Mary Wollstonecraft in Her Time and Our Time

Submitted by Ashley Tauchert to the University of London as a thesis towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the Faculty of Arts, University College London, November 1996.

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Abstract
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This thesis seeks to analyse Mary Wollstonecraft's post-1790 writings in relation to their immediate contexts, and to their reconstruction by feminist literary history. It is partly a critique of the valuable work put in place by feminist predecessors, and partly a contribution to future feminist understanding. I take as a starting point the hermeneutic loop between feminist appropriations of Wollstonecraft as an originating figure in feminist literary history, and subsequent attempts to address her writings overwhelmingly in relation to that discipline. Chapter 1 establishes the groundwork for this study by looking at problems in editing Mary Wollstonecraft, and establishing the compass of her works. Chapter 2 reconsiders the *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, not as a stage towards the *Rights of Woman* but as a critique of patriarchal assumptions in Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Chapter 3 assesses the complex and shifting relationship between Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and feminist literary history, and restores her controversial claim that women are desiring and reasonable creatures to the context of the works it answers. Chapter 4 looks at Wollstonecraft's most neglected mature work: *the Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, and speculates on its relative obscurity in Wollstonecraft studies. In this chapter I offer a psychoanalytically informed discussion, which takes into account Wollstonecraft's first experience of pregnancy at the time of writing. Chapter 5 addresses Wollstonecraft's last two major works: the *Short Residence in Sweden* and *Wrongs of Woman*, both of which, I argue, have received critical attention which emphasises the author's failed relationship with Gilbert Imlay, at the expense of the maternal relationship that I suggest is at the heart of these writings.
Acknowledgements

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This thesis is dedicated to Barbara Elizabeth Tauchert.
Introduction

Chapter 1
Mary's Style: Problems in Editing and Attribution

fig. 1.
D. Pellegrini, "The Persecuted Queen hurried at the Dead of Night into a Common Prison"
(1795)

Chapter 2
The Female Reader: Wollstonecraft, Burke and Patriarchalism

Chapter 3
Vindicating Women: Rights, Duties and Sex in the Second Vindication

Chapter 4
Maternity, Castration, and Mary Wollstonecraft's Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution

Chapter 5
A Woman Scorned: A Short Residence in Sweden and Wrongs of Woman

Conclusion

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Introduction

Asserting the rights which women in common with men ought to contend for, I have not attempted to extenuate their faults; but to prove them to be the natural consequence of their education and station in society. If so, it is reasonable to suppose that they will change their character, and correct their vices and follies, when they are allowed to be free in a physical, moral, and civil sense.

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*¹

Mary Wollstonecraft is both a fascinating and problematic figure for feminist criticism, and one whose life and works are undergoing a period of reconsideration. She was famous in her own time for her publications intervening in - and shaping - the Revolution debate in the closing decade of the eighteenth century. She was also famous for the way she died, and for the life that was thrown into relief by that death.²

It is a death that still haunts us like an unanswered question from the past; a question aimed at the heart of feminist enquiry. The conjunction of death and childbirth, that for the Reverend Polwhele "strongly marked the distinction of the sexes, by pointing out the destiny of women, and the diseases to which they were peculiarly liable", is - for feminist enquiry - an uncomfortable end to Wollstonecraft’s life and works.³ This life and the works it produced offer a lasting example of a past woman’s intellectual and political skills demystifying aspects of mythologised female anatomy. Her death reminds us that female anatomy still has to be taken account of. In this thesis I am addressing the tension between writing and female embodiment that I find captured so compellingly in Wollstonecraft’s death.


² Mary Wollstonecraft died of septicemia following the birth of her second daughter.

My first chapter considers the way that Wollstonecraft’s femininity has been foregrounded in accounts of her writing; it illustrates how eighteenth- and twentieth-century critics and editors have drawn on Wollstonecraft’s biographical circumstances to ground assumptions about her intentions, and attributions of writing to her pen.

This chapter, by focusing on the more problematic and less established of Wollstonecraft’s works, traces some of the assumptions that have been made about the identity and style of Mary Wollstonecraft. The following chapters focus on particular moments in Wollstonecraft’s writing career, and consider the works produced in relation to her engagement with discourses that define and describe the implications of female embodiment.

The disagreement with Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) that underwrites Wollstonecraft’s most famous work — *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) — was aimed at his emphasis on the social and intellectual limitations of female corporeality. Rousseau insisted that these limitations, characterised by a physical and mental passivity, were designed by Nature, and traced their lineations back to an image/fantasy of the woman in her most female (because her most ‘natural’) position: on her back in the dark. The line that is drawn to join together ideas of women’s corporeal condition, and their social role, came to mark the ground on which Wollstonecraft entered the Revolution debate. I argue in my second chapter that her first piece of polemical writing — *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) — is a response to Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) by a female...

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reader who has noticed that the argument she is reading demands of her a different
type of body; one that can wield a sword to defend the Queen of France. The third
chapter examines the ways in which her second *Vindication* circles the problems posed
by the female body to Enlightenment discourses of Rights, and answers accounts of the
female body in moral philosophy which deny its sexual and desiring possibilities. I
suggest in Chapter 4 that the work following this *Vindication* - the *Historical and
Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794) - elides the presence of the female body,
because by then Wollstonecraft was experiencing her first pregnancy; a condition
which the philosophical and moral tradition she was engaged in could only account for
by silencing. But this anomalous work records the resurfacing of the author/narrator’s
body in a peculiarly suggestive way.

In my last chapter I suggest that her final works - *A Short Residence in Sweden*
and *The Wrongs of Woman* - show evidence of a developing writing voice that takes
account of the maternal condition, and that records the writer’s sense of the
implications of motherhood. But I find myself then returning after all to her death -
recorded in the fragmented and unfinished condition of her last novel - and the
continuing temptation as a critic to overdetermine its meaning (albeit from a different
position) as much as Richard Polwhele had done. The relationship between
Wollstonecraft and her female body, recorded in her writing, is the central
preoccupation of this thesis. I am focusing on the post-1790 writings, and the way
these record moments in Wollstonecraft’s engagement with what it means to inhabit a
female body. That meaning emerges from a conjunction between the subject’s
corporeal condition (and the changes brought to bear on it by maternity) and her
consciousness of the discourses that define and describe that condition for her.
The reconsideration of Wollstonecraft's life and career in a range of critical and biographical works since the mid-1980s, has been partly an attempt to reconstruct Wollstonecraft in the interests of modern feminism. As Janet Todd has remarked, the biographical research and editorial work produced by feminist academics and biographers in the 1970s, while bringing her life and works more prominently to the attention of the academy, reveal their "stylistic date". The first wave of academic feminism was looking for a fore-mother. Almost a century earlier, First Wave Suffragists were also claiming Wollstonecraft as a founding figure in the long struggle for female emancipation. In 1890 Elizabeth Robbins Pennell described Wollstonecraft as "the first woman who braved public opinion and lifted up her voice to declare that woman had rights as well as man". Georgiana Hill in 1896 located the "beginnings" of the "women's suffrage movement" in Wollstonecraft's publication of her second Vindication. Millicent Garret Fawcett in 1907 described Wollstonecraft as "A Pioneer of the Movement". The Suffragists emphasised her congruence with their notion of women's rights, noting her somewhat ambivalent mention of female suffrage in the second Vindication; in so doing they located an impressive precedent for their otherwise seemingly unprecedented demands. Between 1920 and 1970, less attention was paid to Wollstonecraft, although this period produced Virginia Woolf's contribution to assessing the relationship between Wollstonecraft's biography and her

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writings.7 Feminist biographers and critics of the 1970s - Janet Todd, Moira Ferguson, Eleanor Flexner, Claire Tomalin among others - rediscovered Wollstonecraft as an intellectual and politically-conscious woman speaking against the grain.8 Since the mid-1980s, Wollstonecraft has been subject to a variety of reinterpretations and reconstructions, which share a common desire to interpret her life and works from frameworks less determined by her moral and political suitability - or unsuitability - as a feminist heroine.9 Feminist critics and biographers of the 1970s were similarly concerned to reclaim Wollstonecraft from the moral and political judgements of the past.

A revision of Wollstonecraft’s reputation becomes evident at the end of the decade: Mary Jacobus found in Wollstonecraft’s Rights of Woman a disappointing “silencing of the ‘feminine’, a loss of women’s inheritance”, in an essay originally published in 1979.10 Mary Poovey’s important study of Wollstonecraft published in 1985, is central to the move to revise the understanding of her works arrived at in the previous decade. The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer exposes problematic

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9 I raise what I believe to be the implications of claiming Wollstonecraft as an originary feminist heroine in my discussions of individual works. Janet Todd comments that “[i]t is impossible to look at the 1970s biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft without the embarrassment of past use or present abuse”; Gender, Art and Death, p. 2.
aspects of Wollstonecraft’s argument in the *Vindications*, and builds a complex picture of her work situated within a historical moment. This study, however, remains in turn shaped by the question of Wollstonecraft’s success or failure as an exemplary feminist: Poovey exposes flaws in Wollstonecraft’s feminist position, which she explains as a failure to disentangle herself from the current ideology of femininity and propriety. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* sets the political writings in a biographical context, and foregrounds Wollstonecraft’s psychology as a writing woman:

Wollstonecraft’s noisy bravado, in fact, masks her insecurity both about how to present the outrage she felt and how to give her largely subjective responses authority.¹¹

Poovey exposes Wollstonecraft’s boldness and assertion as a “mask” - an artificial stance revealed by prose which “betrays” this deception. This mask she identifies as an act of making “herself over in the ‘masculine’ image of the intellectual” (p. 55). “Noisy bravado” explicitly suggests Wollstonecraft’s pose is inauthentic: a surface style which can never sound authentic, and through which a marginalised and rejected femininity can be heard. It is in this context, and in the context of Wollstonecraft’s “refusal to acknowledge female sexuality” in her account of the *Rights of Woman*, that Poovey identifies Wollstonecraft’s “failure to take her challenge to its logical, radical extreme” (p. 72 & p. 48).

Cora Kaplan’s key essays on Wollstonecraft published in 1983 and 1985 resituate her works in relation to the history of a specifically socialist feminism. Kaplan shifts the emphasis considerably, but still finds Wollstonecraft in certain

important respects disappointing and unsuccessful, particularly in her failure to recognise female sexual desire. In ‘Wild Nights: Pleasure/Sexuality/Feminism’ Kaplan accuses Wollstonecraft of establishing in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* “heartbreaking conditions for women’s liberation - a little death, the death of desire, the death of female pleasure”. She repeats this serious charge in ‘Pandora’s Box’, where she argues that “[w]hat is disturbingly peculiar to *A Vindication* is the undifferentiated and central place that sexuality as passion plays in the corruption and degradation of the female self”. This enduring notion of Wollstonecraft’s failure as a feminist - largely a failure to reflect the sexual awareness of 1970s feminism - is partly a symptom of what Margaret Ezell has described as the tendency in feminist literary criticism to “worry whether our literary forbears were ‘good’ feminists”, and partly a symptom of the historical anachronism that is initiated by wanting Wollstonecraft to be a feminist at all. Such anachronism is inevitable, but its expressions under particular historical conditions is worth analysing. In chapters 2 and 3 I discuss the sort of feminism we can find in Wollstonecraft’s *Vindications*, and the sort of feminisms that have been demanded of her, and found lacking. The persistent charge against her failure to recognise female sexuality, I argue in chapter 3, results in part from our own failure to recognise the sort of sexuality Wollstonecraft was recording, and to take account of the medical and social contexts for sexuality in her lifetime. In chapter 4 I offer a way of reading Wollstonecraft’s “mask” of sexless or masculine

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discourse in her *Historical and Moral View*, taking into account the corporeal conditions that set up the need for masquerade in the first place.

Another facet of research on Mary Wollstonecraft since at least the 1970s has focused on history - political history, social history, and the history of ideas. The work produced by Mitzi Myers since 1977 and throughout the 1980s is generally concerned to return Wollstonecraft to a recognisable historical context.\(^{14}\) Virginia Sapiro’s *Vindication of Political Virtue* (1992) is similarly concerned to understand Wollstonecraft in the light of the historically specific debates belonging to the tradition of political philosophy from which she emerges. Jane Moore, in an essay based on a paper originally given in 1987, applies Derridean deconstructionist methods to resituate Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman* within a contemporary context of discourses of gender and language (including Rousseau and Locke), and finds a text that “radically subverts the extant binarism of genre and gender difference of the 1790s”. In the 1990s Vivien Jones and Tom Furniss have produced valuable work which positions Wollstonecraft in relation to contemporary sexual and stylistic discourses, clarifying her engagement with the forging of femininity in the writing of Helen Maria Williams, and masculinity in the writings of Edmund Burke. My chapters on Wollstonecraft’s responses to the French Revolution draw on these accounts, and on the work of Ronald Paulson which makes suggestive use of Freudian categories to illuminate contemporary attempts to represent that revolution.\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) See bibliography.

Gary Kelly’s full-length study of Wollstonecraft’s life and works in 1992 reformulated the feminism she is voicing to take fuller account of the historical determinants of the French Revolution. Kelly’s reassessment of Wollstonecraft is particularly useful as a point of study; the notion of Revolutionary Feminism he adopts is concerned to replace the 1970s agenda of sexual liberation with a 1790s inflection, more interested in evidence of Wollstonecraft’s engagement with the writers and social conditions of that period than with her relationship to the subsequent history of feminism. More recently Harriet Devine Jump has identified Wollstonecraft as a “twentieth-century icon” for feminist criticism, and expresses a need to “situate her work more firmly in the context of her own time”, partly “in the hope of correcting some of the extreme emphases which have been placed on the feminist aspects of her work”.16 Claudia Johnson’s study of Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s (1995) has assessed Wollstonecraft’s critique of Burke’s Reflections as “a radical and feminist counter-take on the relations among politics, sentimentality, and gender”, in an argument that identifies a corrective to effeminacy at the heart of both Vindications.17

Janet Todd, whose editorial and critical work in the 1970s and since has spearheaded academic recognition of Wollstonecraft, and made her works available to a new readership, has recently reviewed her own work on Wollstonecraft from the perspective of two decades of change and development in Women’s Studies, and notes that “[i]t is easy to look back and see the fashioning of image”.18 My own work takes

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18 Todd, Gender, Art and Death, p. 2.
its place within this long renegotiation of Wollstonecraft’s life and writings, and shares
a desire both to draw on the insights into that life and those writings made available by
two decades of feminist research and critical practice, and to refashion the woman they
belong to. I am interested in observing the relationship that has developed between
Mary Wollstonecraft and feminist criticism since the editorial and critical conjoining of
them through the suffragist movement, and in looking at the effects and implications of
certain claims made on her feminism.

My own feminism is concerned with what it means to inhabit a female body at a
particular historical moment, and the strategies that record that meaning in writing. In
this thesis I have applied a variety of methodological means to assess the implications
of female corporeality in Wollstonecraft’s writings. Historical recontextualising of her
works in relation to the discourses they answer and resist seems necessary to revisit
particularly her more famous Vindications without reproducing a model of
Wollstonecraft as a failed or flawed feminist. Chapters 2 and 3 are concerned to build
on the historical contextualising work of the last decade: they recover some of the
discourses and debates that produced Wollstonecraft’s writing, and also aim to further
the recognition of the past woman writer as a physical and discrete entity whose life
and works cannot be fully accounted for in isolation from the constitutive importance
of the specific political and philosophical contexts in which she found herself. A
psychoanalytically-informed analysis of biographical conditions allowed me access to
reconsider the otherwise unaccountably disembodied text which followed the Rights of
Woman. Chapter 4 draws on the work of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler to assess the
implications of a repressed maternal body in Wollstonecraft’s writing of the Historical
and Moral View during her first pregnancy. Chapter 5 returns to the details of
Wollstonecraft's biography, in order to highlight the critical appropriation of her late works for a narrative of seduction, betrayal and suicide. I take issue with the biographical emphasis placed on Wollstonecraft's writings, and suggest that the version of her biography in circulation hides crucial aspects of her life and writings from view, while overemphasising others.

While I am drawing heavily on the history of feminist criticism of Wollstonecraft, I am also raising questions about the effects of applying a late twentieth-century feminist agenda to this late eighteenth-century woman. One of my intentions in this project is to expand the possibilities of feminist criticism, in order to recognise aspects of female identity that might have been under-represented as a consequence of the need to avoid overdetermining female anatomy. This aspect of the thesis is informed by the current debate concerning the problems raised by feminist essentialism, in which I take the position that the corporeal is an important category for feminist enquiry, and one which remains to be fully assessed.\(^{19}\) I have searched for, and found, versions of my own preoccupations in Wollstonecraft's work. I am not claiming to have discovered the authentic Wollstonecraft, but I hope to have uncovered neglected aspects of her writings - ones that reflect my interests, but which do not misrepresent Wollstonecraft's own. Similarly, I am not attempting to overturn the history of feminist criticism's approach to Wollstonecraft, but to offer a continuing feminist criticism, one informed by my own identity as a bisexual academic woman with children writing at the end of the twentieth century.

Chapter 1

“Mary’s Style”: Problems in Editing and Attribution

In this chapter I will be discussing some of the more marginal and problematic aspects of Wollstonecraft studies. I attend to those works - particularly her writings for the *Analytical Review*, and her unfinished works edited and published posthumously by William Godwin - of which the authorship is problematic. By addressing itself to the margins of Wollstonecraft studies, rather than the works that have dominated her literary and political reputation, this chapter will be focusing on those aspects of Wollstonecraft’s writing that raise editorial and critical problems related to what we know of her active life and premature death. I will be arguing that certain gaps in our attention to Wollstonecraft’s literary and political concerns are allowed or enforced by the ideological presumptions with which she is read. These assumptions, as I have suggested in my introduction, are in part the result of a drive to assimilate Wollstonecraft to a feminist literary tradition, which has adopted for itself the maternal authority of an iconic Mary Wollstonecraft. As I will discuss in more detail below, the pre-feminist attention to Wollstonecraft raises equally problematic questions of gendered identity, which influence the way her writings have been read and categorized. I will begin with a discussion of the most ambitious recent re-editing of Wollstonecraft’s works, and then look at the history of critical attention to those texts of which the attribution remains uncertain.

1. I am Madam

Yours &c

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT¹

Virginia Sapiro thanks Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler in the preface to her recent book on Wollstonecraft’s political writings for “placing all of Wollstonecraft’s

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¹ Wollstonecraft’s signature closing a letter to Mary Hays dated November 12th 1792 (*Collected Letters*, pp. 219-220).
Chapter 1

known writing, with the exception of her letters, between the covers of seven volumes. All critical works on Wollstonecraft written since 1989 owe a similar debt of gratitude to the co-editors of the seven volumes of *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, published by William Pickering in that year. Prior to its publication researchers and students of Wollstonecraft relied either on the various disparate editions of the works published this century, or spent time in the copyright libraries working from first and second editions. Before the publication of Todd and Butler’s *Works* as a single, re-edited series with the added and important benefit of an index, cross-referencing played a smaller part in critical commentary, and critical studies tended to concentrate on a single Wollstonecraft title - most frequently her second *Vindication*. Since 1989 three full-length critical studies of Wollstonecraft have been published - Gary Kelly’s *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Virginia Sapiro’s *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft*, and Harriet Devine Jump’s *Mary Wollstonecraft: Writer* - all of which have attempted overviews of her body of work or entire career. Until 1989 such sweeping perspectives remained the field of the biographers, all of whom to varying degrees read the works of Wollstonecraft as evidence for her personal (and in most cases inevitable) development as a feminist.

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2 Sapiro, *Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. xxvi.
In an introductory passage explaining their "Editorial policy" the editors of the *Works* set out the principles governing their selection in the preparation of this edition:

In this edition we have aimed to include all works by Wollstonecraft published in or immediately after her own lifetime.\(^6\)

The first problem in achieving this aim is indicated in the following paragraph by the editors:

Private letters to Johnson, to Imlay and to Godwin are included, since they appeared in Wollstonecraft's *Posthumous Works* (1798), the collection selected and edited by her husband William Godwin.\(^7\)

A selection of her letters, then, can be included in a collection of "all" her "published" works on the grounds that these letters were included in a publication of her previously unpublished works by her "husband" "immediately after" her death. The editorial principle in itself is unquestionable: a number of Wollstonecraft’s writings are only available from this source, including her last novel.\(^8\) If we include this novel and the other fragments available from Godwin’s *Posthumous Works* in the corpus of Wollstonecraft’s writing, when these were never authorized for publication by Wollstonecraft in her lifetime, on what grounds could we exclude the letters this pattern is of course William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'*(London, 1798) which is the main source for any biography of Wollstonecraft. See also Janet Todd’s article, ‘The Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft’, *Signs*, 1 (1976): 721-34.

\(^6\) *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 1, p. 29.
\(^7\) ibid., p. 29.
\(^8\) It was Godwin’s practice to destroy manuscripts after he had published, so no manuscript version of these posthumously issued works exists. As Eleanor L. Nicholes rightly points out in her editing of the Wollstonecraft manuscripts held as part of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library: “[i]nasmuch as none of the manuscript originals of the letters published in *Posthumous Works* has been traced, it would seem that nonpublication in 1798 was essential to the survival of Mary’s original manuscripts*. *Shelley and his Circle: 1773-1822*, ed. by Kenneth Neil Cameron, Vol 1, ed. by Eleanor L. Nicholes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 68.
contemporary editor chose to publish alongside less personal writings? But the inclusion of these letters inevitably establishes a division between this small selection (deliberately chosen and heavily edited by the author’s husband) and the mass of other private letters and notes which have subsequently been discovered and made available, but which were not published “in or immediately after” Wollstonecraft’s life. The reader is directed by the editors to Ralph Wardle’s *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1979), and informed that this collection has been added to by the subsequent appearance of previously undocumented letters, which - as they point out - indicates the need for a new complete edition.

The decision of these editors not to include that new complete edition of Wollstonecraft’s letters in this collection of her writings is - as I have emphasized above - not the point at issue here. What I am trying to draw attention to in this small example is the question of Wollstonecraft’s authorship raised by Godwin’s editing of her posthumously issued writings. This question concerns Godwin’s editing of works immediately following her death, and to what extent these otherwise unpublished writings can be seamlessly and without further comment absorbed into the canon of Wollstonecraft’s writings. Godwin’s selection of his wife’s letters for publication was deliberate and careful. He also edited extensively those he chose to publish. By extension there remains an uncomfortable question mark over the point at which what we read when we read anything from the *Posthumous Works* slips quietly from the authorship of Wollstonecraft into the authority of Godwin’s editing.

Later in the discussion of their “Editorial Policy” Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler identify “the most vexed issue in editing Wollstonecraft” as “the authorship of

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9 A different case applies to the essay ‘On Poetry’ which had already been published, in a slightly different form, as a letter ‘On Artificial Taste’ to *The Monthly Magazine and British Register*, 3 (April 1797), 279-282. A fragment of the essay exists as manuscript sc 19 in the Pforzheimer Library (see *Shelley and His Circle*, vol. 1, pp. 175ff). The version of the essay which appears in Volume 4 of *Posthumous Works* seems to be an earlier version, and is almost identical to the manuscript fragment.

10 Ralph Wardle comments on Godwin’s editing of the published letters in his preface to *Collected Letters*: “[T]he letters to Johnson and Imlay which William Godwin published in his *Posthumous Works of the Author of ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’* contain frequent deletions and are so much more coherent and carefully punctuated than Wollstonecraft’s usual letters (despite her distraught state of mind when she wrote many of them) as to suggest that Godwin edited them carefully. No originals, however, are available for comparison: although Godwin scrupulously preserved other letters and his diary, he evidently discarded any manuscript that he had published” (p. 19).
the contributions to the Analytical Review". In this equally controversial matter they have chosen to follow “that scholarly opinion” which associates Wollstonecraft with the signatures M, W, and T: “even while acknowledging the possibility that she used more initials, that one of these initials belonged to someone else, or that a single initial was used by more than one person”. Throughout modern Wollstonecraft studies the status of her authorship of these reviews has had to be addressed. The question remains: how do we read such ambiguously situated scripts when we have no safe method of identifying signature?

From the editors’ statement of policy in compiling the most complete edition of Wollstonecraft’s works to date, then, it is possible at once to identify two important areas of uncertainty in Wollstonecraft’s writings: the editing and selecting of works unpublished in her lifetime, and for which no manuscript authorised by Wollstonecraft remains, and the authorship of the review work commonly ascribed to her. A glance at the British Library catalogue offers a third area of uncertainty concerning the authorship of the novel The Emigrants. While the British Library categorizes this as a work by Wollstonecraft, there is no mention of its absence from the seven volumes of edited Works. Neither Gary Kelly nor Virginia Sapiro mentions the evidence in favour of Wollstonecraft’s authorship, and both attribute the novel without comment to Gilbert Imlay.

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11 Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, p. 29.
12 ibid., pp. 29-30.
14 Gilbert Imlay, The Emigrants (London: Hamilton, 1793). The evidence in favour of Wollstonecraft’s authorship is in fact slight, and remains the preoccupation of an M.A. thesis by Robert Hare (see discussion below). Kelly assumes Imlay’s authorship of the novel without reference to wider debate, see especially p.148. Sapiro follows closely the editorial line taken by Todd and Butler, and in doing so excludes any mention of this novel from her discussion.
2. The work of a woman

These three areas of editorial uncertainty lie on the margins of Wollstonecraft studies, and it is for this reason that I wish to discuss them before entering any debate concerning her more familiar or famous works. In this thesis I am trying to indicate some pitfalls in reading women's writings of the past, which I believe have had a recognisable, and distorting, effect on the writing of feminist literary history. I wish to begin by paying attention to the margins and miscellany of Wollstonecraft studies, because certain aspects of the sort of distortion I aim to identify, and its possible implications, are more easily visible in the areas over which there remains an uncertainty about authorship and authority. In this chapter I will be arguing that a pattern emerges from attempts to answer the questions of authorship raised by the material outlined above. This pattern (or repetition of preoccupations in critical approaches to this material) suggests that issues of gendered identity in history, and assumptions concerning Wollstonecraft's ideas of gendered identity, influence readings of her writings.

The first two areas of bibliographic uncertainty (the authorship of the Analytical Review scripts and the possibility of Wollstonecraft's authorship of a novel otherwise ascribed to Gilbert Imlay) are, unlike the example of Godwin's editing of the Posthumous Works, not intrinsically open questions. It is possible that a piece of previously unrecognised source material will surface that could close the debate about authorship in either case. As far as the editors of The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft are concerned, the file is so firmly closed already on the question of authorship of The Emigrants as to warrant no mention of the arguments either way. I am not

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15 Robert Hare, 'The Base Indian: A Vindication of Mary Wollstonecraft', M.A. Thesis, Delaware 1957: "there is an accumulation of psychological and stylistic twists that stamp The Emigrants as the work of a woman" (p. 8).

16 In her 1976 bibliography of Wollstonecraft Janet Todd included the "seventy-eight letters written by Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay" published in Godwin's Posthumous Works (1798), vols. 3 & 4, under the heading of "Works". She refers to Wollstonecraft's contributions to the Analytical Review between "the summer of 1788 to the summer of 1792, when she left for France, and from the summer of 1796 until her death in 1797". She makes specific reference to only one review, that of Catherine Macaulay's Letters on Education (Analytical Review, 8 (1790), 241-254) because this "has been ascribed to Wollstonecraft and contains material later used in A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN". In contrast to the absence of comment in the Works, however, she includes a reference in the bibliography to The Emigrants, citing Robert Hare's 1964 Scholar's edition of the novel, in which
concerned here with the possible answers to these questions of authorship so much as with the phrasing of the questions themselves: the arguments pursued in the course of trying to close these questions since they were first posed.\textsuperscript{17}

Both the debate concerning Wollstonecraft’s contributions to the \textit{Analytical Review} and the quieter debate concerning her possible authorship of \textit{The Emigrants} are characterised, in most cases, by the absence of definite evidence. There is simply no way of answering the question of authorship with certainty. I am interested in the ways in which critics have attempted to argue unquestionability in the face of (as yet) unanswerable questions in these debates. In the case of Wollstonecraft’s work for the \textit{Analytical Review}, two pieces have been positively identified through external evidence, and from these two identifications, critics have built a profile of Wollstonecraft’s review writing based on internal evidence, notions of her style, and probabilities concerning her interests and experience based on biographical evidence.

The “scholarly opinion” cited by the editors of the \textit{Works} in their “Editorial Policy” which identifies Wollstonecraft’s signatures for the \textit{Analytical Review} as M, W, or T is an influential article written by Ralph Wardle for the \textit{PMLA} in 1947. Wardle was the first to follow a trail suggested by W. Clark Durant, who, in his expanded 1927 edition of Godwin’s \textit{Memoirs} reprinted one of Wollstonecraft’s letters to her publisher, Joseph Johnson. This letter, originally published by Godwin in the \textit{Posthumous Works}, mentions a review of “Dr. J-----’s sermon on the death of his wife” which Wollstonecraft had written for the \textit{Analytical Review}.\textsuperscript{18} Wardle decided this “clue” was “worth investigating” because:

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\textsuperscript{17} I should probably declare at this point that I assume the novel, \textit{The Emigrants}, to have been written by Gilbert Imlay, that I accept Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler’s assessment of which reviews were authored by Wollstonecraft, and I read Wollstonecraft’s letters, whether edited by Godwin or not, as published in Ralph Wardle’s excellent \textit{Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft} (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1979), to which I will refer hereafter as simply \textit{Collected Letters}.

It leads directly to a review of *A Sermon written by the late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., for the Funeral of his Wife* in the *Analytical* for August 1788. It is signed *M*, an initial Mary would be likely to use.\(^{19}\)

From this piece of information Wardle goes on to construct a careful deduction based on internal evidence:

> like the other articles so signed in that issue, [this review] is written in her sprawling colloquial style, which contrasts sharply with the Latinized, often periodic writing of her colleagues (p. 1001; my emphasis).

Wardle offers no examples of what he means by either Wollstonecraft’s “sprawling colloquial style” or the “Latinized, often periodic” style of writing against which he is contrasting it. Having asserted a stylistic connection between all the articles signed *M*, Wardle then makes a plausible leap of faith. He locates “two other articles in the preceding issue” written in the “same informal style” (p.1001; my emphasis). Both of these are “reviews” and both are signed *W*. The move from identifying the obvious signatures of *M* and *W* to the less obvious one of *T* is again made via a stylistics bridge. Wardle goes on to say:

> The style of the T-signed articles suggests Mary’s: it has the same loose-jointed sentence structure, the same fondness for stock metaphors as “sentimental varnish,” “cold rapture,” “energetic flow,” and “seasoned with”; the same recurrence of pet words (p. 1002; my emphasis).

