-visible, hyper-consumable yet politically hyper-invisible form within eighteenth-century contexts – has been my focus. Its 'peculiar' place and position in the corpus of Wollstonecraft studies has also been an important issue I have attempted to redress. Invaluable research by Todd, Taylor, Tomaselli, Hunt Botting, Bergès and many other estimable scholars has solidified Wollstonecraft's reputation as a key philosopher of the Enlightenment, and an important proto-feminist, one whom we can still learn from and must acknowledge when it comes to contemporary concerns and debates over the human rights and the conditions surrounding the lives of women. This emphasis and work is invaluable, and the focus on Wollstonecraft's thought – her mind rather than matter – has been integral to restoring her reputation and work to its rightful prominent position in the studies of politics, philosophy, sociology, education and literature. Nonetheless, the significance of the body to all such subjects and to her philosophies of political reform, gender parity, social justice and change, has not been given the attention it deserves. This thesis argues for this oversight to be reconsidered; for Wollstonecraft's attitude to and ideas on the corporeal realities of individuals, particularly the most marginalised, to be included in analysis and readings of her work, and for the body to matter just as much as the mind does in her philosophical and political oeuvre. My thesis celebrates the body, peculiarities and all, in Wollstonecraft's writing, and strives to emphasise the possible legacy of her corporeal ideologies for Wollstonecraft studies, as well as other areas of academic and non-academic practises and learning, most notably feminist and public visual arts. The body need not be singular or 'peculiar', in Wollstonecraft scholarship, but could and should be regarded as a site of intellectual importance and theoretical multiplicity, interdisciplinary significance and reach. In accepting and including it as such, perhaps the lives of women, past and present, including their 'sufferings', as dramatically declaimed by Wollstonecraft above, will be better understood, historicised and learned from by readers and scholars today.

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