The terms Wardle uses to mark Wollstonecraft’s prose style, as a means of identifying her signature when no other (external) means of identification is present, are worth comparing with the terms in which her second *Vindication* has been criticised or categorised.\(^{20}\) As I have discussed in the introduction, Gary Kelly makes an interesting

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\(^{20}\) Jane Moore describes a tendency in modern critics, claiming they have “unfailingly ‘failed’ the *Vindication* for its lack of a coherent argument, clear reasoning and a logical structure” (Jane Moore, ‘Promises, Promises: the Fictional Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft’, p. 166). She cites Wardle’s criticism of the text’s “lack of organisation” and Miriam Brody’s reference on p. 41 of her
contribution to the debate about Wollstonecraft’s style, which suggests that an evaluation of her writing is greatly influenced by a prior judgment concerning her character. This judgment, in the example of Poovey and Kelly’s interpretation of the style of the second *Vindication*, is influenced by the critic’s or commentator’s understanding of Wollstonecraft’s identity as a woman and as a feminist. These critics’ idea of female identity influences their evaluation of her writing style. This is evident in feminist, pre-feminist and anti-feminist commentary on Wollstonecraft. Wardle’s reference to “her sprawling, colloquial style” in this instance suggests that the style is something we expect of Wollstonecraft; something essential and unchanging about her.

Derek Roper draws attention to some of the weaknesses in Wardle’s argument in his contribution to the 1958 volume of *Notes and Queries*. In his *PMLA* article Wardle concludes that by applying his analysis of the *Analytical Review* articles, following the trail suggested by Wollstonecraft’s letter, then 412 articles are identifiable as Wollstonecraft’s, of which 203 are signed *M*, *W* or *T*, and 208 are unsigned. He identifies the unsigned articles on a similar basis of stylistic characteristics, coupled with his idea that a run of unsigned reviews followed by a signed review can be taken to mean that the signature carries back through the unsigned reviews preceding it. Roper disagrees with this figure, and the principles by which Wardle arrives at it. He argues that “[n]o evidence is given for believing that the editors acted in this fashion”, citing the fact that a monthly issue sometimes ended with an unsigned review, and that consecutive reviews sometimes carried identical signatures. This disagreement becomes suggestive for the purposes of my argument when Roper introduces a point about Wollstonecraft’s style in his claim that “internal evidence [does not] invariably support the theory by which these unsigned reviews are ascribed to Mary Wollstonecraft” (p. 37). Roper takes the example of an unsigned introduction to the 1975 Penguin edition of the *Vindication* to the need to “apologise” for its style. (Moore cites a reference in Mary Wilson Carpenter’s ‘Sybilline Apocalyptics: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Job’s Mother’s Womb’, *Literature and History*, 12 (1986), 215-28, (p. 227n.9) for Wardle’s quote. It is in fact taken by Carpenter from Wardle’s 1951 *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography*, p. 156.) For “counter-arguments” she refers the reader to Carpenter’s article, Cora Kaplan’s ‘Wild Nights: Pleasure/Sexuality/Feminism’ in *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 31-56, and Mary Poovey’s discussion in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen*, pp. 77-80.

Chapter 1

review of Lewis’s *The Monk* published in the issue of October 1796. He quotes the following passage:

> the gradual discovery of Matilda’s sex and person (the evil spirit,) is very finely conceived, and truly picturesque; indeed the whole temptation is so artfully contrived, that a man, it should seem, were he made as other men are, would deserve to be d---ned who could resist even devilish spells, conducted with such address, and assuming such a heavenly form.\(^\text{22}\)

Roper makes the following judgment:

> [t]he strong masculine tones may possibly be assumed, but it is strange that a reviewer who elsewhere shows herself preoccupied with her reader’s moral welfare should praise *The Monk* in such terms (p. 37).

The “internal evidence” suggests to Roper that the passage is too “masculine” to be by Wollstonecraft, although he concedes that this style may be “assumed” (like the “heavenly form” of the review). The immorality suggested in the tone of the reviewer he finds less plausible as an opinion written by Wollstonecraft when taking into account her other (signed) reviews.\(^\text{23}\) The passage chosen by Roper is interesting for two reasons: firstly because it could be claimed stylistically as an example of the “loose-jointed sentences”, “fondness for stock metaphors” or “recurrence of pet words” which Wardle took as a sign of Wollstonecraft’s authorship.\(^\text{24}\) Secondly, and by coincidence, it is one of the reviews positively identified by Eleanor Nicholes as the work of Wollstonecraft. While Wardle was working backwards from the principle of a

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\(^{23}\) I am avoiding a discussion of the content of the reviews in this chapter, in order to concentrate on the approaches adopted by critics to identify Wollstonecraft’s character in her writing. For a more detailed discussion of the content of the reviews in relation to Wollstonecraft’s other writings, see chapters 2, 3 and 5 of this thesis.

\(^{24}\) The passage is a single sentence of nine sub-clauses and a parenthesis, and also uses what might be described as “pet words”: “picturesque”, for example, see Mary Wollstonecraft & William Godwin, *A Short Residence in Sweden and Memoirs of the Author of ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’*, ed. by Richard Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 146 & p. 153. I am not suggesting that the use of these words in the review prove it to be the work of Wollstonecraft, but rather that any claim for stylistics as evidence of authorship leaves itself open to debate: these are commonly used words of the time, and while it is possible to identify peculiarly Wollstonecraftian turns of phrase, these alone are not enough on which to base a claim for authorship.
string of unsigned reviews being signed at the end, Nicholes is working from a manuscript of Wollstonecraft's review of *Albert de Nordenshild* which appeared on page 404 of the October 1796 *Analytical Review* (immediately following the review of *The Monk*).

Roper's claim that the review of Lewis's *Monk* was not the work of Wollstonecraft rests on an assumption that a woman wouldn't write like that, and that this woman certainly wouldn't use "such terms", conjuring the figure of a stable, identifiable and consistent Wollstonecraft whose style and tone is assumed to be apparent in unsigned writings. Wardle claims to recognise this figure in "loose-jointed sentences" which contrast with the more practiced (Latinized and periodic) prose of other (by implication male) reviewers. Roper refuses to recognise the presence of Wollstonecraft in a passage which either could only be the opinion of a man, or spoken from the assumed position of a man. The styletics question raised by unsigned writings seems to be decided on a gendering of Wollstonecraft's writing. This gendering has different implications at different points in the history of Wollstonecraft studies, and is shaped by the critical position of the commentator. Roper's comment is interesting in the way it echoes a late eighteenth-century preoccupation with authentic or masquerading gender, particularly in literary matters. He is as bothered about the uncertainty of whether the masculine tones are assumed or not, as he is about the unlikelihood of the immoral tone being the work of Wollstonecraft. When

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25 Both the terms "Latinized" and "periodic" imply a degree of formal education which we know from Godwin's *Memoirs* and Wollstonecraft's letters that she did not experience.

26 The later eighteenth century, it is generally agreed, reveals a growing preoccupation with proofs of sexual difference, or a fear of sexual mutability or confusion. Janet Todd describes the decline of the masquerade in the later decades of the eighteenth century as a result of a general fear of "habits of confounding types of woman, classes and genders" associated with aristocratic debauchery (*The Sign of Angellica*, p. 201). Thomas Laqueur documents a growing preoccupation with the physical authenticity of gender difference throughout the century leading up to Wollstonecraft's career. See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (London: Harvard University Press, 1990). The *Gentleman's Magazine* review of *Sermons Written by a Lady* (1770) foregrounds the authenticity of the writer's sex in very similar terms: "As among other literary frauds it has been common for Authors to affect the style and character of ladies, it is necessary to apprize our readers that these sermons are the genuine productions of a female pen." This review is governed by a fear of fraud, a need to clarify "genuine" identity against the unsettling awareness of the possibility of imitation. The reviewer goes on to cite Johnson's opinion that "it is much easier not to write like a man than to write like a woman" and identifies "a strain of native sense, and elegant simplicity, which a writer of the other sex would have found it very difficult to imitate" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, 40 (1770), 273). See also Jane Spencer, *Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 15-18.
Wollstonecraft published the second edition of her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* in her own name in 1790, the *Critical Review* recorded an apology for its review of the first, anonymous, edition:

> It has been observed in an old play, that minds have no sex; and in truth we did not discover the Defender of the Rights of Men to be a Woman. The Second edition, however, which often reveals secrets, has attributed the pamphlet to Mrs. Wollstonecraft (sic), and if she assumes the disguise of a man, she must not be surprised that she is not treated with the civility and respect that she would have received in her own person. [...] It would not have been sufficient to have corrected merely verbal errors; a lady should have been addressed with more respect.  

It is an ambivalent apology; both genuinely sorry for the lack of respect shown towards a female author in the first review, but also accusing the author of a deliberate stylistic deception (the "secret" disclosed by the second edition). Again, the style of her *Vindication* is at stake, and in a phrase which prefigures Roper's doubts about her authorship of the review above, she is believed to have "assume[d] the disguise of a man". The tone of accusation seems to be based on the notion that Wollstonecraft had gone to some lengths to disguise her true sex in writing the *Vindication*, and had she been less deceptive, her femininity would have been apparent. Again the uneasiness of the reviewer has much to do with the sense that the sex of a writer is not easily apparent in the style of their writing, that the style of a given sex can be "assumed".

The *Gentleman's Magazine* also centered its reaction to Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication* on the discovery in the second edition of her inappropriate and surprising femininity:

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The rights of men asserted by a fair lady! The age of chivalry cannot be over, or the sexes have changed their ground. We should be sorry to raise a horse-laugh against a fair-lady; but we were always taught to suppose that the rights of women were the proper theme of the female sex; and that, while the romans governed the world, the women governed the Romans.  

There is evidence that this review struck home far enough to elicit a response in her next *Vindication*, which, as the reviewer predicts, was of “the rights of women”. In a discussion of sexual difference, she pauses to make the following suggestion:

A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it, though it may excite a horse-laugh. - I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour (*Rights of Woman*, p. 65).

The point she is about to make when she pauses to pre-empt the expected “horse-laugh” is just the point that the reviewers of the *Critical Review* and *Gentleman’s Magazine* seemed to find most disturbing; that the “distinction of sex” might be confounded.

Elsewhere Wardle has made clear the sort of assumptions underlying his identification of Wollstonecraft’s style. He identifies the main “fault” of her second *Vindication* to be “lack of organization” for which he finds a direct cause in “her usual want of mental discipline”. He traces these writing faults to a “natural ebullience” in her character, which “resisted control in writing as in life”. In a later piece of work, Wardle describes her “haphazard punctuation and sentence structure and her reckless use of the dash” in her letters to Godwin, and claims “they suggest a good deal about her impetuous nature, so different from, yet so complementary to, her impassive husband’s”. In Wardle’s case it is clearly a notion of Wollstonecraft’s character and personality that influences his judgment of her writing style; and he has a very

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particular notion of her life as a woman. He describes Wollstonecraft in his introduction to her *Collected Letters* largely in terms of her relationships with the men in her life:

Mary Wollstonecraft passed through many phases following her early days at Beverley. She moved from *timid girl* to *forlorn maiden* to *sanctimonious spinster* to confident woman of letters to rejected *mistress* and finally to mature *wife and mother*.31

Some later examples of judgments concerning Wollstonecraft’s style are perhaps more worrying, as they appear in works of a feminist intention, and could be expected to know better. Meena Alexander, in her 1985 study of *Women in Romanticism*, uses Adorno’s phrase to argue that a “negative imprint of domination” is apparent in Wollstonecraft’s writings.32 From this supposition Alexander proceeds to locate Wollstonecraft’s oppression in her writing, and to figure this oppression as a troublesome denied femininity which haunts her writing style. This analysis of Wollstonecraft’s biography allows a certain judgment of her writing, as if the latter were a transparent medium through which to view the unchanging outline of the former: “the *torment* of a woman writer like Mary Wollstonecraft, who must cut herself loose of the *bonds of femininity* even as she recreates herself in writing”.33 An accusation of stylistic transvestism familiar from contemporary and pre-feminist commentaries on Wollstonecraft’s writings surfaces for Alexander as a result of Wollstonecraft “claiming a public voice for the female author” which (especially in the first *Vindication*) explains “[h]er symbolic cross-dressing”.34 Alexander’s analysis of Wollstonecraft’s style in the first *Vindication* works along similar lines to Mary Poovey’s idea that she was assuming the “mask” of the masculine intellectual discussed in the introduction. In both cases, a feminist consciousness has turned on Wollstonecraft as a woman who tries to write like a man - denying her own femininity - and as such fails her own feminist intentions. Wardle’s analysis of Wollstonecraft’s

31 *Collected Letters*, p. 50; my emphases.
34 Ibid., p. 49.
style, on the other hand, reads into her writing the failings or disappointments of the woman. In each case a notion of the character and identity of Wollstonecraft as a woman shapes the judgment of her writings.\textsuperscript{35}

3. Mary’s style\textsuperscript{36}

The claim for Wollstonecraft’s authorship of *The Emigrants* is made by Robert Hare in an MA thesis, submitted to Delaware University in 1957. The British Library’s decision to catalogue this novel under Wollstonecraft rather than Imlay (whose name appears on the title page of the first edition, and who is otherwise pretty universally assumed to have been the author) derives not so much from the conviction of Hare’s thesis, but from his editing of a 1964 facsimile reprint of the novel. This edition firmly claims Wollstonecraft’s authorship, and includes an introduction by Hare in which he presents the argument of his thesis in a condensed form. The evidence on which he bases his claim for Wollstonecraft’s authorship resembles in its method the debates concerning her authorship of the *Analytical Review* articles. As in that case, there is available to Hare no reliable external evidence of authorship, besides the troublesome naming of Imlay on the title-page to earlier editions of the novel. Hare deals with the doubts this raises about the validity of his argument by including this attribution of the novel to Imlay within a wider argument concerning a deliberate literary fraud by the author and her lover.\textsuperscript{37} Having thus removed the only known source for ascribing

\textsuperscript{35} Virginia Sapiro, in discussing her use of Wollstonecraft’s reviews, jokes that “the most important reviews, those which I have used the most, have so much the flavor of Wollstonecraft’s pen that if she didn’t write them she should have” (*Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. xxvii).


\textsuperscript{37} Hare casts doubt on the story institutionalised by Godwin concerning the dating of Wollstonecraft’s relationship with Imlay. Hare’s argument is detailed, but can be summarised by the claim that Wollstonecraft knew Imlay prior to Godwin’s date of “about four months after her arrival at Paris in December 1792”, and that her writing of *The Emigrants*, its publication in Imlay’s name in 1793, as well as the publication of *The Topographical Description* in 1792, were deliberately covered up by Godwin. He also raises C. Kegan Paul’s doubting of Wollstonecraft’s relationship with Fuseli, as evidence that Godwin introduced this affair to cloak her earlier relationship with Imlay. See chapter 7 of Godwin’s *Memoirs* (*Wollstonecraft & Godwin, A Short Residence & Memoirs*, p. 239). See also C. Kegan Paul’s claim that the Fuseli connection was a “preposterous story” in Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters to Imlay, with Prefatory Memoir* by C. Kegan Paul (New York: Haskell House, 1879), p. xxxii.
Chapter 1

In the introduction to his thesis Hare states his terms immediately, defending his conclusive attribution of authorship on the basis of “[t]he artificiality of both books, and the feminine nature of the style and ideas” (p. iv). By “artificiality” Hare means to point out an inauthentic knowledge of the geography and detail of America; a knowledge he argues can only have been gleaned from travel books and not from the sort of “real first-hand knowledge of America” Imlay could be expected to have had (p. 6). He begins by pointing out the similarities between the narratives of *The Emigrants* and Wollstonecraft’s last novel *Wrongs of Woman*, and goes on to suggest that both novels labour to convince the reader of a common thesis. Again he falls back on stylistics to argue his point:

> [q]uite aside from the evidence that these two novels are of identical authorship, the thesis is a feminine one, and is treated only from the feminine point of view. That a man would have written *The Emigrants* must strain our credulity (p. 7).

“Furthermore,” he adds, “there is an accumulation of psychological and stylistic twists that stamp *The Emigrants* as the work of a woman” (p. 8).

Hare takes Ralph Wardle’s estimation of Wollstonecraft’s writing style as an authority to strengthen his case. He uses Wardle’s comment on Wollstonecraft’s style from his 1951 *Critical Biography*:

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38 *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America*, published in 1792.
Mary’s style is indeed the woman herself; she too was wanting in control, often confused, a bit pretentious, a strange mixture of imitation and originality— but never tiresome.39

From this point Hare argues that Wollstonecraft the woman can be recognised in her style; and hence her style becomes a sign of her presence in a text.

Both Robert Hare and Ralph Wardle refer to Wollstonecraft as “Mary”, while Gilbert Imlay is only ever mentioned as “Imlay”. While this may be thought a minor point, it illustrates both critics’ assumption of intimacy with their subject.40 When Hare begins to evidence his claim for “Mary’s style” in a few examples of close reading from The Emigrants in relation to Wollstonecraft’s second Vindication and her last novel, he circles the issue by repeatedly claiming unquestionable “femininity” without attempting to analyse what it is in the style that is gendered in this way. Comments about the style of a passage collapse into comments on the subject matter or opinion of the author. He says of a certain passage in The Emigrants:

If I may venture a subjective opinion on this point, I suggest that the preceding passage bears the marks of a feminine hand. Such expressions as “my bosom glowed with new emotions” and “joy appeared to throb in my veins,” and the comment on “a sacrifice of so many appropriate pleasures” seem to me to support this opinion, quite aside from the probability that a male author would not be so alarmed at the thought of ribald remarks, or a drunken orgy (p. 33).

It is interesting that in both Hare and Roper’s analysis of Wollstonecraft’s writing, moral disapproval is taken as a sign of femininity.41 This might be an example of the

40 See also Ralph Wardle’s edition of Wollstonecraft’s letters to Godwin: Godwin and Mary: The Collected Letters of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (1966).
41 The date of these enquiries into Wollstonecraft’s authorship is relevant to this point. All of the works I have been discussing in detail were published in the 1950’s: thus not only pre-feminist in their discipline, but also carrying certain heightened notions of femininity. The claim that Wollstonecraft’s reviews were characteristically moral in tone gets us nowhere in the process of identification. Derek Roper is right to point out in his study of Reviewing before the ‘Edinburgh’: 1788-1802, that “[t]o put moral considerations foremost was of course a characteristic of many writers in that age, including Johnson, Coleridge, Southey, Godwin, Fanny Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft—all of whom wrote reviews” (London: Methuen; Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), p. 124.
way in which the figure of Wollstonecraft as a woman overwrites the historical situating of her voice. The opinions cited by Hare above (disapproval of ribald remarks and drunken orgies) are moral opinions, and as such are more revealing of the writer’s religious opinion or social status. What commentators have taken as a moral frigidity regarding sex in the second *Vindication* is more accurately a statement of emerging middle-class identity - defining itself against aristocratic excess and working class vulgarity - and a social and religious idealism. What we might be experiencing in the analyses of Roper and Hare, then, is a simple collapsing of sex and gender issues as determining factors in Wollstonecraft’s writing. The attribution of sex to writing which voices morally reactive opinions confuses the female sex of the writer with a historically and culturally specific feminine identity: the female writer as a sentimental heroine of history.

If such elisions were only apparent in pre-feminist works on Wollstonecraft, they could be attributed to the naivety of male critics struggling to come to terms with an early modern woman writer, whose writings engage with issues of female identity and authorship, and whose life was morally adventurous. But it is possible to identify similar assumptions in recent feminist criticism and commentary, although they function in slightly - but significantly - different ways.

Sally Stewart discusses the evidence and debate so far in her 1984 article, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s Contributions to the *Analytical Review*’. Stewart refers to Wardle and Roper’s discussion, and offers “[a] close comparison of the style and content of the reviews signed ‘M’, ‘W’, and ‘T’ and Wollstonecraft’s other writings, which neither Wardle nor Roper provide”, concluding that Wollstonecraft used these initials on 221 signed reviews, and that another 12 unsigned may also be by her. In the course of providing this close comparison of the style and content of the reviews and Wollstonecraft’s other work, Stewart also makes use of Wardle’s analysis of

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Wollstonecraft’s style; describing “[h]er frequent use of the loose rather than the periodic sentence [...] aptly noted by Wardle”. At one point in her argument, she identifies one of the more contentious T-signed reviews as Wollstonecraft’s by comparing it to an earlier M-signed review of the same work (Rousseau’s *Confessions*) and finding that both reviews “are written in the loose, informal style characteristic of Wollstonecraft”. The basis for finding Wollstonecraft’s style in general to be “loose” and “informal” is left without evidence or discussion of any particular text, or by comparison with other reviewers’ styles in the *Analytical* or elsewhere.

The recurrence of judgments concerning Wollstonecraft’s style suggests that what is thought to be ‘characteristic’ in her writing reflects notions of her life which have survived her feminist reappraisal. What I am highlighting in these examples is a tendency to read Wollstonecraft’s writing through a judgment of her character; a tendency which becomes emphasised in discussions of those writings of uncertain attribution, but which can also be seen at work in discussions of her more central publications. This tendency is apparent in Stewart’s comment on Eleanor Flexner’s remark that Wollstonecraft’s style in her reviews would have been influenced by the house style, and that she would have been unlikely to use her own signature since “no other contributor signed his own”. Stewart claims this “disregards the fiercely independent aspect of Wollstonecraft’s character”. She goes on to say: “[s]igning her name in defiance of convention is precisely the sort of thing Wollstonecraft might have done”. What is highlighted in this example is the degree to which an idea of Wollstonecraft the woman is utilized in assessments of her writing. The origins and authority for the characterisation of Wollstonecraft the woman are necessarily drawn

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44 ibid., p. 188. The moral connotations of “loose” and “informal” when applied to Wollstonecraft seem peculiarly apt.
45 Eleanor Flexner, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Biography*, p. 273. The question of Wollstonecraft’s signature as a reviewer belongs not only to contemporary accounts of her writing style, but is rooted in the history of review publications. The *Analytical Review* was originally the idea of Thomas Christie, whose prospectus was published as a preface to the first edition in May 1788. Christie disliked the sort of anonymous abstract commentary instituted by Ralph Griffith’s *Monthly Review* in 1749, and intended the publication to have “more of the analytical cast in it than any other”. The reviews were signed with letters or symbols which revealed the identity of the reviewer to those familiar with the world of reviewing, suggesting that the reviews were the opinion of an individual reviewer. See Derek Roper, *Reviewing Before the ‘Edinburgh’: 1788- 1802*, p. 22 and p. 264n. 35.
46 Stewart, 'Mary Wollstonecraft’s Contributions to the Analytical Review’, p. 189.
primarily from her writings - the only concrete material we have remaining of her life. A closed circle of assessing Wollstonecraft’s writings by recourse to her character (recognisable in her style), and employing the writings (particularly the fiction) to authorise ideas about her life and character, has been repeatedly drawn by critics and biographers. The gap between the character of Wollstonecraft and the writing of Wollstonecraft, if recognised at all, can be bridged by the one piece of sustained biographical criticism by an intimate contemporary. Godwin’s Memoirs remain the most important source for Wollstonecraft’s biography. His editing of his wife’s unpublished writings shortly after her death, and their publication in parallel to the Memoirs, established an intimately authoritative linking of her character as a woman and her work as a writer.

4. Her intellectual character

Godwin’s role in the creation of an iconography of Wollstonecraft remains ambiguous and, to a large extent, undigested. While his editing of the Posthumous Works and his infamous Memoirs have left a deep impression on the heritage of the Wollstonecraft canon, the extent of this impression, and the influence it has had on our understanding of her writings, is still to be fully understood. The boundary between Wollstonecraft’s plans for writings unpublished at her death and Godwin’s own agenda in offering her life and writings up for public scrutiny is difficult to locate. It is similarly difficult to imagine her response to his version of her life and character in the Memoirs.

47 The two existing portraits of Mary Wollstonecraft should also be mentioned. One depicting Wollstonecraft in 1792 by an unknown artist, commissioned by William Roscoe, hangs in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, the other is known to be by John Opie, depicting Wollstonecraft in 1797, and hangs in the National Portrait Gallery.

48 In my discussion of Godwin’s Memoirs of the Author of ‘A Vindication of The Rights of Woman’ all references are to Richard Holmes (ed.), Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, A Short Residence in Sweden and Memoirs of the Author of ‘The Rights of Woman’ (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). Godwin ends his Memoirs of Wollstonecraft with the following sentence: “While I have described the improvement I was in the act of receiving, I believe I have put down the leading traits of her intellectual character” (p. 273).
Tilottama Rajan’s article ‘Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel’, published in 1988, offers an interesting reading of Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs of Woman* in the light of contemporary “political fiction” and “the rise of hermeneutics”. In her positioning of Wollstonecraft Rajan takes a significantly different definition of Romanticism to that used by Gary Kelly. While Kelly’s work identifies Romanticism in the shift in interest towards the domestic and natural affections, for Rajan “what is distinctively romantic is the awareness of textuality”. She focuses on the “self-reflexiveness” of a text which “includes the process by which it is produced as well as its own self-commentary” (p. 22n. 2). When she applies this framework to Wollstonecraft’s *Wrongs of Woman* Godwin’s role in the production of the text we call Wollstonecraft’s last novel becomes crucial. She distinguishes between Wollstonecraft’s “pre-revolutionary first novel” and the late fragment by applying this organizing definition of Romanticism:

Mary Wollstonecraft’s first novel *Mary: A Fiction* is [...] not aware of itself as a text, it neglects the historicity that is part of both writing and reading [...]. *The Wrongs of Woman or Maria*, by contrast, raises textuality to thematic prominence (p. 225 & p. 223).

This sense of failure, or immaturity, in Wollstonecraft’s early novel and greater achievement (whether a more mature work, or more successful is undeclared) prioritises the disruptive presence of Godwin’s editing in the later novel. Godwin’s role as editor in presenting the fragment of Wollstonecraft’s work as an unfinished novel with a series of endings, his introduction to the work and his publication of it

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50 See Kelly *Revolutionary Feminism*, especially the first chapter ‘Gender, Class, and Cultural Revolution’, and p. 222n. 2 of Rajan’s article. Kelly’s definition of Romanticism, by emphasising a cultural shift prioritising domestic and familial affections establishes a framework in which Wollstonecraft’s work becomes both essentially Romantic and revolutionary in its elevation of domestic concerns as a locus of virtue. His definition of the domestic as including “the constitution of the quotidian, local and particular as ‘real’ life in contrast to the courtly and cosmopolitan, which were represented as artificial, fantastic and a mystification of ‘reality’” is at the same time an accurate description of Wollstonecraft’s concerns in her writing (p. 12). Rajan’s definition of Romanticism is a deconstructionist exercise, which focuses its attention on the text rather than the author, and allows a destabilising of Wollstonecraft as author, thus foregrounding Godwin’s edited publication of her works as ‘text’ in itself.
alongside the Memoirs with which it has become so closely associated, are for Rajan integral conditions of the novel itself, rather than interventions by another author:

Godwin's introduction, interpolations and conclusion must be considered part of the text, with the result that in this novel fictional mimesis is always already implicated in hermeneutic problems (p. 236).

By speaking of the novel as a complete and indivisible package of writing and re-writing (a 'text') Rajan removes the question of authorial intention and therefore of its possible analysis as a specific piece of writing by a specific (female) author at a specific historical moment. There can be no consideration of whether Wollstonecraft would have published the novel in this (admittedly intriguing) fragmented form. She goes on to explain the difference between the two novels in more detail:

since Mary was issued by its author it speaks to us in a historical present that reifies its truths as timeless. But since The Wrongs of Woman is an edited text it speaks to us from the past and allows us to see how both Wollstonecraft's imitation of reality and the strategies she uses to make us reconstitute that imitation are historically produced and subject to further interpretation (p. 236).

In the course of this passage Rajan slips from discussing the work by Wollstonecraft as it is presented by Godwin, to discussing it as if it were a collaboration between the two. The slippage occurs when Rajan uses the word "text", intending both the work as it was left in manuscript form by Wollstonecraft, and the work as we receive it today. Jerome J. McGann has suggested that "[t]he contemporary fashion of calling literary works 'texts' carries at least one unhappy result: it suggests that poems and works of fiction possess their integrity as poems and works of fiction totally aside from the events and materials describable in their bibliographies". While there is no manuscript of this late fragment existing without Godwin's organising influence, Rajan's decision to read the piece as if it were a deliberate exercise in open-ended

fragmented narrative disregards the existence of such a manuscript prior to Godwin’s publication. This treatment of the novel, which is the result of Godwin’s intervention, can be seen as an act of depreciating women’s literary history, because it removes the necessary concern for its author. In this case, what we call Wollstonecraft’s last novel, has become something quite different.

Virginia Sapiro complains of Rajan’s treatment of Wollstonecraft’s writing as an example of “the tendency to overtheorize literature”. She argues against Rajan’s approach with the plausible claim that “[s]urely even if one finds it appropriate to personify texts rather than their authors, it makes sense to call a draft a draft when one is dealing with intra- rather than inter-textuality”.

But Sapiro’s work on Wollstonecraft returns artistic authority to an unquestionable subjective intentionality which presents her writings as a transparent veil through which we can read Wollstonecraft the heroine: in this case the heroine of a narrative charting the progress of political philosophy. Sapiro maintains this line as an organising principle to the extent that she reads the narrative voices of Wollstonecraft’s writings as direct Wollstonecraftian speech: “We know from the texts referring to the narrator’s ‘real’ life that she faced the same issues there”.

In spite of the scare quotes, Sapiro repeatedly searches for confirmation of validity in biographical authority, in a real world outside the problematically fictional works.

Janet Todd highlights the problems caused by Godwin’s editing of Wollstonecraft’s last novel in her article ‘The female text - Edited’. She writes of Godwin’s “presence in the novel” as a factor emphasised by the coincidence of the resulting hybrid with certain trends in eighteenth-century fiction: “the eighteenth-century habit of elaborately pretending that a male author merely edits a woman’s papers” and “leaving a text unfinished as part of its finish”, citing Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* and Diderot’s *La Régissieuse* as examples. The familiarity of these fictional devices, she argues, allows certain assumptions about eighteenth-century

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52 Sapiro, *Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. 309n. 106.
53 ibid., p. 266. As I have discussed in my introduction, Timothy Reiss takes the line of authorial intention in relation to this novel to an equally absurd position when he ascribes an impressive agency to Wollstonecraft’s (unintentional) death.
fiction to “intrude to prevent a total severance of the two voices”. The resulting
“text” offers an intriguing problem in any attempt to comment on it as Wollstonecraft’s
writing, because Godwin “has the first and last words” and his “mind and prose enclose
and interpret Wollstonecraft’s novel, as they do her life and character in his
biography”. It is not surprising, then, that this “text” by Wollstonecraft has been
elevated from relative obscurity to pride of place in Wollstonecraft studies, for it offers
the sort of narrative disjunction and riddle so amenable to current theoretical
preoccupations. Jane Moore, for example, in an essay which claims to explore “the
possibility that deconstruction offers a useful mode of textual analysis both for feminist
readings of past texts and relatedly, necessarily, for current feminist approaches to the
politics of gender and literary criticism”, finds that this novel succeeds where the
second Vindication failed: “The Wrongs of Woman makes apparent what the
Vindication suppresses all along: this is the impossibility of treating literature and
philosophy as self-enclosed categories”.

By prioritising a concern with the displacement of “authorial intention as the
source and guarantee of meaning” which in turn “produces a fundamentally unstable
text whose competing discursive modes struggle for dominance”, Moore enables this
already authorially displaced “text” to be elevated as a more successful version of the
second Vindication, so that “The Wrongs of Woman in particular displays the conflict
between this period’s opposing discourses of collective radicalism and individual
Romanticism”. The question raised by Gillian Beer in her essay ‘Re-presenting
Women: Re-presenting the Past’ (published in the same collection) seems to touch on
this matter when she asks: “[w]hy do we so value gaps and contradictions? Is it
because it allows us to exercise a sort of social control, to represent ourselves as
outside history, like those nineteenth-century doctors who described their patients and
yet exempted themselves from the processes of disease and decay they described?”

Janet Todd, ‘The Female Text - Edited’, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 193;
ibid., p. 172. A similar elevation of this novel in relation to the second Vindication can be seen to
be taking place due to its apparent approval of female sexuality, in contrast to the Vindication’s
approval of rationality. I discuss this matter in chapters 3 and 5.
When read in isolation from its moment in women's literary history, then, a piece of writing such as Wollstonecraft's last novel is subject to readings which tend either to overvalue or undervalue the importance of Wollstonecraft as an author. In this novel the 'Death of the Author' (as exemplified by Rajan and Reiss) is literally an aspect of the text's textuality. At the opposite extreme, Sapiro reads the novel (and all of Wollstonecraft's narrative voices) as a recording of the author's personal story. While it is easy to say that neither position does justice to this peculiar piece of writing, it is more difficult to offer a clear path between the two polarities. Neither the sort of approach ridiculed by Roland Barthes' for locating the explanation of a text in the character of its author, nor his injunction that the author must be killed off, seem appropriate principles with which to approach Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel. A third position might introduce the complexities of gender in history, and the effects of a consciousness of gendered writing on the critic, into the debate. Since the female writer has not yet fully lived, she cannot be so casually killed off. Nancy Miller goes some way towards offering a way forward in her essay 'Changing the Subject: Authority, Writing, and the Reader'. Miller points out that:

the postmodernist decision that the Author is dead, and subjective agency along with him, does not necessarily work for women and prematurely forecloses the question of identity for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had, women have not [...] felt burdened by too much Self, Ego, Cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, and hence decentered, "disoriginated," deinstitutionalized, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, is structurally different.  

59 Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author' (1968), *Image/Music/Text*, tr. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142-8: "The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us" (p. 143; original emphasis). We might say that Wollstonecraft's work has been understood as the failure of Wollstonecraft's feminism.  

She concludes that the question of identity (as female subjectivity located in writing) "is irreducibly complicated by the historical, political, and figurative body of the woman writer" and that "the condition of dispersal and fragmentation that Barthes valorizes (and fetishizes) is not to be achieved but to be overcome". What this might suggest, then, for Wollstonecraft's last novel in particular, and for the past writing of women in general, is that a concern for the specificity (as opposed to universalisation under the heading of 'Woman') of female identity at the moment of writing needs to be addressed. This approach would have to avoid the Scylla of biographical criticism (which imposes a pre-formed notion of female identity onto the writing), and the Charybdis of de-authored textuality (which forecloses the question of female subjectivity prematurely).

To summarise, then, in each of the three examples of questionable authorship, a degree of what might be termed biographical interference seems to distort our reception of Wollstonecraft's writings. While it may be true that a reaching for biographical certainty in the face of authorial uncertainty is inevitable in these instances, I will demonstrate in the following chapters that a comparable critical conjunction of biographical preoccupation with assumptions about the presence of gender in writing is apparent in the ways in which Wollstonecraft has come to be institutionalised in literary history. A conceptual loop between Wollstonecraft the feminist and feminist perspectives on Wollstonecraft as an originator of feminist literary history is particularly apparent in feminist approaches to the second Vindication. A comparable effect is visible in pre-feminist approaches to a woman writer writing about women and writing in the late eighteenth century: in both cases, Wollstonecraft's writing tends towards a symptom of gender in writing. The following chapters are organised around the question of whether it is possible to read Wollstonecraft's writings without being haunted by the figure of Wollstonecraft-the-woman, and the domination of the writing by this figure in its various dramatic poses both during her life and since her death.

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Domenico Pellegrini, ‘The Persecuted Queen hurried at the Dead of Night into a Common Prison’ (1795)
Chapter 2
The Female Reader: Wollstonecraft, Burke and Patriarchalism

And lo! an amazon stept out,
One WOLLSTONECRAFT her name,
Resolv'd to stop his mad career,
Whatever chance became.  

When Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her Vindication of the Rights of Men in 1790, she was addressing a public letter to Edmund Burke, in direct response to his public letter of the same year to "a very young gentleman at Paris". This in turn was an open reply to Richard Price's politically fired sermon delivered at the Old Jewry meeting house on 4th November 1789. Such a chain of publications is not unusual in the context of the "pamphlet wars" from which Wollstonecraft's first piece of political writing emerged. This publication marked her break from being a writer of educational and occasional pieces, to becoming a recognisable (and remembered) voice participating in a debate

1 William Roscoe, The Life, Death, and Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke (Edinburgh, 1792); quoted by Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 97.
2 Burke informs the reader in his preface that "the following Reflections had their origin in a correspondence between the Author and a very young gentleman at Paris, who did him the honour of desiring his opinion upon the important transactions, which then, and ever since, have so much occupied the attention of all men"; Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris. By the Right Honourable Edmund Burke [1790], ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968; repr. 1983), p. 13. Further references to this edition will be given in the text after quotations. The "young gentleman" was Charles-Jean Francois Depont, whose letter to Burke of 4th November 1789 sparked Burke's first writing on the Revolution (see The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, ed. by T.W. Copeland and others, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958-78), vol. 6, pp. 31-3 and pp. 39-50).
concerning the most pressing issue of the day. Nevertheless it has often been passed over as a juvenile stage in the development of her feminism. Moira Ferguson plots Wollstonecraft’s career on a tangent from latent to overt feminism, assessing for example Wollstonecraft’s *Female Reader* of 1789 as an unformed precursor of her second *Vindication*: “still too fragmented for a sustained theoretical piece, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is in embryo here, waiting to be born from the union of her own experiences with qualitative historical change”. The first *Vindication* is overshadowed, and read through, our familiarity with the second, more famous *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. As Virginia Sapiro notes: “Wollstonecraft’s first major piece of political writing is [...] usually read as a minor and not very competent shot taken by a not yet famous writer at Edmund Burke and drowned out by Thomas Paine’s later, more famous barrage.” Marilyn Butler reproduces eleven pages of the first *Vindication* compared to seventeen of the second, in her anthology of publications contributing to *The Revolution Controversy*, although the former has a more direct claim to be counted in this collection. Claire Tomalin calls it “a ragbag into which Mary stuffed the ideas she had picked up over the past few years in her reading and conversation, without any attempt to sort them out or reason with Burke at the level he required”.

As this *Vindication* is presented to the reader as a direct response to Burke, it is also necessary to bear in mind the figure of Burke of the *Reflections* as her direct addressee. This *Vindication* argues on the grounds of rhetorical strategies and is as

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5 Wollstonecraft’s previous publications were: *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life* (1787); *Mary: A Fiction* (1788); *Original Stories from Real Life: With Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the mind to truth and Goodness* (1788); a translation of Jacques Necker’s *On the Importance of Religious Opinions* (1788), *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* (1790), and numerous review articles published in the *Analytical Review* from June 1788.

6 Moira Ferguson, ‘The Discovery of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Female Reader’*, *Signs*, 3 (1978), 945-57 (p. 948).

7 Sapiro, *Vindication of Political Virtue*, pp. 186-7. Bridget Hill notes that Wollstonecraft’s first Vindication “has been so overshadowed by her later *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that until recently it was an almost inaccessible text” (“The Links Between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay: New Evidence”, p. 183).


9 Tomalin, *Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 95.
concerned with the use of language as with the issues of revolutionary politics or rights. An assessment of the style and argument of Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, then, demands an assessment of the work it answers. Wollstonecraft claims that “many pages of the following letter were the effusions of the moment” in an “Advertisement” which plays on the image of the writer at her desk, with Burke's *Reflections* open before her (*Rights of Men*, p. 5). This chapter begins by considering Burke's *Reflections* as the object of Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication*; it goes on to consider an earlier political controversy between John Locke and Sir Robert Filmer as an analogue to the one between Wollstonecraft and Burke, in order to reclaim the *Vindication of the Rights of Men* as a critique of the patriarchalist assumptions displayed by Burke.

1. The transient topic of the day

Tom Paine accused Burke in the *Reflections* of creating “tragic paintings [...] calculated for theatrical representation” and recommended he “recollect that he is writing history, and not plays”. James Macintosh, in his response to Burke, called *Reflections* “in every respect a performance, of which to form a correct estimate, would prove one of the most arduous efforts of critical skill”. Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* repeatedly attacks Burke's *Reflections* for its “theatrical” style. Her accusation is intended to establish a clear division between Burke's play on his readers' patriotism and emotional responses, and her own prose, which is placed by contrast on the side of clear-sighted

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10 Virginia Sapiro agrees with “Wollstonecraft’s critics” on the fact that “*Vindication of the Rights of Men* is an attack on Edmund Burke more than it is a defence of the French Revolution” (*Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. 25).

11 Virginia Sapiro describes Wollstonecraft as “a consummate anti-patriarchal thinker in a way few better-known ‘anti-patriarchal’ thinkers have been or could even understand” (*Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. 28).

12 Wollstonecraft uses this phrase in her “Advertisement” to describe the degree of interest in the Revolution (p. 5).


15 See for example p. 8 and p. 15.
rationality. This posture characterises her Vindication as a work of its time. Its use of what Gary Kelly names the rhetorical figure "Vir bonus dicendi Deridus" of Tacitus's Dialogues, is an example of "[t]he association of different kinds of rhetorical style with different political structures [...] well-established [...] in eighteenth-century political debate". At the same time, the Vindication's claim to unadorned speech in relation to Burke's theatrical declamations prefigures the sentiment made memorable by Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads a decade later, which points an accusing finger at "the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country" as examples of "the multitude of causes unknown to former times [...] now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind".

Burke had directed a comparable accusation of theatricality at Dr Price, whose sermon to the "Revolution Society" is the point of departure for his letter:

Plots, massacres, assassinations, seem to some people a trivial price for obtaining a revolution. A cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouse the imagination, grown torpid with the lazy enjoyment of sixty years security, and the still unananimating repose of public prosperity. The Preacher found them all in the French revolution. This inspires a juvenile warmth through his whole frame (pp. 156-7).

He returns often to this image of the preacher in his pulpit, excited and "triumphant" at the events in France. His implication is that Dr Price is unaware of the real effects of the revolution, that he is responding only to an inaccurate theatrical image, and that Burke can provide us with the detailed visualization of the actual events behind Price's triumph. He accuses Price here of responding to the revolution as if to a cheap, exciting piece of

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16 Gary Kelly, Revolutionary Feminism, p. 87. See also Gary Kelly, 'Mary Wollstonecraft as Vir Bonus', English Studies in Canada, 5 (1979), 275-281.
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teatrical drama, blinded by scene-changes, stage-effect, spectacle. The passage paints Price as the man of bad taste - described in Burke's earlier 'Essay on Taste' as one

so continually in the agitation of gross and merely sensual pleasures, or so occupied in the low drudgery of avarice, or so heated in the chase of honours and distinction, that their minds, which had been used continually to the storms of these violent and tempestuous passions, can hardly be put in motion by the delicate and refined play of the imagination.18

Wollstonecraft draws on a comparable opposition between good and bad taste in her introduction to her novel Wrongs of Woman, in which she aligns this work with books which "delineate our finer sensations" in contrast to those relying on "stage-effect" to engage the reader's attention.19

In a review of Charlotte Smith's Emmeline for the Analytical Review in 1788, Wollstonecraft had already adopted "theatrical" as a term of moral and critical censure: she enquires of the hypothetical young female reader, in a clearly weighted question: whether "Lady Adeline's theatrical contrition did not catch her attention, while Mrs Stafford's rational resignation escaped her notice?"20 In this review, "theatrical" is defined largely by its opposition to "rational" ("theatrical contrition" is balanced in the second clause by "rational resignation"). As a posture taken against Burke, her assault on his "theatrical" style, then, situates her Vindication firmly within the tide of responses to the Reflections, and also within her already established aesthetic criteria. Marilyn Butler identifies as a characteristic of "the sixty or so authors of books and pamphlets who tried to refute Burke's position and to defend the revolution": an indignant response to "what they regarded as the sophistry of [Burke's] appeal to the irrational".21

19 Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, p. 74.
20 ibid., vol. 7, p. 27.
21 Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, p. 39. See also Bridget Hill's article; 'The Links Between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay: New Evidence' for a discussion of the similarities between Wollstonecraft's Vindication and Macaulay's Observations on the Reflections of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke on the Revolution in France. In a Letter to the Right Hon. the Earl of Stanhope (London, 1790). Wollstonecraft sent a copy of her Vindication to Macaulay in 1790 with a note expressing her opinion that "Mrs Macaulay Graham [...] contends for the laurels whilst most of her sex only seek for flowers", to
The following passage, taken from the *Vindication's* "Advertisement", establishes an opposition between plain speaking and equivocation, in a direct address designed to win her readers' approval by courting their confidence:

I have not yet learned to twist my periods, nor, in the equivocal idiom of politeness, to disguise my sentiments, and imply what I should be afraid to utter: if, therefore, in the course of this epistle, I chance to express contempt, and even indignation, with some emphasis, I beseech you to believe that it is not a flight of fancy; for truth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful (p. 7).

This passage anticipates the introductory statement of the second *Vindication*, in which Wollstonecraft rejects fine language and sophisticated argument in a trope of simplicity, described by Mary Jacobus as "claiming sense for women rather than sensibility". The earlier *Vindication* opens its attack on Burke by striking at the heart of what the author finds most objectionable in his writing; identified in her "Advertisement" as "the sophisticated arguments, that every moment crossed me, in the questionable shape of natural feelings and common sense" (p. 5). The passage makes a clear reference to Burke's famous earlier work in its use of the charged terms "sublime" and "beautiful".

Wollstonecraft introduces her *Vindication*, then, with a trope of simple unadorned truth standing against sophisticated equivocation. By accusing Burke of theatricality she is emphasising the stylistic strategies of his writing. Butler identifies a common "effect" of Burke's "tactics" in the "sometimes exaggerated posture of rationality" evident in his opponent's writing, a posture she finds "assorts ill with the natural style of a humane, impassioned individualist like Mary Wollstonecraft". But the tone adopted by the author of this *Vindication* deviates less from Wollstonecraft's earlier writings than Butler's which Macaulay replied in words which suggest she had already read it (p. 177). The letters are held in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, New York.

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22 See *Rights of Woman*, pp. 11-12; Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View', p. 54. In her introduction to the first *Vindication* Wollstonecraft rejects "those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence" - suggesting she is rejecting the usual (masculine) position of addressing women, rather than feminine language (p. 11).

comment suggests. Both the 1787 *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and the 1788 *Original Stories from Real Life* express a note of indignation at what the author identifies as “affectation” and “a false display of the passions” in the former, and “false politeness” by which “sincerity is sacrificed, and truth violated” in the latter.24

The terms Wollstonecraft uses in her “Advertisement” to denigrate Burke's strategy are already associated with feminine characteristics: equivocation, politeness, disguise, insinuation and flights of fancy.25 She later accuses Burke of employing the “doublings of cunning” and “subterfuges of inconsistency” (p. 29). Rousseau identifies “cunning” as one of the “natural” characteristics of the female in his influential *Emile*:

>Cunning is a natural gift of woman, and so convinced am I that all our natural inclinations are right, that I would cultivate this among others, only guarding against its abuse.26

A point Wollstonecraft responded to in her comment: “this partial moralist recommends cunning systematically and plausibly”.27

Wollstonecraft, then, in the opening pages of her *Vindication*, is by implication accusing Burke's prose of a certain effeminacy, and at the same time is making a claim for her own prose as a proper corrective, far from effeminate. While conscious of the associations between female writing and qualities unbecoming to proper discourse, she utilises this association to her own ends. As I discuss below, her reviewing voice in the *Analytical Review* articles performs a similar move when addressing itself to feminine writing.

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25 Jane Moore cites John Locke's equation between women and eloquence (“Eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived”) and refers to Rousseau’s comment (quoted by Wollstonecraft in the second *Vindication*) that “[a] man says what he knows, a woman says what will please; the one needs knowledge, the other taste; utility should be the man's object; the woman speaks to give pleasure” to support her view that “[t]he position of women in relation to men was roughly analogous to the position and function of figurative language in relation to a utilitarian one”. See Jane Moore, ‘Promises, Promises’, p. 160 & p. 159; John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 508; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* [1762], tr. by Barbara Foxley, ed. by P. D. Jimack (London: Dent, 1974, repr. 1989), p. 339; *Rights of Woman*, p. 97.
26 *Rousseau, Emile*, p. 334.
27 *Rights of Woman*, p. 95.
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2. A female production

Wollstonecraft’s first Vindication was published anonymously in its first edition, the identity of the author being revealed only in a second (largely identical) edition published three weeks later. At no point in the text of the Vindication does its author disclose her sex. The reader, as is evident in shocked reviews of the signed second edition, would have assumed it to be the work of a man. There is evidence to suggest that Wollstonecraft prided herself on her ability not to write like a woman - her reviews of novels in the Analytical Review confidently identify anonymous works as “a female production”, and at one point she adapts Pope's comment that “most women have no character at all” to “apply it to their production. - Novels”. It seems for these reasons appropriate to be cautious when making claims for a feminist intention (whether failed or not) available from Wollstonecraft's use of gendered metaphors in her attack on Burke.

Meena Alexander expressed disappointment in 1985 at Wollstonecraft's “play[ing] into the given perceptions of masculine and feminine” in her “symbolic cross-dressing”. Mary Jacobus says something similar of Wollstonecraft's claim to “useful” rather than “elegan[t]” language in her introduction to the second Vindication which Jacobus calls “a feminist preface to the Lyrical Ballads”. By seeking a primarily “feminist” intention in the passage, Jacobus is also led to express disappointment in the “alienated” result: “[l]inguistic pleasure (literary language) is placed on the side of the feminine; banned, like female desire”.

It remains the case that, as a woman, the author of the Vindication is accusing Burke of being too effeminate, and claiming a more masculine authority for the voice of

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28 Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler’s edition of the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft offers a clear editorial comparison of the two editions.
29 I discuss the Critical Review and Monthly Magazine’s reaction to Wollstonecraft’s second edition in chapter one of this thesis. See also the review printed in the Gentleman’s Magazine, 61 (1791), p. 151, which questions whether the writer might be “a fictitious lady”.
31 Meena Alexander, Women in Romanticism, p. 49.
32 Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View', p. 54.
her response. In so doing she dissociates her own voice from the froth of sensibility she finds in Burke, chastising him for his “sentimental exclamations”, “pampered sensibility”, and “fondly cherished romance” (p. 8, p. 9 & p. 44). She uses similar terms to rubbish women's trivial writings in her career as a reviewer. She says of Kearsly's *The Letters of Maria* (1790): “The sentimental rant in these letters leaves nature and common sense so far behind, that it is impossible to find any criterion to try it by, unless we were simply to tell our readers, that we laughed most heartily over the passages which the author laboured to render very pathetic”. David Simpson comments that in this *Vindication* “it is Burke himself who is feminized as a slavish sentimentalist and participant in an aristocratic-effeminate culture”.33

As a gendered assault, then, her *Vindication*, makes a claim to a virile and virtuous politics (in contrast to the corrupt and effeminate figuring of the old regime) comparable to Tom Paine's claim for a “gigantick manliness” in the new French republic, and James Mackintosh's description of the new politics as “original masculine thought”.35 These instances belong to what David Simpson has described as “the long tradition of radical references to the male propriety of reason” which figures the old regime of France, and aristocracy in general, as effeminate, and the advance of “Liberty” and “Reason” in positive accounts of the Revolution as a virile, masculine corrective.36 For Paine the opposition between masculine and effeminate politics is a manifestation of the more fundamental opposition between “Reason and Ignorance” as in the conclusion to the first part of *Rights of Man* he defines “two distinct and opposite forms” of government which

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33 *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 7, p. 329; original emphasis.
36 Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt against Theory*, p. 105. See also Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: Male and Female in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984) which argues that the history of western philosophy is rooted in the sexual metaphors of Greek theories of knowledge, and that Bacon’s science elaborated these metaphors (pp. 10-17, esp. p. 12). In Bacon’s *The Masculine Birth of Time*, the narrator informs the reader: “I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave” (B. Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon: An Essay on its Development from 1603 to 1609 with New Translations of Fundamental Texts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University press, 1964), p. 131).
"erect themselves on the two distinct and opposite bases of Reason and Ignorance". Wollstonecraft's opposition between "equivocation" and "truth" touches on her interest in a politics (and writing style) characterised by a weighted opposition between a "sophistical" and "natural" approach. Her accusation against Burke is that he indulges in "sophistical arguments" disguised by "the questionable shape of natural feelings and common sense" (p. 5).

Wollstonecraft's assault on the Reflections exhibits a clear intention to taint Burke's character with the same brush she uses to criticise his prose. The author of the Vindication makes a claim to rational, clear argument sweeping away the sentimentalism of traditionalism and prejudice. The vocabulary of masculinity she uses to bolster her own prose seems to be put under some strain by her sex as a writer, but is not unusual from a defender of "the rights of men". The gendered nature of the assault is heightened when, in a moment of mock gallantry, she inverts the chivalric code openly valued by Burke as a positive virtue in the Reflections. By picturing their debate as a duel, she claims a strength and skill in her own prose absent from her opponent's. He in turn is imagined as either too boyish or too effeminate to wield the necessary weapons, and in either case is in need of patronage:

it would be something like cowardice to fight with a man who had never exercised the weapons with which his opponent chose to combat (p. 10).

By resorting to a code of chivalrous honour represented by the duel, Wollstonecraft aims a blow at the heart of the Reflections and its author. Yet by refusing to challenge her opponent to the imagined duel, she also makes a play of striking at his male honour, by representing him as unfit to fight within the terms of the chivalric code he values so highly. Lawrence Stone has noted suggestions in late seventeenth-century playwrights that the "crim.con." case which superseded duelling as a way to regain honour lost in an act of female adultery, was a way to protect meek husbands from death at the hands of more

37 Paine, Rights of Man, p. 379.
aggressive lovers. The duel (as a means of settling arguments) favoured the more virile or “manly” opponent.38

The image is not only scornful. The weapons Wollstonecraft denies Burke the skill and strength to use are her prized tools of rational argument: the sort of disciplined individual sceptical rationality Burke rejects as an assault on the collective knowledge represented by tradition and cultural prejudice:

in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings [...] We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages (Reflections, p. 183).

Wollstonecraft repeats her challenge later in another image drawn from a code of male honour when she says: “in controversy, as in battle, the brave man wishes to face his enemy, and fight on the same ground” (p. 29).39 Burke is again presented as an emasculated figure cowering from rational debate in the shadows of eloquence as Wollstonecraft positions herself as “the brave man”. Her macho stance is compounded by a repeated use throughout the Vindication of the adjective “manly”. When she claims not to be “prevented” by Burke's sophistry from “giving a manly description” of the rights of men, she is claiming to be more manly than Burke. This offers an explanation of her odd accusation that even “the Ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations” (p. 8). An accusation which might seem to reflect back on the author, unless we take note that - in a move which again echoes her reviewing of female novelists - she disassociates herself from the negative

38 Lawrence Stone, The Road to Divorce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 237. As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, Wollstonecraft's challenge to Burke is not only based on gendered writing: a man might not be 'manly' enough to duel if he is effeminate, but also if he is not mature enough or not civilized enough.

39 In contemporary responses to Burke political debate is often figured as a battle. James Mackintosh describes the "weapons of controversy" and "this miscellaneous and desultory warfare", Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy, p. 91.
attributes suggested by the dismissive tone of “the Ladies”. There is both a class and
gender differential in operation in Wollstonecraft's insult: she does not wish to be counted
as a lady either by her class or her sex.

One might also suggest that she was playing on rumours of homosexual scandal
which had surfaced regarding Burke’s conduct. Mary Poovey finds in Wollstonecraft's
stylistic machismo a “mask” of masculinity covering her anxiety about being a woman
writing “during a period in which self-assertion was considered “unladylike”. The
argument turns on whether anonymous publication is considered an act of genuine
modesty or a disguise of (usually female) sex. It seems best to err on the side of caution,
and suggest that anonymous publication was often simply a convention of the pamphlet
war, but when an anonymous author is disclosed as female, her initial claim to anonymity
is read as a disguise of her sex.

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40 The statement recalls Shaftesbury's claim that “[e]ven the fair sex, in whose favour we pretend to
make this condescension [towards a scrupulous nicety], may with reason despise us for it, and laugh at us
for aiming at their peculiar softness” (Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics
41 Wollstonecraft’s tendency to accuse Burke of an effeminate style might suggest she was aware of the
consternation surrounding his defence of homosexual offenders. In 1774 he campaigned successfully for
the pardoning of a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery who was facing a death penalty for sodomy. In 1780
his outrage at the public murder of two men convicted of sodomy caused a reaction against his
homosexual sympathies in a number of newspapers, provoking a libel suit against the Public Advertiser
(later withdrawn); see Stanley Ayling, Edmund Burke: His Life and Opinions (London: Murray, 1988),
pp. 53-4. There is a similar case for reading Wollstonecraft’s digressions on madness as a personal attack
playing on rumours about Burke’s state of mind. Accusations of madness, circulating before 1789,
surface in various responses to his writings on the French Revolution: Fox described the Letter to a
Member of the National Assembly (1791) as “mere madness” and in 1790, Windham recorded his view of
Burke as “a man decried, persecuted and proscribed; not being much valued, even by his own party, and
by half the nation considered little better than an ingenious madman!”; see The Writings and Speeches of
Edmund Burke: Volume VIII: The French Revolution, ed. by L.G. Mitchell, textual editing by William B.
42 Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, p. xv.
43 The Critical Review piece cited above takes the anonymity of the first Vindication to imply that the
writer is not female. L.G. Mitchell lists 15 anonymous publications, and a further 17 (not including
Wollstonecraft’s) issued without the author’s name (including those by Catherine Macaulay and William
Roscoe) in his Appendix of “Contemporary Works Relating to Burke’s Writings and Speeches on the
French Revolution” (The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, pp. 533-7).
Wollstonecraft's accusation of theatricality is a response in particular to Burke's use of emotive rhetoric in the beautifully executed scenes where he places the figure of the Queen of France centre stage of the revolution as political theatre, reducing the events of the revolution to a potent image of the violated heroine. As I will be discussing these scenes in some detail, I reproduce them in full below:

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France, then the dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, - glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendor, and joy. Oh! What a revolution! and what an heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. - But the age of chivalry is gone (pp. 169-70).

This passage occurs shortly after the dramatic reconstruction of the scene of the King and Queen of France being “taken” in their beds:

A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with (...) blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poinards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and

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44 Burke, Reflections, p. 170.
through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment (p. 164).

The complex events of the Revolution have been distilled here into a potent image of the young queen as if on a wheel of fortune, enduring the dizzy revolution of the wheel from the highest to the lowest point of its circumference. As this image occurs immediately after Burke has introduced the figure of the "elevated sphere she just began to move in", this "revolution" of the wheel of the Queen's fortune coincides with an image of the heavenly sphere rotating bringing into the scene an idea of great natural and divine forces at play. It is certainly theatrical in the sense of positioning the reader of the Reflections as an audience witnessing the effects of the revolution as a personal attack on the body of the heroine of a staged scene involving complex, awe-inspiring machinery.

Burke's description of the threatened "almost naked" Queen has also characteristics of a climactic scene in a gothic novel, with the queen adapted to the role of the endangered heroine. The positioning of the queen as heroine of the novel of the revolution demands a concurrent positioning of the reader as audience to this personal narrative. The reader is prepared for the passage reproduced above by the one immediately preceding which marks a transition from rhetoric to narrative. There is a distant control in Burke's admonition of the National Assembly:

This Assembly, which overthrows kings and kingdoms, has not even the physiognomy and aspect of a grave legislative body - *nec color imperii, nec frons erat ulla senatus*. They have a power given to them, like that of the evil principle, to subvert and destroy; but none to construct, except such machines as may be fitted for further subversion and further destruction (p. 161).

The passage immediately following this makes a sudden shift in tone and attention:

Who is it that admires, and from the heart is attached to national representative assemblies, but must turn with horror and disgust from such a profane burlesque, and abominable perversion of that sacred institute? (p. 161).
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The effect is surprising. It is achieved though an interrogative tone directly addressing the reader. The question is weighted with emotive pointers directing the reader's response: "heart", "horror", "disgust", "profane", "perversion", "sacred" and offers the reader an association either with the sacred or the profane. This quick intimacy is heightened by the next sentence. The reader's abhorrence is secured in the imperative contained in the fluid parameters of the claim that "[I]overs of monarchy, lovers of republicks, must alike abhor it". Then the reader is led to a position of direct empathy with the members of the National Assembly under the direction of Burke's own empathetic stance: "I am sure many of the members who compose even the majority of that body, must feel as I do" (pp. 161-2).

The passage continues this line of attention to feeling by directing the readers to transfer their feelings in response to this passage onto the imagined sympathies of a hypothetical member: "How must that assembly be silently scandalized [...] How must they be inwardly indignant [...] What must they have felt [...] What must they have felt [...] What must they have felt" (p. 162). Again the repetition of the interrogative maintains the reader's direct involvement in the passage, asked to assess their own emotive response to Burke's images, then displace them onto silent (but presumably privately subversive) voices in the Assembly.

When Burke begins his dramatic narrative, then, the reader is prepared to apply these feeling responses aroused in the preceding paragraphs. The move from rhetoric to narration is marked with a trope of historical realism: "History will record, that on the morning of the 6th of October 1789..." (p. 164). By sectioning off the following narrative within a historic time scale, Burke places the reader in the seat of spectator to an emotive tableau. The scene itself is powerful; the queen at rest, trusting, vulnerable, private, is surprised by the entrance of "a band of cruel ruffians and assassins reeking with [...] blood" (p. 164). The contrast between the isolated queen, her solitary sentinel murdered by the invaders, and the noise and number of the intruding group is heightened by the sexual
threat such a scene implies: the vulnerable “persecuted woman” against a band of evil men entering her privacy, reinforced by the detail that the queen/heroine is “almost naked”.\footnote{Visual representations of the scene in engravings and oil paintings play on a similar imagery of the queen as violated virtue: in D. Pellegrini’s “The Persecuted Queen hurried at the Dead of Night into a Common Prison” (1795) she is figured in a flimsy white night-robe, surrounded by dark, heavy, uniformed armed guards: the contrast between the exposed femininity of the queen, and the armed strength of the guards is heightened by the oppressive gloom of a prison corridor, lit by a single torch. The guards are all looking directly at the queen (heightening the sense of her exposed vulnerability) and she is the only figure looking out of the picture, as if imploring sympathy or protection (see fig. 1). Vivien Jones discusses Wollstonecraft’s version of this scene in her \textit{Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution} in ‘Women Writing Revolution: Narratives of History and Sexuality in Wollstonecraft and Williams’, \textit{Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832}, ed. by Stephen Copley & John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 178-199.}

Burke's later passage about the queen recalls the charged emotions of this earlier scene. Again he makes a quick step from rhetorical declamation to personal involvement. In one sentence he describes the queen as a classical heroine, with “the dignity of a Roman matron”. The following paragraph makes a sudden leap into Burke's private history, the shift being marked by his decline into the first person: “It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the queen of France”. The sentence has the effect of lending Burke's detailed scenes the authority of intimacy, in contrast to the distanced speculation of the preacher in his pulpit. Burke pits the authority of direct experience against the rhetoric of Price's sermon.

In these climactic scenes Burke fuses political argument and moral sentiment, with the intention of exposing Price's sermon as irresponsible cant when faced with the effect of its ideas on real individuals. In this way Burke's writing on the French revolution has affinities with Helen Maria Williams's \textit{Letters From France}, in which the author presents legislative and social changes in detailed scenes of their effect on the lives of individual characters.\footnote{See Helen Maria Williams, \textit{Letters from France} [1790-6] (Delmar, New York: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975).} Burke makes a point of describing the revolution as “a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions” implying that the events in question take place not only in the social world but in the literary imagination of a highly educated man (p. 175). This sense is reinforced by his reference to classical tragedy in describing the events of the revolution:
we are so made as to be affected at such spectacles with melancholy sentiments upon the unstable condition of mortal prosperity, and the tremendous uncertainty of human greatness [...] in those natural feelings we learn great lessons [...] in events like these our passions instruct our reason [...] when kings are hurl'd from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama [...] we behold such disasters in the moral, as we should behold a miracle in the physical order of things (p. 175).

A moral pressure is exerted on the reader, so that the political ideas and ideals involved in the events described by Burke fade to the backdrop of a Greek Tragedy, to which the reader is audience, and offered a spectator's seat from which to react with suitable emotion: "[n]o theatric audience in Athens would bear what has been borne" (p. 176).

The success of the revolution is re-written as the failings of a corrupt population unwilling to defend the honour of an innocent woman in distress. The reader is shamed into response:

little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult (pp. 169-70).

The image of "ten thousand swords" is particularly powerful. It is this image that many satirical responses to Burke's Reflections take as their object. With an implication of

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47 See for example the following contemporary cartoons: "Don Dismallo, after an absence of sixteen years embracing his beautiful vision", 'H.W.' 18th November 1790: British Library 7679; "Don Dismallo running the Literary Gauntlet", 'H.W.' 1st December 1790: British Library 7685; "The knight of the Woeful Countenance going to Exterminate the National Assembly", 'H.W.' 15th November 1790: British Library 7678. Coleridge parodies Burke's eulogy to the Age of Chivalry in a marginal note to his Conciones ad Populum, or Addresses to the People: "The age of Priesthood will soon be no more - that of Philosophers and Christians will succeed, and the torch of Superstition be extinguished for ever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous Loyalty to rank [...] that subordination of the Heart, which keeps alive the spirit of Servitude amid the empty forms of boasted Liberty! etc." The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, vol. 1, Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion, ed. by Lewis Patton & Peter Mann (Princeton & London: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 65-70; reprinted in Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy, p. 197. James Mackintosh parodies the "ten thousand swords" image in his Vindiciae Gallicae (quoted in text below). Wollstonecraft's response is however particularly sensitive to the gender implications of the image.
phallic response to a desirable woman, it calls the readership of the *Reflections* to account. It is theatrical, as both Paine and Wollstonecraft suggested and Burke acknowledged in his reference to the Athens audience, but in the sense of the theatre of the imagination. The swords are real only within the world of romance literature; the reader is moved to defend the threatened honour of the heroine of a romance.

The effectiveness of this passage is partly due to a coexistence in sentimental literature of an overt intention of moral improvement and a covert effect of sexual arousal. In being so moved, the reader is aligned with Burke against the “ruffians and assassins”. The political situation is reduced to a programmatic gender and class opposition; Royalty and the State imagined in the figure of the queen, the revolutionary forces in contrast as a mob of ravaging men. In this picture the reader, if a man of honour, would have no choice but to draw his sword in defence of an image of virtue and beauty, persuaded to do so by a sense of wronged honour combined with the fantasy of a sexual reward. Burke writes of his own response, again relying on the powerful image of threatened innocent honour in the shape of the defenceless female to inspire empathy in the reader:

> Influenced by the inborn feelings of my nature, and not being illuminated by a single ray of this new-sprung modern light, I confess to you, Sir, that the exalted rank of the persons suffering, and particularly the sex, the beauty, and the amiable qualities of the descendant of so many kings and emperors, with the tender age of royal infants, insensible only through infancy and innocence of the cruel outrages to which their parents were exposed, instead of being a subject of exultation, adds not a little to my sensibility on that most melancholy occasion (p. 168).

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48 In Gothic novels there is a tendency towards delicious detail in lingering scenes of exquisite rape-threat: Lewis’s *The Monk* is the prime example of this, one in which however the threat is realised. Janet Todd says of Ann Radcliffe’s novels: “Taking the archetypal sentimental story of a fatherly male menacing a weak but virtuous female [...] she heightens the elements, obscures and magnifies, making a moody menacing patriarch whose immense shadowy outlines suggest incest, rape and murder” (Todd, *Sign of Angelica*, pp. 255-6). In Burke’s *Reflections*, the revolutionary mob takes the place of the “menacing patriarch”.
This is a conventional sentimental tableau, the family group shown in a composition of beautiful suffering which suspends the narrative movement of the novel of sensibility in order to allow the reader time to call all feeling responses into action. Burke leads the reader by confessing his own "sensibility" as a weakness, clearly a weakness to be admired and copied. The response in question is sanctioned by "nature", with the "new-sprung modern light" of rationality figured as an unnatural interloper. The combining of ideas of sensibility (especially in the mention of "infancy and innocence") with ideas of chivalric honour ("the sex, the beauty, and the amiable qualities" of the queen) in this passage leads Burke to his famous lament for the expired age of chivalry.

Burke offers an explanation for the success of the revolution in a vocabulary of failed sensibility, establishing a weighted opposition between "chivalry" and "oeconomists, and calculators". But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness (p. 170).

49 "In the later novel of sensibility the emotional message is carried in sentimental tableaux which stop the action [...] so the viewer can learn sympathy and respond tearfully" (Todd, Sign of Angellica, p. 140). The tableau of the Royal family in distressing and poignant circumstances is present in visual art of the period: Charles Benezach's "The Last interview between Lewis the Sixteenth and his Disconsolate Family" (1794), M. Bovi's "The king's Departure from his Disconsolate Family" (1794) and Mather Brown's "The Final Interview of Louis the Sixteenth" (1795) reproduced in David Bindman, The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution (London: British Museum Publications), p. 32, p. 50 & p. 23.

50 Lawrence Stone demonstrates in his study of the history of divorce that the eighteenth century saw a "very slow and very hesitant redefinition of male honour" so that the "spirit of bourgeois prudence and calculation was seen to be triumphing over the spirit of chivalry and the readiness to risk and take life in defence of honour" (Stone, The Road to Divorce, p. 237 & p. 238).
Burke's defence of the Queen of France in terms of chivalric honour seemed to cause Wollstonecraft distress. The last sentence in particular returns repeatedly to her first *Vindication* (and subsequent writings), and is always paraphrased or directly quoted by Wollstonecraft with barbed irony.

Burke defines chivalry as a subduing force, in terms which echo the Marquis of Halifax's definition of the power of vulnerable femininity "to subdue your Masters".\(^52\)

It was this opinion which mitigated kings into companions, and raised private men to be fellows with kings. Without force, or opposition, it subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and gave a domination vanquisher of laws, to be subdued by manners (pp. 170-1).

Wollstonecraft reads chivalry as sensibility, and this subduing force as a destructive illusion, directly opposing Burke's "pleasing illusions, which made power gentle".\(^53\) Her scorn for Burke's sentimentalism in this form - sensibility as a mitigating force of social taste against vice - is overt. It can be heard in the stress on "smearing" in the following passage:

A surgeon would tell you that by skinning over a wound you spread disease through the whole frame; and, surely, they indirectly aim at destroying all purity of morals, who poison the very source of virtue, by smearing a sentimental varnish over vice, to hide its

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\(^51\) Gary Kelly notes that Burke's lament for the "age of chivalry" echoes a passage from Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*: "[honourable love] that great preservative of purity, that powerful softener of the fiercest spirit, that mighty improver of the rudest carriage, that all-subduing, yet all exalting principle of the human breast, which humbles the proud, and bends the stubborn, yet fills with lofty conceptions, and animates with a fortitude that nothing can conquer". Quoted by Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*, p. 20; citing Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* [1765], 8th edn (Dublin, 1796), p. 11.


\(^53\) *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 5, p. 8; Burke, *Reflections*, p. 90.
natural deformity (p. 25).

It spills out in open moral castigation (echoing the tone of voice of Mrs. Mason chastising her wards in Wollstonecraft’s 1788 work for children, *Original Stories from Real Life*) when she directly quotes Burke's phrase:

> Who will venturously ascend the steeps of virtue, or explore the great deep for knowledge, when *the one thing needful*, attained by less arduous exertions, if not inherited, procures the attention man naturally pants after, and vice 'loses half its evil by losing all its grossness.' - What a sentiment to come from a moral pen! (pp. 24-5).

It is manifested again in the following passage which takes issue with Burke's description of the women on the streets of Paris as “the vilest of women”:

> Probably you mean women who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never had had any advantages of education; or their vices might have lost part of their abominable deformity, by losing part of their grossness (p. 30).

In this instance she re-presents the mitigating elegance which for Burke is instinctive, as the result of social advantage.

She picks up the phrase again in her second *Vindication*, where she paraphrases it when discussing Rousseau's description of Sophy's education in *Emile* as “an education of the body”, in a passage which includes him among other writers who have “said that merely the person of a young woman [...] is very pleasing”:

> Rousseau's observations, it is proper to remark, were made in a country where the art of pleasing was refined only to extract the grossness of vice (*Rights of Woman*, p. 92).

This is a typically Wollstonecraftian offering of mitigation, calling as it does on echoes of her earlier outrage at Burke's vision of sensibility. “The art of pleasing” refers to both a
fashion of desirability in women, and the system of gallantry in general, as well as registering some sexual undertone. The stress on "only" underlines the unsuitability of the refinement in question, and the point is reinforced by the use of Burke's phrase, which had become by this stage a marker of indignation and scorn in her writing.

To summarise then: three aspects of Burke's *Reflections* preoccupy Wollstonecraft in this *Vindication*: his "sentimental" style, his representation of Price as an irresponsible radical, and his treatment of the Queen of France as a threatened gothic heroine. In the passage discussed above, Burke's prose plays on images of threatened feminine purity in the body of the Queen, enlisting the reader as her noble defender. Images of desirable and undesirable femininity play an important role in the *Reflections*, and are adapted to trigger responses to masculine or monstrous women in debate at the time. By figuring the state of monarchy as a threatened woman, ideas of patronage and honour are brought into play on the side of conservatism against the dangerous mob of rampaging revolutionaries. At another point in his argument - one which again surfaces in Wollstonecraft's response - the gendered imagery is reversed, and the revolutionary spirit is offered in the image of "the vilest of women", an image playing on cultural fears of the unfeminine woman.

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55 Burke, *Reflections*, p.85; *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 5, p. 30. The image of the monstrous unfeminine woman recurs throughout writing of this period, and reaches its apex in Richard Polwhele's poem, 'The Unsex'd Females' published in 1798, in which Wollstonecraft in particular is depicted as a monstrous, unfeminine woman "despising NATURE's law" (line 2); see extract printed in Vivien Jones (ed.), *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 186-91 (p. 186). A letter in the 1795 edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine* describes the "natural characteristics of women" as "[s]oftness, delicacy, benevolence, piety [...] timidity" and claims that "she in whom they are wanting disgusts; she appears to be an unnatural and monstrous being"; see *Gentleman's Magazine*, 65 (1795), 102-5 (p. 103). For visual analogies, the following engravings offer images of monstrous and unfeminine women taking part in the Revolution: W. Dent, *Female Furies or Extraordinary Revolution* (18th October 1789), reproduced in David Bindman, *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution*, p. 93; James Gillray, 'A Representation of the horrid Barbarities practised upon the Nuns by the Fish-women, on breaking into the Nunneries in France' (21st June 1792): British Library 8109. Claudia Johnson discusses "charges of sexual denaturalization" made against women writers in particular in *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 8-12. See also G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*: 
Chapter 2

Wollstonecraft's answer to these charged female images is characterised by outright scorn. She describes Burke's response to the Queen as the reflex of a "debauched" sensualist to a coquette:

if you had had but half as much reverence for the grey hairs of virtue as for the accidental distinctions of rank [...] you, who could not stand the fascinating glance of a great Lady's eyes, when neither virtue nor sense beamed in them (p. 18).

And she shifts the emphasis of Burke's description of "the vilest of women" from its evocation of a cultural reaction to masculine women, to an instance of her ongoing argument about the influences of education on human nature in the passage quoted above, by applying Burke's fearful image to real women leading real lives: "[p]robably you mean women who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never had had any advantages of education" (p. 30).

Burke's play on female iconography is answered by Wollstonecraft's point that women and the aristocracy are effeminised by a similar artificial elevation:

The vulgar, and by this epithet I mean not only to describe a class of people, who, working to support the body, have not had time to cultivate their minds; but likewise those who, born in the lap of affluence, have never had their invention sharpened by a necessity are, nine out of ten, the creatures of habit and impulse (p. 16).

If the revolution is figured as an innocent woman in danger of rape unless the reader spring to the rescue of her honour with his sword, then Wollstonecraft, by rejecting the image, could be said to have evaded Burke's rhetorical strategy. James Mackintosh also targets Burke's eulogy for chivalry in his *Vindiciae Gallicae*:

Crusades were an effervescence of chivalry, and the modern St. Francis has a knight for the conduct of these crusaders, who will convince Mr. Burke, that the age of chivalry is not past, nor the glory of Europe gone for ever. The Comte d'Artois, that scion worthy of Henry the Great, the great rival of the Bayards and Sidneys, the new model of French Knighthood, is to issue from Turin with ten thousand cavaliers to deliver the peerless and immaculate Antoinett of Austria from the durance vile in which she has so long been immured in the Thuilleries, from the swords of the discourteous knights of Paris, and the spells of the sable wizards of democracy.\(^56\)

The difference between Wollstonecraft's and Mackintosh's response is important. Mackintosh makes a straightforward exchange between Burke's heroine and the image of Marie-Antoinette as a whore available from popular engravings and pornographic material of the time.\(^57\) Wollstonecraft questions her status as a heroine, scornfully emphasising her lack of the Wollstonecraftian qualifications of "virtue" or "sense". This is in part a feature of her response to the *Reflections* as a work marked by its author's "sentimental jargon", a response she had developed to the many sentimental novels which irritated her taste as a reviewer (p. 30). Of *Mount Pelham, A Novel* she wrote in 1789: "This is the varnish of sentiment to hide sensuality", prefiguring (and to a certain extent explaining) her distaste for Burke's phrase about vice losing half its evil by losing all its grossness.\(^58\) In a review of *The Child of Woe* of the same year she offers a "receipt for a novel" which consists of "[u]nnatural characters, improbable incidents, sad tales of woe rehearsed in an affected, half-prose, half-poetical style, exquisite double-refined sensibility, dazzling beauty, and *elegant* drapery" - at least some of which are the characteristics she takes offence at in


\(^{57}\) Lynne Hunt, in her intriguing book *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1992) demonstrates that in representations of revolution "sexual degradation went hand in hand with political corruption" (p. 105). The works in question are, in particular, *Vie de Marie -Antoinette, femme de Louis XVI, roi des Français: Depuis la partie de son pucelage jusqu ’ à l ’ an premier Mai 1791*, and the following two volumes of the same work (*Vie Privée, libertine et scandeleuse de Marie-Antoinette d ’ Autriche, ci-devant Reine des Français*). Hunt remarks that "the pornographic engravings are interspersed with political engravings of aristocratic conspiracy: [...] Such juxtapositions [...] underlined the connection between sexual misbehaviour and aristocratic conspiracy" (p. 107).

\(^{58}\) *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 7, p. 83.
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Burke's writing. She begins this review with the barbed comment: "The Child of Woe having no marked features to characterize it, we can only term it a truly feminine novel".

At this point it seems necessary to pause and consider Wollstonecraft's use of gendered language. One recurrent feature in feminist criticism of Wollstonecraft is a general irritation with her denigration of feminine characteristics, and her valorising of male characteristics. This often leads to a strained explanation of her apparent rejection of cultural signs of femininity, which, it is argued, mask a more profound championing of the female. Critics sometimes tie themselves into linguistic and theoretical knots when confronted with Wollstonecraft's apparently outright sexism. Jane Moore, for example, in a passage which begins by highlighting the "nascent feminist interests" of the second Vindication, offers Wollstonecraft's rejection of femininity in this work as a rejection of "an artificial literary rhetoric of femininity and identifying instead with a philosophical rational discourse, which although controlled by the phallus is not inherently masculine".

The first Vindication is sometimes excused by being a precursor to, and hence a less conscious or more juvenile work than, the second Vindication. The outright scorn for women writers exhibited in her reviews has been overlooked, or re-written as "pioneer feminist literary analysis" by "a feminist literary critic" who "resists the model of

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59 ibid., p. 82; original emphasis.
60 ibid., p. 82.
61 Virginia Sapiro comments that "She seemed at times to reject any notion of an essential core-meaning to maleness and femaleness. Although she used highly gendered language at least partly in the common manner of the day, apparently accepting words like masculine, manly, and effeminate as synonymous with virtue in the first two cases and the lack of it in the second, she seemed to regard these characteristics as fully available to men and women, depending on the state of society." (Vindication of Political Virtue, pp. 269-70). Claudia Johnson, in recognising that Wollstonecraft "consistently presumes that manliness and liberty are synonymous", avoids making this a problem to Wollstonecraft's "feminist critique" by allowing that "[w]omen and men both are kept in subjection by effeminacy" (Claudia Johnson, Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s, p.30 & p. 27). See also Janet Todd, "The Language of Sex in a Vindication of the Rights of Woman", Mary Wollstonecraft Newsletter, 1 (1973): 10-17; Harriet Guest, 'The Dream of a Common Language: Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft', Textual Practice, 9, 2 (1995), 303-23.

62 Jane Moore, 'Promises, Promises: the Fictional Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft', p. 158.

63 Mary Poovey tends to represent the first Vindication in this way: "Wollstonecraft has simply not found her own place within the ideology that surrounds her, and, as a consequence, she still lacks the self-consciousness and self-confidence truly to be the first of that hybrid 'new genus'" (The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, p. 68).
femininity typically inscribed in the texts she reviews". This seems to me to be a sort of double-think that is necessary when Wollstonecraft is positioned as a "pioneer feminist", and when her writings are then assessed as pioneering feminism; a model to which they do not readily always agree.

When Wollstonecraft designates a novel “feminine” she is expressing irritation at a manifestation of weakness and artificiality in a genre, which aligns with her irritation at similar qualities in the female gender. The argument is at least partly explicable by her favoured notion of perfectibility, which posits a future paradise of rational beings governed by rational principles, and from which ideal future position she criticises the present. With regard to this Vindication, it is necessary to point out that Wollstonecraft’s use of gendered metaphors, such as “manly” and “feminine” refer to an idea of virtue as well as sex. This in turn takes place within a political debate characterised by an opposition between a republicanism governed by reason, figured as virile and masculine, and a monarchism governed by tradition and prejudice, figured as effeminate and corrupt.

For this reason I feel Gary Kelly overstates the sexual politics in this Vindication, when he explains the reissuing of the Vindication in a second, signed, edition as a move “to capitalize more fully on the way she, as a woman, had turned the tables on Burke in terms of a gendering of ‘mind’ and culture advanced by Burke himself”. It might after all be too restrictive to consider Wollstonecraft’s use of “manly” only as a gendered metaphor. The Oxford English Dictionary records that, by 1790, “manly” operated as an adjective in three areas of definition: “belonging to human beings”, “possessing the virtues proper to a man”, and “grown up”. All three are pertinent to the debate Wollstonecraft is engaged in here. The first surfaces in her preoccupation with a definition of humanity as different from the brute species (involving an idea of humanity as an evolving category), the second in her interest in gender differentials operating in moral ideas (the word had been applied

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64 Mitzi Myers, “Sensibility and the “Walk of Reason”” in Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics, pp. 120-144 (p. 120, p. 122. & p. 123).
65 See for example Rights of Woman, p. 10, where she describes “improvable reason” as the “dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation” and argues that women, “in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties”. See also Rights of Men, where she describes the utopian future governed by rationality (Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 5, p. 24).
66 Gary Kelly, Revolutionary Feminism, p. 100.
to unfeminine women as early as 1511), and the third in her championing of a rational independence from traditions and habits associated with prejudice and infantile dependence on received ideas.

Wollstonecraft's scorn for Burke's vision of the Queen of France resembles her scorn for the heroines of the sentimental novels she reviewed. Several reviews take issue with the moral effect on young readers of heroines marked out by beauty and sensibility, rather than any degree of virtue or sense. The overlaps between her criticism of Burke's prose, and that of the feminine novelists is partly a consequence of the fact that she wrote the *Vindication* after two years of reading and writing reviews of scores of "feminine" novels which shared the irritating characteristic of "[t]he affected fashionable cant of sensibility". She accuses Burke of indulging a similar vice when she remarks on his "sentimental exclamations" and "pampered sensibility" (p. 8 & p. 9).

There is, then, a case for situating Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication* as a symptom of the frustrations of the female reader, as well as the female writer. Her response to Burke (in a similar way to her response to Rousseau in her second *Vindication*) could be said to be driven by indignation at a writer of political morals whose works excluded, or at least did not take account of, a female reader. Burke's earlier *Philosophical Enquiry into the origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), a target of Wollstonecraft's irritation surfacing in both *Vindications*, makes no allowance for a female reader. The definition Burke offers in this work of "BEAUTY" in terms of "generation" confidently takes an abstract image of the female as an object of aesthetic gaze, the embodiment of the beautiful. The thinking subject on whom this object makes its impression is assumed to be male:

> The object therefore of this mixed passion which we call love, is the *beauty* of the *sex*. Men are carried to the *sex* in general, as it is the *sex*, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal *beauty*.\(^6\)

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\(^{61}\) *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 7, p. 152.

\(^{62}\) Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 66; original emphasis. Further references will appear in the text after quotations.
Beauty is defined as that which individualises the impulses of general lust, both are read as a force drawing men to women. The syntax throughout Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* consistently conflates the reader, Burke, and a general masculine “we” whose behaviour is explained by the aesthetic qualities of “the sex”. When Burke declares “we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us” the sentence hinges on a gendered division (p.116). The “we” and “us” identify the statement's direct authority with a general male subject. This work might be said not only to assume a male reader, but to be dependent on a male reader to make any sense of it. The definition of the beautiful would be upset by a female audience, as it relies on a reflex of male desire for “the sex”.

Tom Fumiss argues in his discussion of ‘Gender in Revolution: Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft’ that the *Philosophical Enquiry* “is written explicitly and exclusively from a male perspective”. He applies a similar reading to Burke's description of the Queen “almost naked” as an oedipal rape fantasy, suggesting that it “takes on structural features which relate it directly to Freud's descriptions of the dynamics of the ‘dirty joke’ - which typically involves obscenity and aggression towards a woman made unavailable through social constraints”. He suggests that the “effect of such a joke” depends upon “a voyeuristically inclined third person” and that it is worth “speculating on the way Burke’s text positions its reader as that third person”. His speculation on a “kind of complicity” between Burke and “his male radical readers through a shared aggression towards the female emblem of aristocratic society” leads to a valuable question: “what if this ‘he’ was a ‘she’?” Wollstonecraft's response to Burke's *Reflections*, and particularly to his eulogy to the Queen, can at least partly be read as an answer to this question.

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70 ibid., p. 80.

71 Susan Khin Zaw takes issue with Fumiss' version of Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication*, suggesting that he views “Wollstonecraft’s first *Vindication* in terms of her second” and for this reason takes “Burke’s genderisation of the sublime and the beautiful, and his treatment of Marie-Antoinette [...] as the focus of Wollstonecraft’s response”. While I might accept (albeit in a more qualified form) her perception of “a characteristically male tendency to conflate gender and sex, and a concomitant disinclination to take female intellectual efforts seriously”, I am suggesting that Wollstonecraft’s response to Burke in her first *Vindication* is a moment of anti-patriarchal consciousness evoked in a female reader encountering Burke’s
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The issues of gender at play in the debate between Burke and Wollstonecraft are not easily assimilable to late twentieth century understandings of gender metaphors. Marilyn Butler stated in 1984 that “we lack commonly accepted rules for reading books like Burke’s Reflections, Paine’s Rights of Man, Wollstonecraft’s Rights of Woman, or Godwin’s Political Justice”. We are too fully equipped by a history of feminist enquiry with a critical monitor of disparaging, if superficial, associations between the female and negative halves of oppositional equations to approach without bias the more subtle, locally charged issues that are invested in these gendered references. It is not simply the case that Wollstonecraft is making an assault on Burke’s use of female iconography to denigrate the revolution. Her stance in this Vindication makes use of a vocabulary of masculinity and femininity unfamiliar to modern feminist concerns, and shaped by a prior gendering of aristocracy as effeminate, which is concerned with distancing itself from contemporary qualities of a corrupt femininity.

I have tried in this discussion to highlight the difficulty Wollstonecraft, and her critics, suffer in the pressure that her inherited vocabulary of republican virtue exerts towards a misogynistic understanding of gender difference. The issue is further complicated by suggestions that Wollstonecraft enjoyed being read as if she were a male writer, or at least, not a female writer. As a reviewer she was persistently patronising towards “feminine” writers, suggesting that one author will “employ her time better when she is married”, and committing “high treason to our fair readers” when she declares that projection of a male reader: Wollstonecraft had no sword with which to defend the Queen. See Susan Khin Zaw, “Appealing to the head and heart”: Wollstonecraft and Burke on Taste, Morals and Human nature, Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth Century Art and Culture (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 123-41 (p. 124 & p. 125).

73 Virginia Sapiro makes the point that “[m]any terms that play important roles in Wollstonecraft’s texts have undergone substantial changes in the way they are generally understood. Some were changing in her day. Some, such as Gothic, had a political buzz in her day that we no longer hear. The point is not just that we might be misguided by reading some words anachronistically, although this is the case. [...] The fact that Wollstonecraft was a woman often speaking of women pushes us toward certain interpretations of words such as virtue or sensibility rather than others; that ‘push’ may be misdirected” (Sapiro, Vindication of Political Virtue, p. xviii).

"we open a novel with a degree of pleasure, when written by a lady, is not inserted in the title page". She is confident in her identification of female writing (designating anonymous productions to have been "evidently written by a lady") so that we might speculate on her consciousness of her own writing, defining itself against this sort of "flimsy" style. There is also a degree of pride to be heard when she records later in her career: "my host told me bluntly that I was a woman of observation, for I asked him men's questions". There is evidence that she assumed her polemical writing would be read by an educated male audience; the second Vindication makes a direct plea in the final paragraph to "ye men of understanding". While Burke's Reflections was issued as a pamphlet costing three shillings, Wollstonecraft's response was published as a book costing a pound, putting it beyond the finances of most women. She is, after all, writing about women in these Vindications - in a similar way to her writing about "Lady" novelists in her reviews - and in both cases the act of writing differentiates the enquirer from the object of enquiry.

David Simpson's assessment of Wollstonecraft's place in the late eighteenth-century convergence of discourses concerning economic and sexual liberty in chapter 5 of his book Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt against Theory (1992), situates her Vindications in a context of debate marked by gendered rhetoric. He summarises her second Vindication as a work insisting on 'reason' "as a faculty common to men and women, and only monopolized by men as a result of interest and habit", identifying this work as "perhaps the summary expression in this period of the tendency in the radical method toward equality of the sexes". While he gives this chapter the title 'The Case for Female Reason', there is one interesting aspect of the way the first Vindication makes a claim for "Female Reason" unmentioned in his discussion. It is to Wollstonecraft's gendering of 'Reason' that I will now turn my attention.

75 Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 7, p. 192 & p. 121 (original emphasis). She praises Catherine Macaulay in her second Vindication, for producing writing in which "no sex appears" (Rights of Woman, p. 118). I discuss the implications of this phrase further in chapter 4.
76 Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 7, p. 191.
77 ibid., vol. 6, p. 248 (original emphasis).
78 Rights of Woman, p. 223.
79 David Simpson, Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt against Theory, p. 106.
4. The case for female reason

In the course of criticising Burke for allowing his reason to be “dupe to [his] imagination” Wollstonecraft accuses him of actively silencing the voice of his reason, and produces a long passage which insists without further comment on the female gender of reason:

did you not sometimes angrily bid her be still, when she whispered that you were departing from strict truth? Or, when assuming the awful form of conscience, and only smiling at the vagaries of vanity, did she not austerely bid you recollect your own errors, before you lifted the avenging stone? Did she not sometimes wave her hand, when you poured forth a torrent of shining sentences, and beseech you to concatenate them - plainly telling you that the impassioned eloquence of the heart was calculated rather to affect than dazzle the reader, whom it hurried along to conviction? Did she not anticipate the remark of the wise; who drink not at a shallow, sparkling stream, and tell you that they would discover when, with the dignity of sincerity, you supported an opinion that not only appeared to you with one face; or, when superannuated vanity made you torture your invention? - But I forbear (p. 59).  

The passage opposes truth and eloquence in a similar way to the “Advertisement” discussed above. It is another example of Wollstonecraft claiming masculine authority for her writing by aligning herself and her argument with the clarity of unadorned speech, directed by reason, and dressing Burke in the drapery of cunning eloquence. But by presenting reason as female, Wollstonecraft manages at the same time to authorise her own voice by assuming her sex's familiarity with, and implied prior right to, the voice of reason.  

This passage, and the general stance of the Vindication which it exemplifies,  

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80 For a full discussion of the feminisation of abstract virtues and forces see Marina Warner, Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985), especially chapter 12 in which she outlines the epistemological and cultural origins of feminised iconographies.  
81 This issue is complicated by the anonymity of the first edition, as discussed above.
play on an association between masquerade or disguise and (sexual) immorality. It occurs immediately after she has openly expressed "contempt" for Burke's "rhetorical flourishes and infantine sensibility"; she is deliberately equating his writing style, and the emotive effect of his writing, with the assumed tricks of "feminine" cunning (p. 58). Earlier in the *Vindication* she states her opinion that "cunning has ever been a substitute for force" (p. 52). The force of her own argument, it is implied, is based on clear reasoning, that of Burke on the deceit that is the refuge of the weak. Again this can not be said to be a clearly gendered opposition. It works on several overlapping ideas of gender, so that the femininity with which she equates Burke's writing is a corrupt, artificial state of weakness, associated with both the aristocratic and the infantile.

She does not, in spite of her claim, "forbear" for very long. Later in the *Vindication* she introduces an oppositional image of reason and feeling which, by feminizing reason, takes issue with Burke's argument about common sense as a cultural inheritance of communal and historical knowledge. In Burke's argument, individual reason is a fallible and precocious guide, usurping an intuitive knowledge based on an accumulation of past communal experience preserved in inherited institutions and cultural habits. ‘Common sense’ in this sense is common to all as the sum experience of the history of civilised nations. Wollstonecraft writes:

> [Poets] must, it is clear, often cloud the understanding, whilst they move the heart by a kind of mechanical spring; but that 'in the theatre the first intuitive glance' of feeling should discriminate the form of truth, and see her fair proportion, I must beg leave to doubt. Sacred be the feelings of the heart! concentrated in a glowing flame, they become the sun of life; and, without his invigorating impregnation, reason would probably lie in helpless inactivity, and never bring forth her only legitimate offspring - virtue. But to prove that virtue is really an acquisition of the individual, and not the blind impulse of unerring instinct, the bastard vice has often been begotten by the same father (p. 31).

The clouded understanding manipulated by poets is associated with Burke's clouding of the political argument in his "rhetorical flourishes". This image echoes and prefigures a
long series of oppositions established by Wollstonecraft between a clouded or "false"
medium and clarity or truth (which she often figures as the "light" of enlightened reason.)

In the second Vindication she criticises Rousseau's method of retreating into an idealised
past as a way of escaping the clouded medium of a corrupt present:

had Rousseau mounted one step higher in his investigation,
or could his eye have pierced through the foggy atmosphere,
which he almost disdained to breathe, his active mind would have
darted forward to contemplate the perfection of man in the
establishment of true civilization, instead of taking his
ferocious flight back to the night of sensual ignorance (Rights of
Woman, p. 21).

She is in agreement with Rousseau's intention to transcend the distortions of a corrupt
present, but takes issue with his retreat into a mythic state of nature, accessible only in the
distant past. Her view here, as elsewhere, has much in common with Blake's prophetic
imagery of humanity chained or shrouded in illusions. The cloud is an image of the
distortions of sensibility as the medium through which women experience the world, as
well as the corruptions of wealth and privilege in general, from which she derives her idea
about women and kings suffering from the same fantasies. In an argument attempting to
account for "the fondness for dress, conspicuous in women" she equates the pressures of
femininity with those of hereditary wealth:

Hereditary property sophisticates the mind, and the unfortunate
victims to it, if I may so express myself, swathed from their birth,
seldom exert the locomotive faculty of body or mind; and, thus
viewing everything through one medium, and that a false one, they
are unable to discern in what true merit and happiness consist
(Rights of Woman, p. 161).

82 I am thinking in particular of Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: "If the doors of perception
were cleansed, everything would appear infinite" (in Romanticism: An Anthology, ed. by Duncan Wu
(Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 84), but there are interesting and suggestive ways in which Wollstonecraft's
and Blake's works make contact. See Michael Ackland, 'The Embattled Sexes: Blake's Debt to
Wollstonecraft in the Four Zoas', Blake, 16 (1982-3), 172-83; Nelson Hilton, 'An Original Story',
Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality, ed. by Nelson Hilton & Thomas Vogler (Berkeley: University of
In her discussion of Rousseau’s assertion that girls have a natural propensity for “dolls, dressing and talking” Wollstonecraft returns again to this image of a false medium in a simile with monarchy:

men of the greatest abilities have seldom had sufficient strength to rise above the surrounding atmosphere; and, if the page of genius have always been blurred by the prejudices of the age, some allowance should be made for a sex, who, like kings, always see things through a false medium (p.48).

In Wrongs of Woman the false medium reappears as the suffocating atmosphere of the marriage from which Maria struggles to escape. The narrator presents her memory of leaving her marriage in a vocabulary of escape from this false medium; in this case the distorting pressure of financial dependence, the powerlessness of a married woman:

I almost feared that the coach would break down before I got out of the street; and, 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.\(^3\)

When she says that poets “cloud the understanding”, then, Wollstonecraft is using the “cloud” to stand for a kind of false consciousness, a distorting illusion belonging to the present, barring the spectator from a direct apprehension of truth. In so doing, she is accusing Burke of hiding within the “gorgeous drapery in which you have enwrapped your tyrannic principles” (p. 37). The image takes up Burke’s defence of the “pleasing illusions” of a civilised nation, associated by Wollstonecraft with the rhetorical style of Burke’s writing - she mounts an attack on his “piety” as “affectation” which she calls a “rant to enable you to point your venomous dart, and round your period” (p. 26).

Wollstonecraft here, as elsewhere, is claiming visionary status as a woman unaffected by the illusions of the ‘false medium’ she associates with a female imagination: literally one of

\(^3\) Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, p. 158.
the “men of the greatest abilities [who] have seldom had sufficient strength to rise above
the surrounding atmosphere” mentioned in the second *Vindication*.

The “mechanical spring” touched by the poets is echoed in the second *Vindication* where a similar phrase denotes instinctive rather than reasoned response to stimuli:

> In the infancy of society, when men were just emerging out of barbarism, chiefs and priests, touching the most powerful springs of savage conduct, hope and fear, must have had unbounded sway (*Rights of Woman*, p. 20).

She is drawing on ideas of sensibility as an internalised system of heightened response, an instinct which bypasses “the tedious labour of ratiocination” (p. 30).\(^4\) This is part of her disagreement with Burke’s idea of an instinctive common sense which he posits as an authority above individual reason. Burke argues that this is an active monitor of truth:

> In England we have not yet been completely embowelled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals (p. 182).

Wollstonecraft satirises this feeling monitor as “a kind of mysterious instinct [...] supposed to reside in the soul, that instantaneously discerns truth” (p. 30; original emphasis).

Having attacked Burke’s prioritising of instinctive feeling over reason, Wollstonecraft claims value for feeling in the passage in question i.e., by redefining it within a gendered

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\(^4\) As G.J. Barker-Benfield comments, Wollstonecraft’s notion of sensibility was rooted in “the late eighteenth century’s common understanding of the nervous system”, which developed out of post-Restoration anatomical science and philosophy. Locke’s (1690) *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* “pivoted on the ‘concept and definition of sensation’”, and itself was rooted in Newton’s physics, particularly his description of nerves in *Principia* (1687). Barker-Benfield describes the journey of ‘sensibility’ as a concept from the early eighteenth-century discourse of physiology; Bernard Mandeville’s *A Treatise of Hypochondriack and Hysteric Passion* (1711), David Hartley’s *Observations on Man* (1749), and Dr. George Cheyne’s correspondence with Samuel Richardson, in which he “transmitted the physiological aspect of sensibility to Richardson by way of his detailed response to Richardson’s most intimate physiological needs” - “Cheyne seems to have been Richardson’s primary source for the version of the nerve paradigm injected into his novels, and thereby into the mainstream of sentimental fiction” (Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 1-36, esp. p. 3, p. 6 & p. 7). See also Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 17-28.
image of sexual union. Feeling becomes “the sun of life”: registering classical (Apollonian) imagery, she masculinizes a traditionally feminine trait. Her inversion of the more common gendering of reason as masculine and feeling as feminine is emphasised by the image of procreation in which they play a particular part. She draws on a traditional iconography of sexual union in which the female is “inert” and “helpless” without the active “invigorating impregnation” of the male. A union of the two forces gives birth to reason.

This is an instance of a crucial aspect of Wollstonecraft's thinking, often simplified by critics who overemphasise her championing of reason at the expense of feeling; a reading which fits a feminist epistemology seeking (understandably) to de-couple the traditional pairing between women and emotion.\(^5\) It is particularly interesting here, occurring as it does within a piece of writing which goes to such lengths to claim authority for its voice as one of rational debate in opposition to Burke's “infantile sensibility”.

Reason is not only claimed - as Mary Jacobus remarks - “over [women's] dead bodies”, but as an essentially female quality, which at the same time is only fruitful if fired by feeling.\(^6\) The author of this *Vindication* is claiming a direct access to reason while projecting an image of Burke masquerading in the artificial petticoats of sensibility. This is an instance of what John Whale has described as Wollstonecraft's attempt to “reconstruct[] rather than demystify[] emotional value”.\(^7\) He identifies a paradoxical line in Wollstonecraft's writing as a “celebration of divinely sanctioned rationality”.\(^8\) What we see in her response to Burke is a complex series of manoeuvres, some of which employ gendered metaphors in operation in political discourse. There is only a portion of these available to an investment of Wollstonecraft in feminist history; namely those arising from our knowledge of the writer of this *Vindication* as a woman. However, it is also possible

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\(^5\) For a full discussion of the nature of biological essentialism, and its effect on feminist thinking, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, esp. chapter 1 (pp. 1-34).

\(^6\) "A plain-speaking utilitarian speaks not so much for women, or as a woman, but against them - over their dead bodies, and over (having attempted to cast it out) the body of the text too: 'I shall be employed about things, not words!'", Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View', pp. 54-5.


\(^8\) ibid., p. 180.
to read Wollstonecraft’s first *Vindication* as a significant, and intriguing, critique of the patriarchalist assumptions of Burke’s argument, by considering it in relation to Locke’s *Second Treatise Concerning Government*. By looking at the *Vindication* in this context, I will argue for its recognition as an important contribution to the history of feminist thought.

### 5. Property and patriarchalism

Marilyn Butler identifies a central pillar to the structure of Burke's *Reflections*, which she aptly describes with an architectural image:

> The skills are architectonic, yet (in the newer architectural taste) irregularly so: the main ‘feature’ of the *Reflections*, what in a more formal composition one might call the centrepiece, is Burke's lyrical eulogy of Louis XVI of France, depicted as the wronged father of his family of twenty-five million [...]. Marie Antoinette is portrayed as all that is delicate and feminine, semi-divine and yet vulnerable, Woman as seen in the chivalric tradition, calling upon men for protection.\(^9\)

Burke draws on familial imagery to draw the Revolution as an unnatural overturning of natural structures. We can trace through the *Reflections* a pattern of anxiety in recurrent images of cohesion and dispersal. Burke's most stated fear of the revolution he is imagining is one of an anarchism figured as the inevitable consequence of things falling apart because the centre cannot hold. In the following passage he emphasises a crucial relationship between “[o]ur political system” and a model of nature, at the centre of which acts a divine “wisdom”:

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\(^{9}\) Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy*, p. 34.
Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete. [...] In this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars (p. 120).

This passage exemplifies one of the dominant strategies of the Reflections, to portray human government in such a way as to justify monarchy as a reflection of divine will, and to reinforce this image with the model of a domestic family. At the centre of the three structures (political, natural and familial) is a figure of unquestioned benevolent paternal authority.

Wollstonecraft introduces her attack on Burke as one concerned with "foundation" not "superstructure":

attacking the foundation of your opinions, I shall leave the superstructure to find a centre of gravity on which it may lean till some strong blast puffs it into the air (p. 9).

The image is appropriate: Burke's Reflections expresses an anxiety about revolution as a centrifugal movement, an attack on the "centre of gravity" drawing anarchic chaos into patterns of social hierarchy. This "centre of gravity" is located in the father/king figure; the essential architectural key stone to a perpetuating pattern of property inheritance. The "foundations" Wollstonecraft is attempting to excavate are the dual pillars supporting Burke's argument: property inheritance and the power of the father/king figure.
Wollstonecraft's architectural vocabulary echoes Locke's refutation of Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680) in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), and positions her writing in the political camp of Lockean contract theory. Locke uses a similar image to represent his critique of patriarchalist argument, in a passage concerning Robert Filmer's fundamental image of the father as microcosmic king:

> the Thing [Fatherly Authority] is there so taken for granted without Proof, that I could scarce believe my self, when upon attentive reading that Treatise, I found there so mighty a Structure rais'd upon the bare supposition of this Foundation.\(^9\)

Locke later describes Filmer's "Supposition of a natural Right of Dominion over his Children, by being their Father, and this Title of Fatherhood" as "the main Basis of all his Frame", suggesting that without the foundation of this central pillar Filmer's argument would fall apart (p. 176). In discussing Filmer's assertion of Adam's "Absolute Unlimited Sovereignty" proving that "Men are not Naturally Free", Locke claims:

> This first erroneous Principle failing, the whole Fabrick of this vast Engine of Absolute Power and Tyranny, drops down of it self, and there needs no more to be said in answer to all that he builds upon so false and frail a Foundation (p. 190).

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9. Wollstonecraft seems to have read Locke; in her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* she describes his "definition of liberty" as an origin for "the elements of the Declaration of the Rights of Man", probably referring to his *Essay Concerning Liberation* (1667), his *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689, 1690, 1692, 1714), and his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), in which he argued against the divine right of kings (*Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 6, p. 16). The philosophical catechism which begins chapter 1 of the second *Vindication* seems to recall Book II, Chapter 1, of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) (*Rights of Woman*, p. 14). Virginia Sapiro comments on the tendency to explain Wollstonecraft's political philosophy as "a late eighteenth-century Locke in drag", but she accepts that Wollstonecraft's "radicalism is grounded in Lockean terms" although "her works from the 1790s are at least as infused with a language of republicanism as of legal rights" (*Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. xx). For an analysis of women's position in contract theory, see Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988).

Locke often uses italics to mark out his incorporation of Filmer's vocabulary, phrases from Filmer's argument against republican arguments. Wollstonecraft's critique of Burke draws on Locke's architectural metaphors, suggesting that she was aware of his arguments against Filmer's *Patriarcha*.

Filmer's case can be paraphrased in a few lines: the power of a king is unquestionable, liberty is unnatural, the Bible proves the former by stating that Adam was the first king, and the sons of Adam were kings, so royalty descends in a direct line of inheritance from the first man to kings of today (kingdoms record different branches of Adam's family). So any movement of popular uprising is a breaking of God's law, and therefore a blasphemous crime. In the course of his argument, Filmer makes a direct link between the power of kings and that of fathers. It is this idea, and the way it surfaces in Burke's *Reflections* that I wish to indicate here.92

Filmer's argument relies on the supposition that kings are fathers, for only in this case can the commandment "Honour thy Father" be used to justify the divine power of kings.93 If Adam was king because he was father of his children, then kingship itself is an extended state of paternity:

> It is true, all Kings be not the natural parents of their

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92 Burke's *Reflections* draws on the reader's investment in what Carole Pateman has termed "traditional patriarchal thought" which "assimilates all power relations to paternal rule". In Burke's *Reflections* this figure is foregrounded in a concern with patrilineage and in passages defending 'the family' against the anarchic Revolutionary mob (Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, p. 22). Michael McKeon recently offered a definition of patriarchalism as "the traditional regime that is replaced by the modern conception of gender difference", after "foundering [...] at the end of the seventeenth century [due to] political developments" in his essay 'Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28, 3 (1995), 295-322 (pp. 296-7). In this essay McKeon takes issue with a universalising notion of patriarchy in an argument which performs what Carole Pateman identifies as "a confusion [which] arises because 'patriarchy' has yet to be disentangled from patriarchal interpretations of its meaning" and which allows "modern society" to be "pictured as post-patriarchal and patriarchy [to be] seen as a pre-modern and/or familial social form" and results in patriarchy being "reduced merely to the displacement of early familial relationships onto the political realm." See Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, chapter 2, 'Patriarchal Confusions', pp. 19-38, esp. p. 21 & p. 22. See also Judith M. Bennett, 'Women's History: a Study in Continuity and Change', *Women's History Review*, 2, 2 (1993), 173-84 and 'Feminism and History', *Gender and History*, 1 (1989), 251-72, where Bennett reiterates the importance of critiques of specific patriarchal moments.

subjects, yet they all either are, or are to be reputed, as the next heirs of those progenitors who were at first the natural parents of the whole people. [...] As long as the first Fathers of families lived, the name of Patriarchs did aptly belong unto them. But after a few descents, when the true fatherhood itself was extinct, and only the right of the Father descended to the true heir, then the title of Prince or King was more significant to express the power of him who succeeds only to the right of that fatherhood which his ancestors did naturally enjoy. 94

The proof offered for this argument underscores the role of the father as king to his family in the chapter ‘Of the Agreement of Paternal and Regal Power’:

If we compare the natural duties of a Father with those of a King, we find them to be all one, without any difference at all but only in the latitude or extent of them. As the Father over one family, so the King, as Father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole commonwealth [...] all the duties of a King are summed up in an universal fatherly care of his people. 95

The power of the father, and by inference, that of the king, is created by the dependency of the son on the will of the father for his inheritance. Will as a legal document of legacy derives directly from this fact of paternal control of inheritance. Filmer touches on the role of women when he states:

There could be no law against adultery or theft, if women and all things were common. 96

Women and property are syntactically equal: that which is owned, and therefore that which can be stolen from the owner. At the same time there is a suggestion (in the possible

94 ibid., pp. 60-1 (original emphasis).
95 ibid., p. 63.
96 ibid., p. 65. See Pateman’s analysis of ‘Genesis, Fathers and the Political Liberty of Sons’, chapter 4 of The Sexual Contract, pp. 77-115, esp. pp. 104-115, where she observes that “all the stories of original contracts have a singular feature in common. Freud’s stories, like those of Sir Robert Filmer and the contract theorists, begin with a father who is, already, a father. [...] But a father cannot become a father unless a woman has become a mother, and she cannot become a mother without an act of coitus” (p. 104).
differentiation offered by “or” in the first clause, “and” in the second) that women are the mediators of property. That is, adultery is a crime when primogeniture is in operation.

And primogeniture is the key stone of patriarchalist political theory, which carries with it a network of ideas about women as the mediators through which the next generation of inheritors of a family's name and property are gestated.\footnote{See Genevieve Lloyd, \textit{Man of Reason}, pp. 2-37.}

Wollstonecraft calls this system of inheritance of property and power directly to account in the second \textit{Vindication} when she complains that “[t]he \textit{rights} of humanity have thus been confined to the male line from Adam downwards” (Rights of Woman, p. 99; original emphasis). In the first \textit{Vindication} she remarks on “all the unnatural crimes which the laudable, interesting desire of perpetuating a name has produced” in a long discussion of the benefits of abandoning a system of primogeniture; stretching as far as love replacing “gallantry”, the removal of “[l]uxury and effeminacy” from “noble families”, “women” acting like “mothers”, and “the fine lady” becoming a “rational woman” in fulfilling “her part of the social compact” (pp. 22-4). In place of primogeniture, she argues:

\begin{quote}
The only security of property that nature authorises and reason sanctions is, the right a man has to enjoy the acquisitions which his talents and industry have acquired; and to bequeath them to whom he chooses (p. 24).
\end{quote}

Locke writes in the \textit{Second Treatise} that:

\begin{quote}
every Man has a \textit{Property} in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The \textit{Labour} of his Body, and the \textit{Work} of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatesoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his \textit{Labour} with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his \textit{Property} (pp. 287-8).
\end{quote}
In her response to Burke's passage describing the "choice of inheritance" which gives "our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood" (quoted above) Wollstonecraft again recalls Locke's theory of "the Property of labour" (p. 296):

For it is a farce to pretend that a man fights for his country, his hearth, or his altars, when he has neither liberty nor property. - His property is in his nervous arms - and they are compelled to pull a strange rope at the surly command of a tyrannic boy, who probably obtained his rank on account of his family connections (p. 15).

In his description of the revolution as a mob threatening the queen's virtue, Burke is drawing on his metaphor of familial relations ("a relation in blood") for a political system. He imagines for the reader the threat of the revolutionary forces to the state as a threat to a woman deprived of the protection of her husband:

this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment (p. 164).

The syntactical parallel of "king and husband" - the two terms offered laterally instead of hierarchically - is echoed in Burke's later eulogy on the death of the age of chivalry, where "king" and "father" are offered on equal terms:

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order [...]. Regicide, and parricide, and sacrilege, are but fictions of superstition, corrupting jurisprudence by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father, are only common homicide (p. 171).

This passage is difficult in the way it contains two conflicting intentions. The fear of downwards levelling enacted in the descending syntax of the first sentence expresses anxiety for loss of a valued hierarchy: "but a man [...] but a woman [...] but an animal". It
offers the spectre of a reductivism beyond egalitarianism, until all is reduced to the lowest animality and individuated humanity is lost in the process. But this striving for ordered differentiation is countered in the last sentence by an odd syntactical move which makes “king”, “queen”, “bishop” and “father” perform on a horizontal line of value. The argument can be paraphrased; if chivalric values are abandoned in favour of enlightened progress we have to abandon the pleasing illusion of status and hierarchy. No one would be any more valuable, significant or important than anyone else. Murder would then be simply murder whether the victim is a king or a subject. But the inclusion of “father” in the list of differentiated victims syntactically excludes the “man” of the first sentence from the status denoted by “common homicide” in the last. Killing a father is not, in Burke’s valued system, simply homicide. By giving the father an equality of syntactical value in the passage, Burke implies that the father of a family serves the same significant function as the king of a country.98

Wollstonecraft picks up this passage in her *Vindication*. There she writes:

‘Regicide and sacrilege are but fictions of superstition corrupting jurisprudence, by destroying its simplicity. The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, are only common homicide.’ - Again I agree with you; but you perceive, Sir, that by leaving out the word *father*, I think the whole extent of the comparison invidious (p. 25; original emphasis).

By ‘agreeing’ with Burke here, and in this case underlining her agreement, she seems conscious (or at least wishes to make the reader conscious) of having located the method of his argument. Burke’s intention in the passage in question is to align the reader in a position of agreement with the author by presenting an undigestible scenario in the voice

98 Until 1790 women found guilty of ‘petty treason’ could be burnt at the stake. Petty treason included any crime against a representative of the king, i.e., forging coins as well as murdering husbands. George III meliorated the punishment to hanging then burning on the grounds that “the natural modesty of the female sex forbids the exploring and public mangling of their bodies” (William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 Vols (London, 1774), vol. 4, p. 204). The last woman to be burnt alive for husband-murdering was Katheryn Hayes, on 3rd November 1726. The last woman to be hanged then burnt was Christian Murphy, 18th March 1789. I am grateful to Dr. A. D. Harvey for drawing my attention to this information.
of extremist opinion: that the crimes of "regicide" and "sacrilege" are "superstition". If the reader can agree with the extremist's proposition, then the entire fabric of social hierarchy is in question. If the murder of a king is nothing more than "common homicide", then Burke's figure of social cohesion is denied its ceremonial centre, and the structure in question is subject to chaotic dispersal. He relies on an intuition that the reader will experience a strong repugnance to such anarchic ideas, that a basic level of royalism and religious conformity (fear of king and God) will be triggered. Wollstonecraft undermines this careful positioning by taking Burke at his word. She troubles his vocalisation of a generic first person plural pronoun. More than this, she challenges the essential element of his construction. She literally 'leaves out' the father. Not resting at that, she emphasises the significance of her act in a direct challenge to the patriarchalist "foundation" at play in his argument: "you perceive, Sir, that by leaving out the word father, I think the whole extent of the comparison invidious" By leaving out the word father, Wollstonecraft denies Burke's paralleling of the function and symbolism of fathers and kings, and by extension the "whole extent of the comparison." In her next Vindication, she describes a "weak king" and a "weak father" as tyrants in the same syntactical breath (Rights of Woman, p. 5).

There is again a notable analogue available between Wollstonecraft and Locke, when, in the course of arguing against Filmer's use of the Decalogue as a Biblical authority on the power of the father/king, Locke writes:

\begin{quote}
I hope 'tis no Injury to call an half Quotation an half Reason, for God says, Honour thy Father and Mother, but our Author contents himself with half, leaves out thy Mother quite, as little serviceable to his purpose (p. 145).
\end{quote}

By leaving out the mother, Filmer destroys the authority he seeks in using this commandment, leading Locke to ask:

\begin{quote}
And why may I not add as well, That in the Decalogue, the law that enjoyns Obedience to Queens, is delivered in the Terms of Honour thy Mother, as if all Power were originally in the Mother? (p. 149).
\end{quote}
Wollstonecraft in "leaving out the father" recognises (and rejects) Burke's version of an identification between paternal and royal power; an identification which has authority, according to Locke, only by "leaving out" the mother.

I have been arguing on the basis of internal evidence that Wollstonecraft was aware of Locke's attack on Filmer's patriarchalism in her response to Burke. Many modern critics - interested primarily in her feminist credentials - identify the second *Vindication* as the debut of Wollstonecraft's feminist consciousness; in many of the numerous claims for Wollstonecraft as the originator of a feminist tradition, it is in the second *Vindication* that the genesis of Wollstonecraft's feminism is located. But if, as I have argued above, her first *Vindication* engages with Burke on issues of patriarchalist politics, then this work could be said to be a critical engagement with a moment of patriarchy. As such, it deserves to be accounted for in the history of feminist writing; not because it is a work by the author of the *Rights of Woman*, but because it is a serious and powerful challenge to the patriarchal ideology inherited by late eighteenth-century political discourse. As a woman reading Burke's *Reflections*, Wollstonecraft might have been responding to the simple fact that she had no sword with which to defend the queen.
Chapter 3

**Vindicating Women: Rights, Duties and Sex in the Second Vindication**

*Feminist criticism has in a sense no beginnings.*

Writing as a feminist on Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* evokes a feeling which I imagine compares to the experience of actors approaching the famous soliloquy in *Hamlet*. The title of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication*, and the reputation of those who have stamped its passages with impressive and influential commentary, stand between the present writer and the task in hand. It seems appropriate, then, to begin this discussion of Wollstonecraft's most famous work by considering the implications and emphasis of its title, and its institution in feminist literary criticism since its reassessment at the end of the last century.

There is a tendency to characterise this *Vindication* as a problematic work claiming rationality for women by denying female sexual pleasure, and in the process establishing a dichotomy between sense and sensibility. I will suggest that what has been perceived as a banishing of “female desire” is perhaps also a reclaiming of sexual desire *for* women from the rape fantasy prevalent in conduct literature that Wollstonecraft was writing against. The chapter ends with a consideration of Wollstonecraft’s attempts to find a place for femininity (as female embodiment) in an enlightenment discourse of ‘Rights’, and takes as its focus her negotiation of the female body in relation to contemporary ideas of sexual difference in the human mind.

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**1. A manifesto for the women's movement**

Late twentieth-century criticism of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* tends to be premised on an idea of Wollstonecraft as a feminist, if not the originating figure in Western feminism. As a result commentaries are preoccupied by evidence towards (or against) her status as a feminist thinker. A few prominent examples should illustrate this point. I have already noted Mary Jacobus's comment in her essay 'The Difference of View' that "The Rights of Woman" makes a claim to "sense for women rather than sensibility". For Jacobus this dichotomy explains the style of the *Vindication*, which she suggests "pays a price that is reflected in its own prose". This leads Jacobus to her claim that Wollstonecraft in this work speaks "not so much for women, or as a woman, but against them - over their dead bodies, and over (having attempted to cast it out) the body of the text too". Jacobus introduces this criticism of Wollstonecraft as a writer denying her femininity (which informs her larger argument that women writers in a "patriarchal society" experience a "rift" by which "language itself may re-inscribe the structures by which they are oppressed") with a fanfare introducing Wollstonecraft as "feminism's founding mother herself". Her positioning of Wollstonecraft as a pioneering feminist opens the door to the modern feminist critic's criticism of Wollstonecraft's proto-feminism as a project flawed by her unconscious reproduction of patriarchal ideology within her early (naive and undeveloped) attempt to analyse that ideology at work. In her concern at Wollstonecraft's feminism, Jacobus characterises the second *Vindication* as an example of the "problem" that is "women's writing", and elevates the posthumously published, unfinished novel *Wrongs of Woman* - as Wollstonecraft's more positive move towards fiction as a "solution" to this problem.

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4 Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View', p. 54.
5 It is worth noting that criticisms of Wollstonecraft, especially of Wollstonecraft as a feminist, always work in the critic's favour.
6 ibid., p. 55. Claudia Johnson comments on the tendency of "feminist historians" to "scold" Wollstonecraft for her "commitment to the emerging institution of bourgeois motherhood" in the second *Vindication*. She is referring in particular to Lucinda Cole, '(Anti)Feminist Sympathies: The Politics of
Chapter 3

Jane Moore’s essay (published in the same collection) identifies a tendency - apparent in Jacobus’s comments - in modern feminist criticism to “fail” Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication*, and a concomitant tendency to explain her writing as a symptom of her character: “it is her temperament and her life, which critics turn to in order to account for what they perceive to be the *Vindication’s* chief ‘flaw’: namely, a lack of unity in content and structure”.7 However, Moore’s essay reaffirms a version of the second *Vindication* as a failed project in extending humanist enlightenment discourse to women, which in turn allows her to reclaim it as a willing model of deconstructionist strategies. She writes of the “*Vindication’s* inability to avoid what it condemns” because it “produces not a theory of the transparent capacity of language, nor evidence of the ‘simple truths’ and ‘first principles’ [terms from Wollstonecraft’s introduction, also singled out by Jacobus] assumed to pre-exist discursively constituted meanings”.8 This failure, Moore claims, is “the first step towards denaturalising sexual difference, thereby exposing its historical relativity and cultural constitution, and so giving us a firmer grasp on understanding our own process of gender formation”.9 Wollstonecraft is judged a failed humanist, but a successful, if unconscious, feminist.

Jacobus and Moore come upon Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication* from very different theoretical positions, and with quite different purposes. Jacobus is interested in psychology and the gendered border between reason and unreason, while Moore is

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8 ibid., p. 170.
9 ibid., p. 173.
deploying a somewhat programmatic Derridean deconstruction as "a useful mode of
textual analysis both for feminist readings of past texts and relatedly, necessarily, for
current feminist approaches to the politics of gender and literary criticism". Both are
drawn to Wollstonecraft's second Vindication as a crucial early feminist text, and both
treat it primarily in this way.

Mary Poovey also expresses disappointment in Wollstonecraft's feminism, as
illustrated in the following comment:

we discover in Wollstonecraft's work what pieces of ideological
baggage even this self-consciously political woman simply could
not leave behind.11

Any late twentieth-century approach to Wollstonecraft's work, and in particular to the
second Vindication, carries expectations shaped by the concerns of feminist theory. We
are revealing not only the gaps in Wollstonecraft's critical consciousness, but also the
extent to which we remain blind to or evade what pieces of ideological baggage we carry
with us as self-consciously feminist critics. Gillian Beer, in her essay 'Representing
Women: Re-presenting the past' goes some way towards offering a corrective to the sort
of approaches I have been discussing. She warns that:

we must take care not to fall into the trap of assuming the
evolutionist model of literary development, so often taken for
granted, in which texts are praised for their 'almost modern
awareness' or for 'being ahead of their time'. This presentist
mode of argument takes now as the source of authority, the only
real place.12

Partly the problem is one of a codified political vocabulary, essential to a cohesive impulse
in the practice of social criticism, but clumsy in its application to past literary texts.

Jennifer Lorch's Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist, published in

10 ibid., p. 155.
11 Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, p. xvi.
12 Gillian Beer, 'Re-presenting Women: Re-presenting the Past', The Feminist Reader, ed. by Belsey &
Moore, p. 67 (original emphasis).
1990, offers an explicit example of a “presentist” mode of approach; the title contains a model of Wollstonecraft’s life as a series of events which shape her into a “radical feminist” - a term drawn from late twentieth-century feminism, and necessarily carrying a set of associated expectations. A similar - and I think equally problematic - influence shapes Gary Kelly's recent important study, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft*. In both cases, a vocabulary belonging to an active agenda of feminist critical politics situated in the 1990's is applied to writings situated firmly in the 1790's. When Lorch states that “in the relationship with Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft experienced what some have seen as the very core of the feminist dilemma: how to love a man, live with a man, and retain feminist integrity and sisterly loyalty”, the terms in use identify the political thrust of her study with a post-1960's feminist agenda inappropriate to either the life or career of a woman publishing in 1792. While I am not suggesting that we should be reading women’s past writings without a consciousness of feminist history, it seems clear from these examples that what we are doing when we read women’s writings of the past is often more interesting as a comment on the present. Gillian Beer provides a careful description of the difficulties involved in balancing the needs of a present critic with the (often overlooked) needs of the historical material on which she is practising:

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15 Janet Todd discusses the emergence of Mary Wollstonecraft into feminist literary criticism in the 1970s in her thoughtful introduction to *Gender, Art and Death* (London: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 1-10. She explains the sudden wide interest of feminist criticism in Wollstonecraft as an effect of “a good deal of identification and much searching for parallels as a generation sought validation for the present through turning the past into its predecessor” (p. 1). She remarks on the way in which the 1970s biographies “reveal their stylistic date”. The critics involved in the task of reassessing Wollstonecraft in the late 1980s and 1990s (Alexander, Mellor, Lorch, Sapiro, Kelly, Devine-Jump, Johnson) approach Wollstonecraft with different intentions, but seem generally concerned to rescue her from a critical “embarrassment” evoked by the earlier feminist ground work. This thesis, it occurs to me, also fits this pattern.
The task of the literary historian is to receive the same fullness of resource from past texts as from present: to respect their difference, to revive those shifty significations which do not pay court to our concerns but are full of the meaning of that past present. The text fights back: but it can do so with meaning for us only if we read it with enough awareness of the submerged controversies and desires which are not concerned with us. The past is past only to us. When it was present, it was/is the present. So, re-presenting literature representing women in a way that is concerned with something other than our own design and story is a challenge which 'relevance' bypasses. We are not at work on a supine or docile text which we can colonise with our meaning or meanings.16

It might be worth noting here that Wollstonecraft was herself suspicious of lying passive in the face of interpretation. She remarks in her first Vindication: "Let all these points be demonstrated, and not determined by arbitrary authority and dark traditions, lest a dangerous supineness should take place".17

Anne Mellor’s study of Romanticism and Gender was published in 1990. In a section on Mary Wollstonecraft Mellor describes the political agenda of the second Vindication in the following way:

By selecting the image of the egalitarian family as the prototype of a genuine democracy, a family in which husband and wife not only regard each other as equals in intelligence, sensitivity, and power, but also participate equally in childcare and decision-making, Wollstonecraft introduced a truly revolutionary political program, one in which gender and class difference could be erased.18

Mellor’s book is not an extensive study of Wollstonecraft, and as such should not be treated in the same way as, for example, Sapiro’s or Kelly’s more detailed and sustained pieces. It presents itself as a corrective to the history of scholarship in Romanticism,

working on a feminist literary agenda by which both the works of the Romantic period, and the institution of literary criticism engaging with these works, need to be re-addressed through a less partial understanding of what it means to be ‘Romantic’, and how the canon of works included in this definition is selected and judged. Mellor’s understanding of the period is not primarily historical, as her occasional mistakes in the chronological relation between, for example, Burke’s *Reflections*, Paine’s *Rights of Man* and Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Men* would suggest. Wollstonecraft is selected as an exemplary feminist heroine of the period, and as such is exhibited by Mellor in a way which foregrounds her feminist credentials. These credentials are signposted by a terminology vetted and approved by contemporary liberal feminism: “egalitarian family”, “genuine democracy”, “truly revolutionary political program”, “gender and class difference […] erased”. The image of “the egalitarian family as the prototype of a genuine democracy”, as well as making an asumption about Wollstonecraft’s approval of the form “democracy” has evolved since the French revolution, foregrounds marriage as a partnership between “equals in intelligence, sensitivity, and power” who “also participate equally in childcare and decision-making”. This version of Wollstonecraft’s ideas on marriage and social roles in relationships and child-rearing is oddly familiar at the same time as being inaccurate, or at least overstated, as I will discuss in more detail below. At this stage I wish to indicate Mellor’s performance of what Margaret Ezell has described as a “desire for continuity, for a maternal link” between modern feminist critics and their “literary forbears”; a performance grounded in an “expectation that the past should be similar to the present and that the value of studying the past is to find someone or something with which to identify”. The sort of marriage Mellor finds in Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication* is a model unavailable to Wollstonecraft in the terms and easy tone in which Mellor presents it.

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19 ibid., p. 32.
20 I am not complaining about this agenda, simply pointing out how odd it sounds in relation to what we know of late eighteenth-century social and political conditions. It is, however, worth bearing in mind how culturally as well as historically specific the model of “the egalitarian family” invoked by Mellor is: see Bonnie Zimmerman, ‘What Has Never been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism’, *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Warhol & Herndl, pp. 117-137 and Barbara Smith, ‘The Truth that Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s’, *Feminisms*, pp. 690-712.
21 Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History*, p. 27.
While Mellor's championing of Wollstonecraft's feminist heroism is unlike Poovey's criticism of her feminist shortcomings, both approaches share a primary interest in Wollstonecraft as a feminist, and this interest influences the aspects of her writings brought into view, and kept from view, for their reader.

Regina Janes notices an assumption in feminist criticism that Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* would have been condemned at its publication as a shocking introduction of modernity in morals and social relations. Using contemporary reviews of this work at the time of its original publication, she goes some way towards indicating how the second *Vindication* was read at the time it was written; a careful plotting of the recorded reception of Wollstonecraft's writing which is useful to an understanding of our shaping of her works today. Janes finds that "elements" of the second *Vindication* "that correspond to changes that had been in train for half a century were approved; those that marked out the direction of more drastic social transformations were rightly though disapprovingly remarked as revolutionary and visionary, if they were seen at all".22

Janes's quiet suggestion in this passage that Wollstonecraft's writings were subject in their reception to contemporary blind spots (they didn't react to her feminism because they didn't know what a feminist was) is equally applicable to contemporary critical responses to those works which are still read. The very fact of the resurgence of interest in Wollstonecraft and her writing in the last two and a half decades must itself be a factor in judging our own responses to her work. The coincidence of the two remarkable waves of critical and public attention to Wollstonecraft with, in the first instance, the suffragist movement in the 1890s, and secondly the emergence of a new feminist consciousness in the wake of the human rights agitations of the late 1960s, should offer a clue to discovering the inflection we use in writing of her work; a partial interest (whether it discovers approvable or disappointing versions of itself) which is not dissimilar to Janes's


23 ibid., p. 293.
description of "the ability of reviewers to ignore the work's political argument and see it as a work on education".  

2. The rights of woman

The editors of the *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* describe the title of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* as "that timeless asset" which secured its "honoured status as a pioneering classic". In her introduction to *Gender, Art and Death* Janet Todd suggests that Mary Wollstonecraft - rather than Catherine Macaulay - was "rediscovered" by 1970s feminist literary criticism because "she had had the marketing awareness to call her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* instead of *Letters on Education". The full title of Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication*, as it appeared on the title page of the first edition in 1792, reads *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. This has often been shortened - for obvious reasons of economy - to the more catchy version; *The Rights of Woman*. Anne Mellor reads the "revolutionary

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24 ibid., p. 294. I think Janes protests a little too much however: as Gary Kelly notes, "[r]eaction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was mixed [...] 

25 Those generally sympathetic to the French Revolution praised it; those opposed to the Revolution had reservations about it or ignored it; only the *Critical Review* attacked it. Most reviewers, who were of course men, took it to be a book on women's education and acknowledged its attempt to reconstruct the professional middle-class cultural revolution". The last point, however, emphasizes the *Vindication*’s suitability as a piece of evidence supporting Kelly’s larger argument that “in Mary Wollstonecraft’s lifetime both print culture and literature became the class property of the professional bourgeoisie, used as instruments in a class-based cultural revolution” (Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*, pp. 135-6 & p. 9). In studies published after Janes’s article, the sort of assumption she describes seems to disappear; whether this is because it was corrected by Janes, or because it was an aspect of "stylistic date" of the 1970s work on Wollstonecraft, is difficult to tell (see note 13 above). For examples of contemporary reviews, see: *Analytical Review*, 12 (1792), 241-9 (which describes it as a work on education); *Literary Magazine and British Review*, 8 (1792), 133-9 (which approves of her ideas about the army); *Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal*, 8 (1792), 198-209 (which notices her suggestion that women might participate in government); and also the anonymous novel, *Robert and Adela: or, The Rights of Women Best Maintained By the Sentiments of Nature* (London, 1795) which illustrates how dangerous Wollstonecraft’s ideas about women were, and suggests that Wollstonecraft would not have written the *Rights of Woman* if she had been a wife and mother.


27 I have not to date found a critic who does not shorten the title in this way at some point in her discussion. The argument I am pursuing in this section of my discussion can best be illustrated by the anecdotal fact that Dillons bookstore was recently selling remaindered copies of a small cheap paperback bearing that very title. On closer inspection the *Rights of Woman* turned out to be an advice handbook on women’s legal rights: divorce, abortion, custody, adoption, housing, tax, insurance.
rights" Wollstonecraft was making a claim to as "egalitarian marriage", "the vote (which she insisted should be given to both working class men and all women)", "the civil and legal right to possess and distribute property", and "the right to work in the most prestigious professions, including business, law, medicine, education and politics".\(^{28}\) Mellor’s reading of Wollstonecraft’s second \textit{Vindication} is interesting for two reasons: she presents Wollstonecraft’s argument as claiming, advocating, demanding or insisting rather than vindicating, and she reconstructs this argument in a language comfortably familiar to late twentieth-century feminists. The ‘Rights’ gestured towards in the title to Wollstonecraft’s second \textit{Vindication} are not as easily assimilable to the rights which preoccupy the mind of a late twentieth-century feminist writer as Mellor’s passage suggests. The shift from a register of vindicating to one of asserting makes Wollstonecraft sound as if she were concerned largely with an angry insistence that a recognised list of naturalised political and legal rights denied to women be put (back) in place. The \textit{Vindication} in fact mentions the right to vote in a parenthetical and ambiguous statement in chapter 9, which records its own uncertainty.\(^ {29}\) The distribution and possession of property is not only discussed by Wollstonecraft as a ‘Right’ denied to women, but as a system of perpetuating inequality and social oppression.\(^{30}\) She does discuss the possibility of women’s involvement in prestigious professions, but in a vocabulary of an unrealised potential, not an unclaimed right: “Women might certainly study the art of healing, […] They might, also, study politics, […] Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue. […] How many women thus waste life away the prey of discontent, who might have practiced as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and stood erect, supported by their own industry” (p. 168 & p. 169). A ‘might’ is not the same thing as a

\(^{28}\) Anne Mellor, \textit{Romanticism and Gender}, p. 35.

\(^{29}\) "I may excite laughter, by dropping an hint, which I mean to pursue, some future time, for I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government" (\textit{Rights of Woman}, p. 167). Mellor gives no example of Wollstonecraft’s \textit{insistence} on the right to vote for women; the passage quoted here is the only reference I have found to the subject. Janet Todd describes Wollstonecraft’s comment on female suffrage as “imagin[ing] a time when women \textit{might} have the suffrage and compar[ing] their unenfranchised state with that of working men” (Janet Todd, \textit{Sign of Angelica}, p. 224; original emphasis).

\(^{30}\) As I have discussed in chapter 2, Wollstonecraft condemns the ownership and distribution of property in her first \textit{Vindication}. 
‘Right’. As the feminist agenda has shifted, from the agitation for suffrage and legal equality at the turn of the twentieth century, through the drive towards new identities that characterised 1970s feminisms, towards a late twentieth-century fragmentation of concerns perhaps unified by an interest in pluralism, sexualities and cultural difference, as well as a degree of reconciliation or re-negotiation of differences, “that timeless asset” seems to have absorbed into its ‘Rights’ a shifting range of concerns.

The title of the second *Vindication* is a feminized adaptation of the title of Wollstonecraft’s earlier *Vindication of the Rights of Men*. This small shift in terms records a larger shift in Wollstonecraft’s thinking about the utility of a generic noun (“men”) to denote a universal human category.\(^{31}\) The *Rights of Woman* argues in general that the female is artificially excluded from the definition of the human available in writings on the rights of men. The shift from a plural to a singular noun between the two *Vindications* (“Men” to “Woman”) is likely to be picking up Paine’s popularisation of the phrase ‘Rights of Man’ in his work of that title published in the preceding year.\(^{32}\) It is also an echo of the National Assembly’s *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, published in 1789, and Olympe de Gouge’s answer on behalf of women published the following year.\(^{33}\) Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication*, then, signals itself as a work engaging overtly with a public discourse on the rights of humanity, and on the gender differentials operating in works which discuss this subject.

In her introduction, Wollstonecraft draws attention to the specific context of her argument: Talleyrand’s report to the French National Assembly in 1791, proposing a new national education system.\(^{34}\) Talleyrand’s proposal emphasises the domestic skills to be foregrounded in the education of females. Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication* positions

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\(^{31}\) Wollstonecraft had also feminized male pronouns in sections of her *Female Reader* in 1789, see *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 4, p. 68 & p. 69.

\(^{32}\) Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, vol. 1 was published in March 1791, but had been available to Joseph Johnson - who had a few copies printed before deciding not to go ahead with publication - since February.

\(^{33}\) Olympe de Gouge, *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne* (1790). There is no record of an English translation (or even a French copy) of de Gouge’s work in the British Library, which takes the 17 articles of the *Declaration des Droits de l’Homme* (1789) and rewrites them to address women. There is no evidence that Wollstonecraft had read de Gouge’s pamphlet.

itself as a discussion of human ethical and political rights which addresses a tendency to exclude females from full citizenship on the grounds that they are not fully rational beings. By situating itself within a debate on education, Wollstonecraft’s argument tends towards the idea, familiar in other works of the time on this matter, that the status of women as other than fully rational citizens has a causal relation to an analysable social tradition rather than an inevitable natural (divine or biological) hierarchy.35

The chapter plan supports this situating of her text: she moves from a general introduction discussing the ‘Rights and Duties of Mankind’, through chapters interested in the ‘Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character’, to a detailed discussion of influential conduct book writers, ending with chapters on parental influence and national education. Her critique of Rousseau’s *Emile* (which I will discuss in more detail below) is embedded in a chapter headed: ‘Animadversions on some of the Writers who have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, bordering on Contempt’. In the same chapter she discusses James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women*, published in 1765, and John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*, published in 1774, among others.36 She begins the chapter with

35There is an interesting pre-history to the idea that women’s inferiority was the result of their education: see Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Women* (1673) and the anonymous pamphlets: An *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696) and ['Sophia'] *Beauty’s Triumph: or, The Superiority of the Fair Sex Invincibly Proved* (1751) (sections of which are available in *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, ed by Vivien Jones, pp. 207-17 & pp. 225-31). Harriet Devine Jump notes that the debate “on the relative equality of the sexes” and education of women dates back at least to Plato’s *Republic*. She also cites Henri-Cornelius Agrippa, *La Supérieurité du sexe feminin* (1509) and Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women* (1545). Wollstonecraft either hadn’t read or didn’t mention earlier works on the subject of women’s rights or oppression, but she was clearly (and openly) influenced by her contemporary, Catherine Macaulay (see discussion below). Jump suggests that Wollstonecraft might have read the 200 pages of Mary Astell’s *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* which were included without crediting the author in Richard Steele, *The Ladies Library* (1714). See also Janet Todd’s reassessment of the question of Mary Astell as a source for Wollstonecraft, ‘Aphra Behn, Whom Mary Wollstonecraft did not Read’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 26, 3 (1995), 152-8.

36She is particularly upset by women who “argue in the same track as men, and adopt the sentiments that brutalize them, with all the pertinacity of ignorance” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 115), and provides examples from Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi, *Letters to and from the late Samuel Johnson* (1788), letter Ixxii; Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, baronne de Staël, *Letters on the Works and Character of J. J. Rousseau. To which are added, a Letter from the Countess Alexandre de Vassy, to the Baroness de Staël, with the Baroness’s answer, and an account of the last Moments of Rousseau* (1789); Stéphanie-Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Albin, Comtesse de Genlis, *The Beauties of Genlis: being a select Collection of the most beautiful Tales, and other striking Extracts, from Adele and Theodore; the Tales of the Castle; the Theatre of Education, and Sacred Dramas* (1788). She had reviewed the works mentioned by de Staël and Genlis in 1789 (see *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 7, pp. 136-7 & p. 82), and Piozzi’s *Observations and Reflections, made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* at its publication in
Rousseau, and devotes much of its space to quoting long chunks from his text. The main source of her indignation is Book Five of *Emile* published in 1762, in which, having detailed the education of the ideal young man to a point where he is ready for mating, Rousseau conjures up an ideal female companion in the form of the implausibly feminine character Sophy. This fantastical figure of feminine grace and decorum, the imaginative result of Rousseau's system of educating girls, can best be described in a barbed comment Wollstonecraft makes on a parallel figure woven through Fordyce's *Sermons*, of which she says: "Such a woman ought to be an angel - or she is an ass - for I discern not a trace of the human character, neither reason nor passion in this domestic drudge" (p. 108).

Viewed in this way, Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* presents itself as a discussion of the wider social and moral effects of education on the formation of a female character in her present society. Her method is eclectic, and as such gathers evidence and argument in a sometimes distracting way, quoting widely from diverse sources. But nevertheless, the methodology fits itself to the schema sketched above. The political argument throughout the *Vindication* returns to this primary argument about education, which begins, as it does for Rousseau's *Emile*, with the practice of breast-feeding, and is conducted largely through an individual's guided practice in reading influential works of literature, and learning - through conversation and experience - how to think. In this way, the polemic of the *Vindication* is partly an exercise in literary critical practice, yet covers as wide a range of interests as fashion, diet, courtship, religious practice and artistic taste.

The relationship between education and 'Rights' in the *Vindication* is difficult to grasp without a destabilisation of these terms, and the way they have ossified in a particular - and necessarily politicised - way in the two hundred and so years since this

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June and July 1789. Wollstonecraft had included extracts from Genlis’s *Tales of the Castle* (1785, tr. by Thomas Holcroft 1785) and Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy* in her *Female Reader* (1789); see for example *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 4, p. 71.


38 Ralph Wardle observes that Wollstonecraft quotes from Adam Smith, Hume, Leibnitz, Locke, the Bible ("two dozen times"), Shakespeare and Milton, as well as Fordyce, Gregory, Rousseau, Piozzi, Genlis, and de Staël. He concludes from this that "[o]bviously Mary Wollstonecraft was an avid reader, but she was no scholar" (*Collected Letters*, pp. 38-9).
debate was recorded in Wollstonecraft's writing. The important point at issue for present readers is the way in which the 'Rights' this work negotiates are understood.\textsuperscript{39} The 'Rights' Anne Mellor lists as Wollstonecraft's political agenda in this work percolate, sometimes in the form of a noisy absence, through a wide range of modern commentary. Timothy Reiss expressed disappointment that Wollstonecraft did not claim the right for a female sexuality divorced from maternity.\textsuperscript{40} A century ago Elizabeth Robbins Pennell celebrated the \textit{Vindication} as a work marking the beginning of the Women's Movement, in an essay celebrating its re-publication in 1890. She reads this work with a detached, historical interest, its purpose now only to "remind women of the old state of domestic slavery" which had been overcome by 'A Century of Women's Rights'.\textsuperscript{41} In Pennell's view, all the rights demanded by Wollstonecraft had been answered, so that "doctrines, which in the eighteenth century were held to be subversive of all morality, are now thought to be its very basis".\textsuperscript{42} Ellen Moers found this \textit{Vindication} "as boring as are all polemics which have been answered in the affirmative by history".\textsuperscript{43} However, Marilyn Butler's brief introduction to an extract from the second \textit{Vindication} in her anthology on \textit{The Revolution Controversy}, expresses disappointment at the absence of the sort of rights other critics believe Wollstonecraft is insisting upon: "she [Wollstonecraft] does not put forward a platform of actual measures which could be campaigned for, such as changes to marriage and divorce laws, child benefits, schools, a new curriculum, job training, equal pay, public

\textsuperscript{39} Regina Janes identifies the problem as one of definition across two centuries of discussion and change, and offers an answer to the question of whether this work is in its nature feminist, and therefore open to celebration or condemnation within these parameters: "if we take 'feminism' to mean anxiety for the education of women and the improvement of their minds, there did not exist an anti-feminist in England in 1790. If we take feminism to mean restlessness with the subordinate position of women and a vague desire that women should be possessed of more 'liberty' and more consequence, the public opinion was divided between those who thought that women had quite enough liberty as it was and those who thought the rhetoric of submission inappropriate to relations between men and women. If we take feminism to mean demands for specific changes in women's civil disabilities, including the right to vote, Wollstonecraft herself barely qualifies, and her followers, Hays and Robinson, do not even make the attempt". Regina Janes, 'On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Woman}', p. 297.

\textsuperscript{40} See Introduction, footnote 32.

\textsuperscript{41} Elizabeth Robbins Pennell, 'A Century of Women's Rights', \textit{The Fortnightly Review}, N.S., 48 (1890), 408-17, p. 417. See also Pennell, 'The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft', \textit{Athenaeum Journal of Literature, Science, the fine Arts, Music, and the Drama}, (July-December 1885), 80-1 & 143-4; Pennell, \textit{Life of Mary Wollstonecraft} (London: W.H. Allen, 1885).

\textsuperscript{42} ibid., p. 417.
office, even the vote”. Regina Janes indicates the anachronistic disturbance which a concern with social and political rights causes to a late twentieth-century appreciation of this work:

Had Wollstonecraft argued specifically for the franchise, equal access to professions, equal treatment under the law, abolition of discrimination on the basis of sex, positions consistent with the book's argument but not developed, not central, or not present, her first readers might justly have thought her mad. Such recommendations would have borne no useful relation to the actual condition of women and the opportunities available to them.

The 'Rights' for which Wollstonecraft was not arguing, and why, and why we feel she should have been in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, is a discussion of political etymology too large to be included here. The point I wish to make concerning this larger discussion is that it is one which remains largely absent from Wollstonecraft studies, and that this absence is significant and influences the way Wollstonecraft is received by present readers. The following discussion of the nature of the ‘Rights’ recorded by the title of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* considers Wollstonecraft as a contemporary of Kant, in an attempt to bring a slightly different profile of this *Vindication* into focus.

3. Absolute rights

Mary Poovey's discussion of Wollstonecraft in her book *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* suggests that the author's personal struggle to free herself of the restraint imposed by feminine propriety is the key to reading Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, leading her to assert that Wollstonecraft "claims independence,

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especially from the roles assigned to women." But Wollstonecraft does not question the maternal and domestic duties of women in society, she questions the methods she believes have been used to guide women towards these duties, which she finds both offensive and self-defeating:

"if even by these sinister methods they really persuaded women, by working on their feelings, to stay at home, and fulfill the duties of a mother and mistress of a family, I should cautiously oppose opinions that led women to right conduct, by prevailing on them to make the discharge of such important duties the main business of life, though reason were insulted [...] reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly, and I must again repeat, that sensibility is not reason (p. 72)."

The “duties” of a woman (sketched as staying at home, maternity and family) are not at issue here: the “sinister methods” by which women are persuaded to fulfil these duties are. Any method leading women to “right conduct” is not enough in itself, it is the nature of the relationship between women and their duties that is the crux of the matter, and it is this relationship that the *Vindication* hopes to clarify and change.

The key term in this passage is “reason”. The independent application of personal judgment should lead women to “right conduct”, which, for the purposes of the argument Wollstonecraft is following, is primarily loyalty and attention to domestic and familial (maternal) duties. That is, women must be allowed to achieve a degree of self-consciousness or freedom of will in order to recognise and then fulfil their duties freely

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47 Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, p. 58. See the Introduction to this thesis for a fuller discussion of this point.

48 I disagree with Virginia Sapiro here, who finds that “[w]ith certain exceptions, particularly related to the family, Wollstonecraft’s definition of duty appears to be a very general one: any action that furthers the development of virtue and the perfection of human society" (*Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. 74). I would add that Wollstonecraft’s notions of “virtue” and “the perfection of human society” depend on an image of dutiful maternity. While, as Sapiro notes, women’s “first duty is to themselves as rational creatures” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 165), that rationality is defined largely towards enabling virtuous motherhood: when Rousseau asks “how should a woman void of reflection be capable of educating her children” Wollstonecraft answers “How indeed should she, when her husband is not always at hand to lend her his reason?". Her strongest argument against excessive sensibility, it seems, is that “women, whose minds are not enlarged by cultivation, or the natural selfishness of sensibility expanded by reflection, are very unfit to manage a family” (*Rousseau, Emile*, p.371; *Rights of Woman*, p. 100 & p. 75).
and consentingly. The base point seems to be that by developing (or allowing to develop, removing obstacles in the way of the development of) a woman's reason, she will arrive at the same conclusion that Wollstonecraft, with a display of rationality, arrives at: that a woman's duties are “speaking of the majority” maternal. This paradigm of thinking about duty has more affinities (both historical and structural) with Kant's notion of the deduction of duty through pure reason, than with any modern feminist agenda.

Wollstonecraft says in her dedication to Talleyrand:

*a duty cannot be binding which is not founded on reason.* […]

The more understanding women acquire, the more they will be attached to their duty - comprehending it - for unless they comprehend it, unless their morals be fixed on the same immutable principle as those of a man, no authority can make them discharge it in a virtuous manner (p. 5).

The purity of the grounding principle is, for Wollstonecraft as for Kant, the criterion of an action’s virtue. It is not enough to persuade women to perform their duties, or even to perform them well, but they must perform them for the right reason.

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49 “When I treat of the peculiar duties of women, as I should treat of the peculiar duties of a citizen or a father, it will be found that I do not mean to insinuate that they should be taken out of their families, speaking of the majority” (p. 72). She makes an important distinction between “women in the common walks of life” who are “called to fulfil the duties of wives and mothers, by religion or reason”, while “women of a superior cast” she wishes could “pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence” (p. 167). In answer to the question: “But what have women to do in society?” she asks the reader: “surely you would not condemn them all to suckle fools” (p. 168).

50 See my introduction, note 30. Her comment on reason here develops out of her assertion that Talleyrand (and the French National Assembly) would be acting as tyrants if they continue to “yorce all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark” (p. 5; original emphasis).

51 Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), tr. by Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 14. The nature of the affinity between Wollstonecraft and Kant is yet to be fully documented, and has some possible bearings on the history of the relationship between German and English Romanticism, the weight of which has usually been carried by Coleridge. For the purposes of my argument Kant is an important analogue for Wollstonecraft's ideas on “the rights and duties of mankind”. This analogy can be of use in approaching Wollstonecraft's work, and has implications for assessing and situating her second *Vindication*. She had clearly encountered Kant's writings in some form, as she refers in 'Hints' (published in Godwin’s *Posthumous Works*, 1798) to “Mr Kant” who “has observed, that the understanding is sublime, the imagination beautiful” (see *Rights of Woman*, p. 229). She is probably alluding to *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (1764). Genevieve Lloyd notes that Kant’s *Beobachtungen* is interested in sexual difference; Kant claims in it that study damages the female sex, and that a woman “might as well even have a beard, for perhaps that would express more
Her argument about duty rests on an assumption - underlying each chapter of this *Vindication* - that women are neglecting their duties for other pursuits: usually luxurious pleasures associated with aristocratic excess, or vulgarity associated largely with the brutalised lower classes. The ideal is that women should perform their duties "in a virtuous manner", which cannot be achieved by any exterior "authority", but only by the immutable dictates of the moral law. It is worth mentioning here that virtue is used by Wollstonecraft to denote something other than a straightforward concept of chastity or religion. It entails conscious recognition of the nature of moral duty, and a free embracing of it.

What I am trying to indicate here is the nature of the rights and duties argued for in Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication*, or at least a strategy for identifying these. The two terms cannot be separated in any discussion of Wollstonecraft's work. Her dedication of this *Vindication* to Talleyrand describes this work as a record of her "opinion [...] respecting the rights and duties of woman" (p. 3). Throughout this dedication she balances the argument for women's rights, with a concomitant attention to their duties:

if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first [...] that they want reason [...] women cannot, by force, be confined to domestic concerns; for they will, however ignorant, intermeddle with more weighty affairs, neglecting private duties only to disturb, by cunning tricks, the orderly plans of reason which rise above their comprehension (p. 6).


52 She makes this point clear in her dedication to Talleyrand: "I have repeatedly asserted, and produced what appeared to me irrefragable arguments drawn from matters of fact, to prove my assertion, that women cannot, by force, be confined to domestic concerns" (*Rights of Woman*, p. 6). She is not making a claim that women should be released from these duties, but that if "coercion" is removed from "society", the "common law of gravity" will prevail and "the sexes will fall into their proper places" (p. 6).

53 This is evident in her comment that a woman who "discharg[es] her civil duties" must not be denied "individually, the protection of civil laws", followed by her claim that a wife who "neither suckles nor educates her children, scarcely deserves the name of a wife, and has no right to that of a citizen". She offers the gloss that "take away natural rights, and duties become null" (*Rights of Woman*, p. 166).
The first chapter advertises itself as a discussion of 'The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind'. Why a woman's rights and duties might differ from a man's, is the primary question asked by Wollstonecraft's Vindication. The answer always seems to present itself in the form of the female body.

4. Heroines, brutes and reasonable creatures

The 'Woman' who is the subject (and object) of Wollstonecraft's second Vindication is identified in one of Wollstonecraft's footnotes as “neither heroine nor brute[]”, but something quite distinct from these terms; a “reasonable creature[]” (p. 87). Elsewhere she describes Fordyce's female ideal as either an “angel” or an “ass”. In both examples she is aiming at a definition of the female neither elevated (heroine/angel) nor denigrated (brute/ass) out of the civil equation between duties and rights which makes a citizen accountable. The ‘reasonable creature[]’ she takes as her subject, then, is a...

54 I am thinking through Judith Butler’s idea of "Women" as the Subject of Feminism’ in chapter 1 of Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1-34: “For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued” (p. 1).
55 “Such a woman ought to be an angel - or she is an ass - for I discern not a trace of the human character, neither reason nor passion in this domestic drudge” (Rights of Woman, p. 108). As Claudia Johnson notes, Wollstonecraft’s Rights of Woman rejects the labouring woman as a model for female identity: she "disdains the 'square-elbowed family drudge' (Wollstonecraft's 'mere notable women'), and refers squeamishly to 'ignorant servants' who pass on 'nasty tricks' to their young mistresses” (Equivocal Beings, p. 66; Rights of Woman, p. 75 & p. 144). I discuss the “nasty tricks” below. The rest of Wollstonecraft's comment on Fordyce’s woman is equally informative. She describes this figure as a "slave" ruled by a "tyrant" - a common-place figure for the relationship between the sexes in writings by women throughout the eighteenth century (see for example Sarah Egerton, 'The Emulation' (1703); Elizabeth Thomas, 'On Sir J--m S-- saying in a Sarcastic Manner, My Books would make me Mad. An Ode' (1722); Elizabeth Tollet, 'Virgil' (1724) & 'Hypatia' (1724); B-ll M-rt-n, 'The Humble Wish' (c1726); Mary Leapor, 'An Essay on Woman' (wr. 1746), in Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.31; p.40; p. 99; p.105; p. 207). G.J. Barker-Benfield suggests that “Wollstonecraft’s work, suffused with ‘Commonwealth’ thought, and the constant references in the writings of women throughout the eighteenth century makes it crystal clear that their representation of themselves as ‘slaves’ to men was derived from classical thought. Thence women carried it to their opposition to race slavery in the modern world” (The Culture of Sensibility, p. 462n. 20).
56 She comments on the “inconsistencies” into which “men fall when they argue without the compass of principles” in a footnote to her description of “the line of subordination in the mental powers”: “Women, weak women, are compared with angels; yet a superior order of beings should be supposed to possess more intellect than man; or, in what does their superiority consist?” (p. 59).
dichotomy: ‘creatures’ is offered in the Biblical sense, carrying notions of corporeal limitations and mortality, and functions similarly to ‘brutes’ (animalistic and without moral judgment), and ‘reasonable’ is offered in the sense of able-to-reason, rather than moderate or fair. Angels and heroines are unrealistic ideals, the fantastical female representations she found so irritating in her work as a reviewer of novels. Reasonable creatures have both rationality and corporeality, and the relationship between the two is what I am interested in here.

Within her aspiration for absolute virtue, Wollstonecraft recognises a differential principle operating according to the ‘degree’ to which an individual might realise its potential:

If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles (p. 30).

Virtue is an absolute rather than relative quality, but its manifestation differs in the degree to which individuals are differently equipped to carry out its principles. Her larger argument throughout the second *Vindication* works on a similar structure of absolutes, realised in differing degrees according to the differentials in human individuals and groups. Her concern is the relative relationship between the sexes and reason, which can be summarised as a universal absolute realised according to variable differentials. And the

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57 For the *Analytical Review* 1789 she wrote: “We can scarcely find a variety of words to characterize a slight variety in the same species of writing; though this novel is one degree better than the last, it belongs to the same class in which old insipidity and folly assume a new dress. Angels and devils are thrown into strange situations, which rather create disgust than sympathy” (*Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 7, p. 119). The footnote in which she makes this comment is peculiarly interesting. She describes “a few women who, from having received a masculine education, have acquired courage and resolution” in the text, and lists in the footnote: “Sappho, Eloisa, Mrs Macaulay, the Empress of Russia, Madame d'Eon, &c. These, and many more, may be reckoned exceptions; and, are not all heroes, as well as heroines, exceptions to general rules?” Sappho was known to have written love poems to women, Heloise’s lover Abelard was castrated in punishment for their liaison, and Madame d’Eon was in fact Charles de Beaumont, Chevalier d’Eon (1728-1810), a French spy who disguised himself as a woman, in spite of a royal order to dress according to his proper sex. He was proclaimed male by an autopsy after his death in 1810. It is not clear in what sense Wollstonecraft meant “remarkable” in these cases (p. 87).
variability is measured against embodiment, so nearly always appears to be concerned with sexual difference.

Wollstonecraft introduces this *Vindication* with an acknowledgement of a significant corporeal difference between the sexes:

In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female, in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman (p. 10).

Later she clarifies her observation of sexual difference “in point of strength”; she is not only concerned with the notion of female inferiority, but also with the relationship between “the constitution of [...] bodies” and the “degree of virtue” attainable:

I have already granted, that, from the constitution of their bodies, men seem to be designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue.

It is from this position of conceding male advantage in achieving virtue, that she argues for female accountability. Women’s bodies might be weaker than men’s, and hence women are handicapped in their progress towards virtue “by Providence”, but their bodies, and therefore their virtue, only differ in degree:

I speak collectively of the whole sex; but I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in respect to their nature. In fact, how can they, if virtue has only one eternal standard? (p. 30).

There is one standard of virtue for reasonable creatures, and only the degree to which these creatures achieve that standard varies according to their individual potential and application; this potential and application seems to be a question of embodiment. Her argument remains that women and men should be educated according to the same principles to aim at the same standards, but that their achievement might differ according
to relative physical qualities. It is an argument of degree and kind: they are the same species (hence her claim in the introduction to treat women as “human beings” first, and as women later) but differ in degree.

Kant employs a similar refraction in his description of universal and individual rights in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. For Kant the members who constitute a state are “citizens”. All citizens enjoy the following attributes: “freedom to obey no law other than that to which he has given his consent [...] civil equality in recognising no-one among the people as superior to himself [...] civil independence which allows him to owe his existence and sustenance not to the arbitrary will of anyone else among the people, but purely to his own rights and powers as a member of the commonwealth”. Citizens are defined by “fitness to vote” because a person “must therefore be not just a part of the commonwealth, but a member of it”. This in turn leads to a necessary distinction between “the active and the passive citizen”. The passive citizen is any individual or group of individuals who “have no civil personality”. Among those Kant includes apprentices, servants not employed by the state, the domestic tutor, minors and “all those who are obliged to depend for their living (i.e., for food and protection) on the offices of others (excluding the state)”. As these groups and individuals have “no civil personality, and their existence is, so to speak, purely inherent”, they are passive citizens, and do not enjoy the right to vote. Needless to say, among the categories of passive citizens are “women in general” as their existence is inherent; they depend for their day to day needs on men, and have no direct relationship to the state. Kant points out that this apparent division of subjects into passive and active citizens and the “consequent inequality does not, however, in any way conflict with the freedom and equality of all men as human beings who together constitute a people”. It is such a distinction that I wish to indicate in Wollstonecraft’s writing on the *Rights of Woman*.

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58 She moves beyond the impasse of physical difference in her analogy between women and soldiers, when she asks: “Where is then the sexual difference, when the education has been the same?” (p. 27).
60 ibid., p. 139.
61 ibid., p. 140.
Chapter 3

The “duties” of men and women are acknowledged to be different, but to be organised around “but one rule of right” (p. 40). Women’s social duties are understood by Wollstonecraft to be based on their connection “with man as daughters, wives, and mothers” and “their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties” (p. 30). But these social duties are represented as a means to achieve “the grand end of their exertions”: “to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue” (p. 30). This “grand end” applies to all women’s “exertions”. Some women are set aside from her discussion as “minds of a superior class” who can be “left to chance”, while she is most concerned with “the multitude, with moderate abilities, who call for instruction, and catch the colour of the atmosphere they breathe” (p. 78).

5. Love, considered as an animal appetite

Wollstonecraft has been described by Cora Kaplan as “first offer[ing] women this fateful choice between the opposed and moralized bastions of reason and feeling” by arguing that women should be liberated (or liberate themselves) from the sexual into the rational realm. Janet Todd describes Wollstonecraft’s idea of marriage as “simply oppos[ing] the sentimental emotional ideal with a chilly sort of union in which the partners are not passionate or sexually inclined”, and finds an “anti-sexual stance” in this Vindication. Mary Poovey also finds Wollstonecraft making a “basic assumption” that “women are primarily reasoning rather than sexual beings” and “repeatedly turn[ing] her argument away from every potentially dangerous acknowledgment that women have sexual or physical needs”. She claims that Wollstonecraft “rejects the female speaking voice” in favour of “a voice totally unconscious of sexuality”. While the Vindication can be said to be concerned with shifting the balance between rationality and sensibility (or reason and feeling) in female identity, it is an overstatement to claim that it denies female sexuality, or that it avoids mentioning women’s sexual or physical existence. The

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62 Rights of Woman, p. 83.
63 Cora Kaplan, ‘Pandora’s Box’, Feminisms, pp. 857-77 (pp. 862-3 & p. 866).
64 Todd, Sign of Angellica, p. 206 & p. 247.
overstatement seems to arrive from an assumption by most commentators that female sexuality is only expressed within, or in relation to, marriage. In discussing marriage, Wollstonecraft claims that women (as well as men) should expect less of the great passion, and more of “affections” and “friendship”, in an argument addressing the effects for women of indulging a “romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling” which leads them to expect that their husband will “love them with a fervid increasing affection every day, and all day”. The necessary disappointment of this expectation, according to Wollstonecraft, is what leads women to “try to please other men” to experience again “emotions raised by the expectation of new conquests” and hence away from her “duties” (p. 33, p. 37 & p. 31). She summarises her own argument as an attempt to “endeavour to restrain this tumultuous passion, and to prove that it should not be allowed to dethrone superior powers, or to usurp the sceptre which the understanding should ever coolly wield” (p. 31).

Wollstonecraft’s apparent resistance to female sexuality in this *Vindication* derives largely from her reaction to Rousseau’s image of a rape fantasy (or mild heterosexual sadomasochism) in Book V of *Emile*, to justify the “moral” relations between the sexes. Rousseau argues that “[i]n the union of the sexes each alike contributes to the common end, but in different ways. From this diversity springs the first difference which may be observed between man and woman in their moral relations”.

Rousseau comprehends women as the object of a male desire which is pleasurably heightened by female resistance (or at least a show of resistance): “woman is specially made for man’s delight”, and by her “charms” she should “compel him to discover and use his strength” and the “surest way of arousing this strength is to make it necessary by resistance”. This sexual fantasy, in which the man “should be strong and active” and the woman “be weak and passive” and “offer little resistance”, is for Rousseau “the origin of attack and defence, of the boldness of the one sex and the timidity of the other”.

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66 Rousseau, *Emile*, tr. by Barbara Foxley, p. 322. Further references will appear in the text after quotations. The rape fantasy described here by Rousseau is not his creation. See for example Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze: Being the Secret History of an Amour Between Two Persons of Condition* (1724), an astonishing female sexual fantasy which accepts the notion of resistance and yielding as necessary to female as well as male pleasure. The heroine disguises herself as three different women to experience the pleasure of resisting and yielding to the same man more than once. On her fourth attempt she wears a mask, and refuses to give her name, and takes on the role of active seducer.
Wollstonecraft reproduces Rousseau’s description of “the union of the sexes” in a long footnote to a discussion in chapter 3 of a woman left to care for her children alone, who is likely to have “never thought, much less acted for herself” because “she has only learned to please” (p. 54, and n. 14). She declares that she will “make no other comment on this ingenious passage, than to observe, that it is the philosophy of lasciviousness” (p. 55). But at the beginning of chapter 5 she returns to the passage and comments in detail on her opinion that “these fundamental principles lead to a system of cunning and lasciviousness” (p. 89). Fordyce is also found to be “spin[n]ing out Rousseau’s eloquence” (p. 105). His passages on “the behaviour which woman ought to assume to render her lovely” are found to be “so very sentimental, that I have heard rational men use the word indecent, when they mentioned them with disgust” (p. 106). When she turns to Gregory’s *Father’s Legacy*, she finds his comments “with respect to duplicity, female softness, delicacy of constitution” similar to, if “more decorous” than, Rousseau’s passage, and comments that “it all comes home to the same point, and whoever is at trouble to analyze these sentiments, will find the first principles not quite so delicate as the superstructure” (p. 113).

In place of the male sexual fantasy she finds in Rousseau, Fordyce and Gregory, Wollstonecraft gestures in this *Vindication* towards an active female sexuality, but these gestures seem to have been overlooked in accounts of her “anti-sexual stance”. In asking whether “affectation” is “necessary” to “gain the affections of a virtuous man”, she again remarks that “Nature has given woman a weaker frame than man”, notes that “a wife, who by the exercise of her mind and body whilst she was discharging the duties of a daughter, wife, and mother, has allowed her constitution to retain its natural strength, and her nerves more openly (*The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, 2nd ed., ed. by Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar (New York & London: Norton, 1996), pp. 206-24).

* The passage she quotes reads like a dramatised rape fantasy: “Behold these smiling innocents, whom I have graced with my fairest gifts, and committed to your protection; behold them with love and respect; treat them with tenderness and honour. They are timid and want to be defended. They are frail; O do not take advantage of their weakness! Let their fears and blushes endear them. Let their confidence in you never be abused. - But is it possible, that any of you can be such barbarians, so supremely wicked, as to abuse it? Can you find in your hearts to despoil the gentle, trusting creatures of their treasure, or do any thing to strip them of their native robe of virtue? Curst be the impious hand that would dare to violate the unblemished form of Chastity! Thou wretch! thou ruffian! forbear” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 106; Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 5th edition (London, 1770), vol. I, sermon iii, pp. 99-100).
a healthy tone” is expected to “condescend to use art and feign a sickly delicacy in order to secure her husband’s affection” (p. 33). In opposing women’s use of “[w]eakness” to “excite tenderness”, she imagines the “lordly caresses of a protector” which will “not gratify a noble mind that pants for, and deserves to be respected”. Respect for the mind is paramount, but nonetheless sexual love is for Wollstonecraft “a natural right”, the “wages due” to even a “patient drudge, who fulfils her task, like a blind horse in a mill”, who is “defrauded of her just reward” if her husband finds sexual pleasure elsewhere (p. 76). She discards polygamy as an alternative to marriage on the grounds that, according to her source, it “enervate[s]” the men “by the use of so many women”, while the women are “deprived in their matrimony of that share of physical love which, in a monogamous condition would be all theirs” (p. 80). While she admits that she wishes to “guard the female heart” from “romantic wavering feelings” she clearly states that she does not wish to guard their hearts from “strong, persevering passions” (p. 85). She notices that the “sexual attention of man particularly acts on female sensibility” - a phrase which has been read to suggest that male sexuality is inspired by (acts on) female sensibility. But the comment is part of an explanation for why a woman “turns to a new lover” because her “husband cannot long pay those attentions with the passion necessary to excite lively emotion” - and the woman has grown used to such “lively emotion” because “this sympathy [between sexual attention and sensibility] has been exercised from their youth” (p. 73). The acting on is admittedly double-edged, but in the context seems to record her opinion that female “sensibility” is stimulated by male sexual attention, rather than the other way round. Women’s “sex”, she exclaims in chapter 4, “stand[s] between them and rational converse” with men. But this is not an argument for reducing all inter-sexual relations to “rational converse”. Wollstonecraft distinguishes between inter-sexual relations in general, and those between lovers:

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68 She is quoting from John Reinhold Forster, Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World (London, 1788), pp. 425-6.
69 G.J. Barker-Benfield quotes this phrase as evidence that Wollstonecraft was aware of “what kind of femininity appealed to men”, Culture of Sensibility, p. 363.
With a lover, I grant, she should be so, and her sensibility will naturally lead her to endeavour to excite emotion, not to gratify her vanity, but her heart. This I do not allow to be coquetry, it is the artless impulse of nature, I only exclaim against the sexual desire of conquest when the heart is out of the question (p. 64).

Her earnest wish “to see the distinction of sex confounded in society” is qualified similarly by a sexual get-out clause: “unless where love animates the behaviour” (p. 65). Women, she seems to be arguing, achieve the power they are otherwise denied by their sexual activities: “whilst man remains such an imperfect being” he is “the slave of his appetites”, and women “obtain[ ] most power who gratify a predominant one” (p. 53). The “rational woman” imagined by Wollstonecraft would be more sexually active, rather than less:

the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualitites, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband’s passions (pp. 33-4).

Wollstonecraft’s gestures towards possible female sexual futures are not only contained within marriage. She describes, for one, adultery as “a natural divorcement” (p. 80). A sensual relationship is recognised between mother and child, particularly in the act of breast-feeding, which she notices women have been prevented from enjoying by “many husbands” who “during the first effervescence of voluptuous fondness [...] refuse to let their wives suckle their children” (p. 83). Love between women and men is described as “only a part of that glowing flame of universal love, which, after encircling humanity, mounts in grateful incense to God” (p. 77).

Wollstonecraft’s use of the word “sensibility” begins to carry the weight of female sexuality, especially when she complains that “sexual distinction respecting modesty has proved fatal to virtue and happiness” for women because they are “made by [their] education the slave of sensibility” and then “required, on the most trying occasions, to resist that sensibility” (pp. 141-2). And again when she notes that Rousseau and Gregory
“both desire a wife to leave it in doubt whether sensibility or weakness led her to her husband’s arms”. Wollstonecraft’s idea of sexual modesty demands that no woman can remain that ambivalent about her own desire: “The woman is immodest who can let the shadow of such a doubt remain in her husband’s mind a moment” (p. 142).

Claudia Johnson finds Wollstonecraft’s comments on the “very nasty tricks” girls learn when “too intimate” with each other evidence that “sexuality is constantly spilling over heterosexual boundaries” in this Vindication. The “parental heterosexuality” Wollstonecraft imposes on women is the solution to the problem of an excess of female sexuality. Johnson finds that, in spite of Wollstonecraft’s comment that “many women have not mind enough to have an affection for a woman” (p. 200), it is only heterosexual relationships that she “dignifies by name and recommends as such”. When Wollstonecraft approaches female intimacy, however, her prose becomes strained and ambiguous, in contrast to her lucid and unabashed references to female desire with men. After describing the “nasty, or immodest habits” and “very nasty tricks” girls learn from servants and pass on in “boarding-schools”, she claims that “women are, in general, too familiar with each other”, and then turns to recommending “frequent ablutions” to “preserve health and beauty” (p. 144). Girls should “wash and dress alone” and never be assisted during “that part of the business [...] which ought never to be done before a fellow-creature; because it is an insult to the majesty of human nature”. It appears to me that the fear of “intimacy” Johnson is reading as sexual, is in this instance purely toiletry, in the modern sense. She stops herself from proceeding “still further”, so we never hear the fascinating promise of “some still more nasty customs, which men never fall into”, but the evidence suggests that what she is unable to bring herself to mention openly is menstruation: “Secrets are told - where silence ought to reign; and that regard to

70 Rights of Woman, p. 144; Johnson, Equivocal Beings, pp. 42-3.
71 ibid., p. 42. Wollstonecraft’s comment arises from her discussion of “[t]he power which vile and foolish women have had over wise men, who possessed sensibility” taking the example of Rousseau and “that fool Theresa”: “Nay, in the bitterness of his heart, he himself laments, that when his bodily infirmities made him no longer treat her like a woman, she ceased to have an affection for him. And it was very natural that she should, for having so few sentiments in common, when the sexual tie was broken, what was to hold her? To hold her affection whose sensibility was confined to one sex, nay, to one man, it requires sense to turn sensibility into the broad channel of humanity; many women have not mind enough to have an affection for a woman, or a friendship for a man” (p. 200).
cleanliness, which some religious sects have, perhaps, carried too far [...] is violated in a beastly manner. How can *delicate* women obtrude on notice that part of the animal economy, which is so very disgusting?” (p. 145; original emphasis). The “personal reserve” Wollstonecraft is advocating for “both sexes” she believes is the only thing which can keep “[d]omestic affection” alive (p. 146). Her application of the same degree of “personal reserve” in intra-sexual as well as inter-sexual domestic relations, is not necessarily evidence of a denial of female emotional intimacy; in fact it can be taken to suggest quite the opposite.

If for Wollstonecraft the attainment of virtue is dependent on the degree of physical strength and health, a worrying over sexual difference, and a concern with the female body and desire, would be inevitable. Throughout this *Vindication* Wollstonecraft is interested in the nature of femininity, in what it means to have a female body, and where the borders and limitations of that body would be, were it allowed or enabled to develop without restraints. This is what can be heard in her attempts to negotiate a definition of masculinity or manliness that would not exclude female bodies:

> Indeed the word masculine is only a bugbear: there is little reason to fear that women will acquire too much courage or fortitude; for their apparent inferiority with respect to bodily strength, must render them, in some degree, dependent on men in the various relations of life (p. 13).^^

She believes it is possible for women to become “more masculine” because “strength of mind has, in most cases, been accompanied by superior strength of body, - natural

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^72 As Claudia Johnson demonstrates in *Equivocal Beings*, Wollstonecraft finds both men and women artificially effeminate: “Bodily strength from being the distinction of heroes is now sunk into such unmerited contempt that men, as well as women, seem to think it unnecessary: the latter, as it takes from their feminine graces, and from that lovely weakness the source of their undue power, and the former, because it appears inimical to the character of a gentleman” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 43). Wollstonecraft wants to allow women to become “more and more masculine” in the sense of the “imitation of manly virtues [...], the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character” (p. 10). She is defining masculinity in opposition to ‘effeminacy’ rather than femininity, and does not assume that this increase in masculinity will lead to a level equality between men and women, but an increase in virtue through struggle for both sexes: “let their virtues be the same in kind, though they may vainly struggle for the same degree; and the superiority of man will be equally clear, if not clearer” (p. 41).
soundness of constitution” (p. 13 & p. 43). To illustrate this point she observes that “the majority of great men lived beyond forty five” and concludes “they must have had iron frames”. Self-reflection is apparent in her observation that so “few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man”: 

So few, that the exceptions remind me of an ingenious conjecture respecting Newton: that he was probably a being of a superior order, accidentally caged in a human body. Following the same train of thinking, I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentrical directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were male spirits, confined by mistake in female frames (p. 39; original emphasis).

If “bodily strength” is “the only solid base on which the superiority of the [male] sex can be built” and “the most perfect education” is “such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart” (p. 44 & p. 24), then sexual difference might be attributable to the sort of education women had received:

But avoiding, as I have hitherto done, any direct comparison of the two sexes collectively, or frankly acknowledging the inferiority of woman, according to the present appearance of things, I shall only insist that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale (pp. 39-40).

And the sort of education Wollstonecraft is advocating for women has a future of unguessable proportions for the female body and mind:

It is difficult for us purblind mortals to say to what height human discoveries and improvements may arrive when the gloom of despotism subsides, [...] without being gifted with a prophetic spirit, I will venture to predict that woman will be either the friend or slave of man. We shall not, as at present, doubt whether she is a moral agent, or the link which unites man with brutes (p. 40).
6. Betwixt Man and Brutes

The power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations, is the only acquirement, for an immortal being, that really deserves the name of knowledge (Rights of Woman, p. 61).

Wollstonecraft is concerned in her Vindication of the Rights of Woman simultaneously to argue and to demonstrate that women were as capable as men (under suitable conditions) of “drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations”. This was an important claim; it was a demand for recognition of intellectual equality, in terms of how possible it was for women to achieve the highest forms of thinking. Her phrase - “the power of generalizing ideas” - evokes some powerful sources, in itself a claim by Wollstonecraft to “that [which] really deserves the name of knowledge”. John Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding takes the ability to abstract and draw general conclusions in thinking as a defining characteristic of the human (as opposed directly to ‘brutes’):

If it may be doubted, Whether Beasts compound and enlarge their Ideas that way, to any degree: This, I think, I may be positive in, That the power of Abstracting is not at all in them; and that the having of general Ideas, is that which puts a perfect distinction betwixt Man and Brutes; and is an Excellency which the Faculties of Brutes do by no means attain to.

It is this context that justifies the passion in her remark: “How grossly do they insult us who advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes!” (Rights of Woman, p. 22).

Rousseau describes women's “reason” in Emile as the “practical” complement to masculine reason. Women are unable to “discover principles” and are expert at “detail”, and thus are represented as the complementary opposite to masculine reason which can

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“principles”, and the complementarity is imagined as “a moral person of which woman is the eye and man the hand”. Wollstonecraft rewrites Rousseau's description of sexed reason in a passage which mocks his image of a husband and wife making “one moral being”. She identifies the polarisation of reason between the sexes as one which ascribes “abstract reason” to the male, and “practical reason” to the female, and disrupts the seductive symmetry of the image with a deflating example: “he may be generalising his ideas as he bets away his fortune, leaving all the minutiae of education to his helpmate, or to chance” (pp. 100-1). In the course of Book V Rousseau describes “the consequences of sex” as “wholly unlike for man and woman”, and states that “[t]he male is only a male now and again, the female is always a female” because “everything reminds her of her sex” (Emile, p. 324). Wollstonecraft answers this claim directly when she states firmly “[t]his desire of being always a woman, is the very consciousness that degrades the sex” (p. 112).

Rousseau is specific about what he means by a woman being always a woman: “the performance of her functions requires a special constitution” (p. 324). These “functions” are “pregnancy”, the birth, nursing and education of her children, and the facilitation of the bond between father and child. He argues explicitly against the possible contention that women might not spend all their time in pregnancy and child care as “a poor sort of logic to quote isolated exceptions against laws so firmly established”, in itself a repudiation of the particular in the face of general laws (p. 325). Women - even when not directly taken up with bearing children - are governed by the “general laws of nature” that make it “a woman's business to be a mother”. And even if we “assume” “long intervals […] between the periods of pregnancy” this primary “business” still governs a woman's “functions” (p. 325). And it is for this reason that “[t]he search for abstract and speculative truths, for principles and axioms in science, for all that tends to wide

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74 Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 340. Rousseau earlier expresses a strong condemnation of abstract thinking: “The chief source of human error is to be found in general and abstract ideas” (p. 236). He differs from Godwin in his idea of the “savage”, who he argues is an opposite type to the peasant (p. 83). See also Godwin's discussion of the human mind as an infinitely improveable intelligence, in which brutes and savages are represented as intellectual children (*Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 157). I am not concerned with ideas of abstract or general thinking as such, but with the point at which these versions of the general/detailed or abstract/particular dichotomy were familiar to Wollstonecraft as an issue of sexual difference.
generalisation, is beyond a woman's grasp” and “woman observes, man reasons” (p. 349).
Wollstonecraft responds directly to Rousseau's claim in chapter 3 of her *Vindication*. She reproduces Rousseau's description of “the proper province of women” excluding “abstract and speculative truths” in full in a footnote, in case the reader had missed the point (p. 44, n 11).  

Wollstonecraft's response to Rousseau draws heavily on Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education*. Macaulay includes “a power of generalising and combining its ideas, in such a manner as to apprehend truths of the most abstract kind” as an essential faculty in “the oeconomy of the human mind” (pt 3, pp. 382-3; Letter vi). She describes the “notion of a positive inferiority in the intellectual powers of the female mind” as a “prejudice” in an argument against the differentiation performed in the education of the sexes (pt 1, p. 49 & p. 48; Letter iv). Macaulay describes Rousseau as one of “the most strenuous asserters of a sexual difference in character” and her discussion is directly concerned to counter Rousseau's definition of female nature in *Emile* (pt 1, p. 205; Letter xxii). In a discussion which outlines “much false speculation on the natural qualities of the female mind” Macaulay argues against the “doctrine of innate ideas, and innate affections” as having been “in a great measure exploded by the learned” (pt 1, p.203; Letter xxii).

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75 As contradictory as it seems, some women writers adopted Rousseau's opinion on the female mind, and presented their own version in writing. Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, for example, published *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits. Addressed to Miss H. M. Williams, with particular reference to Her Letters from France* in 1793. Here she divides “subjects of thought” into a (somewhat ironic) generalised hierarchy of “abstruse, serious, and light” reading from masculine to feminine (p. 119). Hawkins' argument seems conscious of the dangers of its self-undermining nature (that it is argued by a woman at all, however “desultory” the argument claims to be) when she pauses in her catalogue of instances of “superior masculine excellence” to reflect on “approximations between [male and female genius] that render it difficult sometimes to ascertain the precise point at which they diverge”. She claims the right to rely on extreme cases of difference because “to our obtuse faculties” these differences of mind are “scarcely perceptible but when magnified by some degree of distance” (p. 118). It is unclear whether “our” calls on women only, or the mind in general, but it seems oddly convenient for a woman to posit an argument that the female mind “has less strength”, and then to perform an obvious inconsistency in disregarding similar “[i]nstances” where “masculine” faculties are exhibited by female minds as “rare” rather than “magnified” and therefore perceivable by these “obtuse faculties”. Page numbers refer to *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, ed. by Vivien Jones (London: Routledge, 1990).  

76 Catherine Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects*, in 3 parts (London, 1790). Further references to this edition will be made after quotations in the text. Wollstonecraft was greatly influenced by Macaulay's *Letters* in her writing of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).
Chapter 3

She goes on to explain the persistence of prejudice - representing the female mind as inferior - as an example of how generally rare it is for any mind to "reason so closely, and so accurately on abstract subjects as, through a long chain of deductions, to bring forth a conclusion which in no respect militates with their premises". Macaulay's argument, we should infer, is a performance of this ability to "reason [...] on abstract subjects" (pt 1, p. 203; Letter xxii). Wollstonecraft describes Macaulay as "an example of intellectual acquirements supposed to be incompatible with the weakness of her sex". Macaulay's "style of writing" is applauded as one in which "no sex appears" (Rights of Woman, p. 118). It is in this passage that Wollstonecraft begins to move away from an uncomplicated invocation of "masculine" to denote a positive, active, reasoned, virtuous position (in contrast to corrupt effeminacy), when she rethinks an earlier review of Macaulay in which she had described her as "a masculine and fervid writer"."^ Here she suggests that using "masculine" to denote a cluster of ideas - including sound understanding, judgement, profound thinking, penetration, understanding, sober energy, argumentative closeness, sympathy and benevolence - reinforces an "arrogant assumption of reason" by the masculine sex (pp. 118-9).

To summarise, then, Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman suffers the fame of its title. What has been understood as an argument against female sexual desire in favour of rationality, can also be understood as a negotiation of female embodiment; both as an aspect of an attempt to write the female body out of male-authored sexual fantasies, and as an aspect of the problem posed by the female body in political philosophy. The female body then, is foregrounded in Wollstonecraft's second Vindication, partly as that which she has been taught prevents her from achieving "the power of generalizing ideas", and partly (relatedly) in her struggle to recognise an active female sexuality beyond the peculiar confines of male constructions. It is in her next publication that the female body and female desire disappear from view.

Chapter 4

Maternity, Castration and Mary Wollstonecraft’s
Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution

it is quite possible that the represented matter of the Revolution
was only the particular “bricolage” - whatever came
to hand at the moment - for the author
or writer who wanted to talk
about something else.2

1. Positioning the View

Mary Wollstonecraft’s Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution (1794)
was her second published intervention in the revolution debate. While her first Vindication
is concerned to counter Burke’s fears of an evidently growing radical tendency in British
political culture, her Historical and Moral View is written with knowledge of the
intervening political events: the September Massacres of 1792, the execution of Louis
XVI in 1793, and the suspension of Habeas Corpus in Britain in 1793; and at a time of
declared war between Britain and revolutionary France.3

As I have discussed in chapter 2, Wollstonecraft’s first Vindication was shaped by
her engagement with, and rejection of, aspects of patriarchal politics and thinking.
Burke’s Reflections manipulates the reader’s investment in what Carole Pateman has
termed “traditional patriarchal thought” which “assimilates all power relations to paternal

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1 Mary Wollstonecraft, An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution and the Effect it has
Produced in Europe. In future I will refer to this work as either simply the View or the Historical and
Moral View. All page references refer to the following edition: Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, 7 vols., ed.
2 Ronald Paulson, Representations of Revolution (1789-1820) (New Haven & London: Yale University
3 Marilyn Butler offers a regionally inflected context for political writing in the 1790s. While, she
suggests, “[i]t now seems obvious that the English government and upper classes exaggerated the danger
of violent overthrow in the 1790s” awareness of this probably didn’t reach the “gentry scattered among the
villages […] at a period when the news was of French victories abroad and the need for repressive
legislation against radicals at home; when newspapers and journals were full of loyalist sentiment, and
sermons, pamphlets, novels, and satirical verse fervently preached the old-fashioned anti-revolutionary
values of piety and patriotism” (Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature
Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication* questioned inheritance laws and the condition of marriage (important aspects of patriarchalism) and suggested, in line with other radical writings of the period, that property be replaced and/or complemented by "virtue" as a marker of social and political value.\(^5\) The *Historical and Moral View*, I will argue, can also be seen in relation to Wollstonecraft's sensitivity to aspects of patriarchalism, written as it is following the decapitation of what Lynn Hunt has called "the political father".\(^6\)

This discussion is not assuming Wollstonecraft's theoretical familiarity with the term patriarchalism, but rather is raising an aspect of her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* overlooked in more overt claims to her liberal feminism.\(^7\) It is, for example, significant that the primary act of anti-patriarchalism (Regicide) had taken place since her first discussion of the French Revolution, only six weeks after her arrival in Paris, and shortly following her witnessing of the king being taken through the streets to be tried for treason, but is kept outside the borders (chronological and thematic) of her analysis of that Revolution.\(^8\)

I will be arguing, then, that this apparently small act of framing her *Historical and Moral View* (her selectivity about dates and events) can be said to present


\(^5\) "Of all the principles of justice, there is none so material to the moral rectitude of mankind as that no man can be distinguished but by his personal merit" (William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness* (1790) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 474. Page numbers given in the text refer to this edition).


\(^7\) Wollstonecraft's status as an originating figure in feminist history disguises a suggestive and more complex engagement by her late writings with certain central tenets of patriarchalism. In the course of this discussion I am implicitly relying on Carole Pateman's argument that patriarchy as a term remains important for feminist criticism, and one which has fallen out of fashion for various reasons (see Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, chapter 2). Later in this discussion I introduce psychoanalytically informed accounts of femininity which are more interested in phallocentrism than patriarchalism, but I maintain throughout that the former remains in view in critiques of the latter. I use patriarchalism to denote patriarchal structures of thinking, not always (or usually) conscious, and am implying in the term a significant structural continuity between what Carole Pateman terms traditional patriarchal thought, classic patriarchy (as expressed by Filmer's *Patriarcha, or the Natural power of Kings* [wr. 1638]) - McKeon's "patriarchalism") and modern patriarchy (McKeon's "modern conception of gender difference", see chapter 2, n. 92 of this thesis).

\(^8\) Wollstonecraft wrote a letter to her sister Eliza on the 20th January 1793, the day before Louis XIV was executed, which mentions the "unsettled state of public affairs". Her next letter is dated 1-15th Feb. (to Ruth Barlow); in this she restricts herself to the comment: "I will not now advert to public news excepting to tell you that the new constitution will soon make its appearance, and that Paris has remained perfectly tranquil ever since the death of the King" (*Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Ralph Wardle (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 228 & p. 230).
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us with a larger significant absence. The absence of the dead king is what makes her View possible.

That gender-consciousness which is evident throughout Wollstonecraft's mature writings, and for which she has been remembered - summarisable as her insistence on a "manly" style (Rights of Men), her argument for a "revolution in female manners" (Rights of Woman), and her preoccupation with peculiarly female suffering and its causes, and meditations on her daughter's future (Short Residence and Wrongs of Woman) - is not obviously present in the Historical and Moral View. This is interesting in itself: it suggests a reason for the supplementary status (or dismissal) of this work in editions and commentaries on Wollstonecraft, as it raises questions about her feminist philosophy, sorting ill with the common conception of Wollstonecraft as a feminist. The author/narrator of the Historical and Moral View does not declare her gender in the course of the narrative, while the narrative voices present in the works mentioned above make explicit claims on behalf of the perspective of a female writer. The coincidence of

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9 A brief look at her earlier works also suggests that the Historical and Moral View is unusual in avoiding references to gender; Mary (1788) offers passages of first-person confession or commentary by the female protagonist and is interested in the personal details and social outlines of female lives; Original Stories (1788), Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787) and the Female Reader (1789) are clearly invested in a female narrator, protagonist and readership (the Female Reader changes male pronouns to female); Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation (dated 1793) is insistently in the first person; 'On Poetry' (first published in the Monthly Magazine (1797), 279-82) attempts an authoritative tone in the first-person. The View is closest in style to Wollstonecraft's contributions to the Analytical Review (1788-1797) where she was concerned to voice a general rather than personal opinion. See The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vols. 4, 6 & 7.

10 Janet Todd, for example in The Sign Of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction 1660-1800 (London: Virago, 1989) writes in detail about Wollstonecraft's second Vindication and two novels, but pays little attention to the Historical and Moral View. Duncan Wu's recent Romanticism: A Critical Reader (London: Blackwell, 1995) includes a discussion by Anne Mellor of the second Vindication only; Marilyn Butler does not refer to the Historical and Moral View in Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries, or in Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). These approaches work towards a version of Wollstonecraft which aligns feminism with a conscious attitude and critical position: self-identified as a gendered discourse. I am suggesting that other strategies are in play which are feminist in the sense that they are critical engagements with hegemonic patriarchal thinking, while possibly remaining unconscious of their feminism. That is, Wollstonecraft's presence as a woman writing about these events and the questions they raise is important in itself, aside from her 'views', 'opinions' or 'political theory'.

11 The first Vindication was originally published anonymously and does not explicitly represent the writer's gender, but it is nevertheless a gender-preoccupied piece of writing in a way the Historical and Moral View cannot claim to be. My claim that the first Vindication draws on the character of the narrator
two significant absences seems to indicate a powerful elision or denial at work, and during this chapter I will investigate the nature and effect of that dual repression. Why would Wollstonecraft avoid any mention of the king's execution by closing the narrative in 1792 (at a moment prior to her arrival in Paris), and at the same time re-work her writing voice to avoid any suggestion of the narrator/author's femininity, or to make claims on behalf of that femininity, as is a characteristic in her earlier and later writings?

The epistolary style of the first Vindication evoked the presence of Wollstonecraft the writer at her desk with Burke's Reflections open before her. This Vindication is given the form of a "Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke" and relies (in a similar way to Burke's Reflections) on the establishment of a first-person character for its rhetorical persuasion. In the first paragraph of the letter this character refuses to apologise, doesn't twist her periods or disguise her sentiments, beseeches, contends, does not condescend, reverences, and is not intimidated. The second Vindication makes explicit and repeated references to the narrator's female identity, turns arguments on the phrase "because I am a woman" and plays a game of gallant address with a projected female readership: "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures". In the Historical and Moral View the narrator is markedly detached; concerned only to highlight and explain the abstract forces of history at work. Its opening sentence - "When we contemplate the infancy of man" - is already two steps removed from the dialogic intimacy of the first and second Vindications; by use of the first-person plural, and by its object of enquiry (p. 15). The View continues in the third person until the author/narrator enters Versailles, where a sensitive (and arguably sexed) body is seen reflected in the mirrors of the Palace, and returns to the third-person soon afterwards.

In part the creation of a representative, ungendered narrator whose narrative of the Revolution could not be identified with Wollstonecraft's personal experience might be as a sexed representative of the writer need not assume the reader's knowledge of the writer's sex, but is reinforced by that knowledge.

12 Mary Wollstonecraft, Rights of Woman, p. 10 & p. 11. Virginia Sapiro comments that "[i]n this work Wollstonecraft not only did not disguise her sex, but made a point of identifying herself as a woman within the text" (Vindication of Political Virtue, p. 27).

13 The passage in question is discussed below.
explained by the political atmosphere in which she was writing. Wollstonecraft says in a letter to her sister Everina that she was advised by Helen Maria Williams to “burn” her manuscript for reasons of personal safety in the midst of Jacobin “suspicion”, claiming she feared for her life if the manuscript had been “found”. In a letter to Eliza Bishop dated June 24th 1793, written from her house just outside Paris, Wollstonecraft added the postscript: “Do not touch on politics”. A sense of personal danger in a hazardous and unpredictable time provides a plausible reason for containing the narrative within the less sensitive period of 1789-92. In part the detached tone might also be a response to the turn taken by events in France following the violence of 1792, and the Jacobin revolution of 1793, which damaged Wollstonecraft’s belief in the meliorating effect of enlightened rationality on the processes and development of human government. Virginia Sapiro takes this line, suggesting that “her writing was likely to have been curbed by self-censorship”. Gary Kelly and Vivien Jones recognise that the View is written against the popularity of Helen Maria Williams’s Letters from France (1790), and that Wollstonecraft could have been consciously avoiding Williams’s ‘feminine’ style. While these are valid and useful ways of explaining the anomaly that is the Historical and Moral View, I want to suggest that Wollstonecraft’s turn to an impersonal ‘philosophical’ style, removed from any gendered signs of the author/narrator’s identity, can also be read as a performance of her ability to reason in general terms, a guarded - if interestingly flawed - intellectual display. I am going to suggest that this performance, and the sexless discourse

14 Collected Letters, p. 250; original emphasis.
15 ibid., p. 233.
16 In her Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation, written before the View (it is dated Paris, 15th February 1793) but not published at the time, Wollstonecraft discusses the violence of the September Massacres in Godwinian terms of the brutality in “the people” resulting from the brutalising government of the old regime. Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 6, p. 444. She describes the Letter as the result of “melancholy effusions” (p. 445). See Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice: “Revolution is engendered by an Indignation against tyranny, yet is itself ever more pregnant with tyranny” (p. 269).
to which it makes a claim, are explicable in terms of Wollstonecraft's first experience of maternity. The psychoanalytically informed discussion raised by this argument might also account for the absence of a beheaded king.

2. The least interesting and important of Mary's books

Intended as the first of three volumes, the *Historical and Moral View* stands as the longest and most meticulous of Wollstonecraft's writings. It is one she seemed to value highly. She described this work in a letter to Eliza Bishop as "a great book." Nevertheless, the *Historical and Moral View* is conspicuous as the most neglected of Wollstonecraft's mature writings. After its initial publication in 1794, it was given a second edition in the following year, and then remained out of print until Janet Todd's facsimile edition in 1975. At the time of writing it is only available outside copyright libraries as selections in anthologies, and in Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler's seven volume *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

Wollstonecraft's biographer, Claire Tomalin, offers a clue to the relative critical and editorial indifference towards this work:

The interest of the *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* is not the factual element, since the narrative breaks

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20 The fact that Wollstonecraft intended (and signposted this intention in her "Advertisement") to write "two or three more volumes" on the Revolution, which would inevitably have had to cover the events of 1793, is interesting to this argument. The absence of the beheaded King from this volume, and the subsequent failure to produce later volumes which might have contained reference to this, might simply be a re-enactment of her failure or unwillingness to write about a beheaded King (*Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 6, p. 5). It is equally interesting that she described the *Letter on the Present character of the French Nation* as "introductory to a series", but no evidence exists of her continuing this project (*Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 6, p. 443). I am speculating on the context in which such an absence is possible or necessary.
21 *Collected Letters*, p.231.
off before the date of her arrival in France, and she gives no sources for her information; it is largely in its sidelong glances at her own experience, and in the passages where she tried to formulate her political faith.\textsuperscript{22}

Camilla Jebb in 1912 said something very similar of this work:

For latter-day readers the chief value of the book lies in the vivid descriptions, by an eye-witness, of Paris at that terrible period.\textsuperscript{23}

Tomalin and Jebb - in spite of the distance between them - both emphasise the (rare) personal insights available from this, Wollstonecraft's most impersonal piece of writing. The editors of \textit{A Mary Wollstonecraft Reader} in 1983 voiced a similar preoccupation with evidence of Wollstonecraft's life, suggesting (as Tomalin does above) that a lack of personal or biographical insight is reason enough for judging this work to be a failure:

Since most of the volume reviews what had taken place prior to her arrival in Paris in December 1792 [...] and since it lacks the eyewitness view of events (and of women's participation in them) that the author of \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Woman} seemed so fortunately situated to provide, it fails to justify its length.\textsuperscript{24}

Margaret Tims offers a curt thumbs-down: “Mary's detailed reconstruction of events preceding the outbreak of the Revolution [...] is of no particular interest except to the professional historian.”\textsuperscript{25} Emily Sunstein in a biography published a year earlier complains that “[t]he book never comes to life” and finds in 522 pages of writing only two passages interesting enough to quote, on the grounds that they reflect “her current personal situation”.\textsuperscript{26} Marilyn Butler’s chronology of significant writings and events between 1760-1830 appended to her influential study of \textit{Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries}

\textsuperscript{22} Claire Tomalin, \textit{The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft}, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{26} Emily Sunstein, \textit{A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft} (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 255-6.
mentions Wollstonecraft's two *Vindications* but makes no mention of the *Historical and Moral View*. 27

A tendency to ignore or downgrade the *Historical and Moral View* can be understood as one aspect of the influence on Wollstonecraft studies of late liberal feminism. Recent biographers and commentators, concerned to uphold a version of Wollstonecraft as a social pioneer for women's liberty, tend to prioritise those writings foregrounding aspects of her life which show her as martyred or strident. At the same time a tendency to fix attention on Wollstonecraft's life itself - either in the form of feminist heroine or feminine icon - is often in fact a tendency to fix attention on Wollstonecraft's erotic life, namely her relationships with Fuseli, Imlay and Godwin. The *Historical and Moral View* is not apparently interesting to either of these perspectives. Its reception in the decades after its publication, however, was generally favourable, with one anonymous commentator claiming that "in judiciousness of general remark as an analysis of political events, and correctness of historical narrative" the *Historical and Moral View* is "not second to the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". 28

Gary Kelly, in the course of offering a rare modern celebration of this work, places his assessment of its writing in a careful and detailed analysis of the writer's personal life, in particular of the relationship with Gilbert Imlay, which he claims "transformed Wollstonecraft". 29 Kelly sets the background to this work as a time during

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27 Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, p. 190. Virginia Sapiro thinks the *View* is "one of her most interesting but least successful efforts" (*Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. 34), while Alison Ravetz appears to stand alone in describing it as "one of her most successful pieces of writing"; see Alison Ravetz, "The Trivialisation of Mary Wollstonecraft: A Personal and Political Career Re-Vindicated", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 6 (1983), 481-500, p.481.

28 *Defense of the Character and Conduct of the Late Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Founded on Principles of Nature and Reason, as Applied to the Peculiar Circumstances of her Case; in a Series of Letters to a Lady* (London: James Wallis, 1803), p. 67 (original emphasis). See *Analytical Review*, 20 (September-December 1794), 337-347 and 21 (January-June 1795), 396-397 for favourable reviews of the *Historical and Moral View*. The *British Critic* accused Wollstonecraft of lifting her facts and statistics from the *New Annual Register*, and provided detailed comparisons of passages to uphold its claim, see *British Critic*, 6 (1795), 29-36. *The Critical Review* questions her style, and describes the work as 'turgid', see *Critical Review*, 16 (1796), 390-396. *The Monthly Review*, 16 (January-April 1795), 393-402 gives a favourable account as does the *New Annual Register* (1794), 221-222.

29 Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*, p. 148. Further references will be given after quotations in the text. Harriet Devine Jump offers a careful and detailed assessment of the *View* in her essay "The Cool Eye of Observation": Mary Wollstonecraft and the French Revolution'. This essay offers an accurate and
which Wollstonecraft ‘[c]ertainly [...] gave herself fully and frankly to sexual love’ with Imlay, and quotes Godwin’s description of the transformation this love made on her life and character - ‘[h]er sorrows, the depression of her spirits, were forgotten, and she assumed all the simplicity and the vivacity of a youthful mind’ etc. - without comment. In spite of giving a very positive account of this book as a successful ‘Revolutionary feminist’ work, he imagines it written ‘[m]eanwhile’ in the spaces of her relationship with Imlay, and closes his discussion by commenting that Wollstonecraft would have been ‘more concerned by the breakdown of her vanguardist revolutionary conjugality with Imlay than by the failure of her vanguardist revolutionary writing’ (p. 153, p. 150 & p. 152). Edna Nixon also characterises Wollstonecraft’s ‘work’ on the *Historical and Moral View* as secondary to her relationship with Imlay, claiming that ‘she could await Imlay’s visits in peace of mind, passing the time between his visits in work upon her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*’. A preoccupation with Wollstonecraft’s erotic life takes precedence in these accounts, which speculate about the effect on her writing of the relationship with Imlay. None speculates about the effect of writing during her first pregnancy. Wollstonecraft herself highlighted in a letter to Everina that the *Historical and Moral View* was ‘written during my pregnancy’. In this chapter I am interested in tracing a possible connection between what I find to be the most striking aspects of this work: the disembodiment and de-gendering of the narrative voice, the absence of the decapitated king, and the writer’s first experience of maternity as physically and visibly embodied femininity.

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31 *Collected Letters*, p. 262.
In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft often uses a visual metaphor to carry her point. She writes in this *Vindication*: “Were women more rationally educated” they could “take a more comprehensive view of things” (p. 134). The “view” she has in mind is elevated to a point above the details of everyday life, usually positioned higher than the ground, and focused on a distant point. A “view” also occurs when she describes the differing experiences of the sexes when travelling:

“A man, when he undertakes a journey, has, in general, the end in view; a woman thinks more of the incidental occurrences, the strange things that may possibly occur on the road; the impression that she may make on her fellow-travellers; and, above all, she is anxiously intent on the care of the finery that she carries with her […] - Can dignity of mind exist with such trivial cares? (p. 68).

This “view” is one which can see beyond the present (“the end” rather than “the incidental occurrences”) and is situated outside the self (in silent contrast to “the impression that she may make on her fellow travellers”). A similar metaphor, two paragraphs earlier, is used to describe the wider advantages gained by the employment of a man in a profession:

“A man when he enters any profession has his eye steadily fixed on some future advantage (and the mind gains strength by having all its efforts directed to one point) (p. 68).

In chapter 5 she makes a self-conscious reference to her own act of stepping back from the detail of her discussion to a more generalised insight into “the world”: “Let me now as from an eminence survey the world stripped of all its false delusive charms” (p. 124). These metaphorical representations of a clear “view” become embodied in the figure of Wollstonecraft’s self-representation at moments in her *Letters from Sweden*. They are also analogues of Romantic poetry’s embodiment of the transcendent ego in the figure of

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32 *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary’s* definition 2.b. of “view”. 
the narrative poet elevated to a position from which he can see clearly. The conceptual view she attempts in these instances is general rather than detailed, elevated rather than immersed in the world, and distant rather than immediate. In the following discussion I will indicate to what extent these metaphorical views - precursors to her *Historical and Moral View* - are informed by gendered metaphors available in philosophical and aesthetic discourse. 

5. What meditation requisite!

Wollstonecraft demonstrated her awareness of a gendering of aesthetic taste in her novel *Mary; A Fiction* (1788) when the character of that name is shown to be “fond of seeing historical paintings” while the “ladies” of her party “soon adverted to portraits.” Sir Joshua Reynolds proposed an aesthetic which valued the general, comprehensive view above the particular. In his *Discourses on Art* Reynolds reiterates a hierarchy between portraiture and history painting, which largely works by associating the former with ‘ornamental’ styles and the latter with the ‘sublime’: “A Portrait-Painter [...] is likely to enter too much into the detail. [...] An History-Painter paints man in general; a Portrait-Painter, a particular man, and consequently a defective model”. Shaftesbury had argued

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33 Marlon B. Ross describes this tendency as an obsession with “climbing mountains”, see ‘Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity’, *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Ann K Mellor 1988, pp. 26-51 (pp. 26-7). Mellor also discusses Kantian transcendence in Romantic poetry, particularly Wordsworth’s self-elevation figured as an ascent of Snowdon: “The Wordsworthian self thus becomes a Kantian transcendent ego, pure mind or reason, standing as the spectator ab extra, the detached observer, both of Nature - that scene spread before his feet at the top of Mount Snowdon that becomes ‘the perfect image of a mighty Mind’ - and of his own life” (p. 149).

34 Gary Kelly reads the *View* of the title as “something personal, unique to an individual but inviting participation” and “like the ‘Lines’ or ‘Stanzas’ favoured in titles of Romantic poems” (*Revolutionary Feminism*, p. 155). This enables an analysis of the *View* as a similar work to the second *Vindication*: “an analysis of the Revolution in terms of sexual politics”. I am arguing the opposite case; that the *View* is impersonal to the extent of being disembodied.

35 See note 38 below.

36 *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 1, p. 34.

earlier in the century that historical painting is a more worthy pursuit than portraiture or landscape, on the grounds of the effort and stamina, as well as the breadth of vision, necessary to paint a historical subject well. The theoretical formulation of an aesthetic prioritising of "general" subjects above the recording of individual instances (history is 'more manly’ than portraits or still-life), reproduces a gendered dichotomy between a feminine immersion in detail and a masculine capacity for conceptualising general or abstract subjects. Such a hierarchy draws on the philosophical tradition of valuing an intellectual ability to "draw general conclusions" (associated with reason and the divine) above the lesser faculty of sense-driven perception of everyday ("defective") instances.

38 Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, ‘Second Characters or the Language of Forms’, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times [1711] (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969): “The face painter [...] No workmanship, no labour, not so much as thought, but when the party is sitting and sees. [...] But when a subject is given to a real painter, a heroic great subject: Good heavens! What toil! What study! What meditation requisite!” (p. 131). “Portraiture [is] not so much as a liberal art nor to be so esteemed, as requiring no liberal knowledge, genius, education, converse, manners, moral-science, mathematics, optics, but merely practical and vulgar” (pp. 134-5). See also Diderot's Notes on Painting (a supplement to his writings on The Salon of 1765) in which history painting is judged greater than "genre" painting because the former is "infinitely more difficult" than the latter: “[t]he immensity of his work makes the history painter neglect details”. Diderot on Art -1: The Salon of 1765 and Notes on Painting, ed. & tr. by John Goodman (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 227-8.

39 See Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine (New York & London: Routledge, 1987). Gill Perry discusses Reynolds's "attempts to raise the status of portrait painting" by allegorizing the (especially female) figure. Her essay offers an interesting overview of the "aesthetic and ideological confusion [...] generated in part by the ambivalent status of not just the portrait, but the whole category of the 'feminine' in contemporary social and cultural discourses”; Gill Perry, ‘Women in Disguise: likeness, the Grand Style and the conventions of "feminine" portraiture in the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds’, Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp.18-40 (p. 19). Wendy Wassyng Roworth's essay in the same collection identifies “the construction of history painting as the most 'masculine' and public of painting genres”. In a fascinating discussion of Angelica Kauffman's history painting, she highlights the compounding of the exclusion of the feminine from the genre in the form of feminised subjects or methodologies ("portrait", "decorative", "furniture, porcelain, and interiors", "Graces, Venus and Cupid, weeping maidens and forlorn shepherds") by the exclusion (social and moral rather than official) of women artists from the life classes necessary to the study of anatomy and form. Wendy Wassyng Roworth, ‘Anatomy is Destiny: Regarding the Body in the Art of Angelica Kauffman’, Femininity and Masculinity, pp. 41-62 (p. 41).

40 Schor argues that detail in opposition to the general, is “overdetermined” as feminine. She discusses Reynolds's Discourses as a neo-classical consolidation of ideas rooted in Aristotle's division of matter (feminine) and form (masculine). Detail is associated with matter (feminine) because it is an aspect of the deformity or diversity of nature (also feminine), while the general is associated with the masculine because it pertains to ideal (non-particular) form (Reading in Detail, p. 22 & p. 16). There are also clear and suggestive roots for the idea in Edmund Burke's gendering of the sublime and the beautiful as respectively ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ aesthetic categories, the former associated with distance, scale, general
When Mary insists on looking at historical paintings, she is drawn by her taste rather than by a consciousness of the gendered implications of aesthetic theory. Wollstonecraft, however, knew better.

In the context of Wollstonecraft’s apparent concern to show herself capable of reasoning, and her awareness of a gendering of aesthetic and intellectual faculties which assumed that women were not very good at thinking beyond immediate, narrow, quotidian experience, the tone of the narrative voice in the *Historical and Moral View* takes on a different significance. She states her opinion in the second *Vindication*, again answering Rousseau, that “many women [...], instead of being supported by the reason and virtue of their fathers and brothers, have strengthened their own minds by struggling with their vices and follies” (*Rights of Woman*, p. 104). Having identified Catherine Macaulay as just such a woman in her previous publication, Wollstonecraft is also concerned to establish herself in the same category. She reproduces the axiomatic nature of a gendered hierarchization of intellectual and aesthetic abilities in a comment made in the course of the second *Vindication* concerning the effects of a defective education on women in general when she complains that *they* are “[u]nable to grasp any thing great”. She takes “history” as an example of this failing, lamenting that women “find the reading of history a very dry task, and disquisitions addressed to the understanding intolerably tedious, and almost unintelligible” (p. 211). Here, as elsewhere, Wollstonecraft has placed considerable distance between herself, figured by her writing voice, and “they” - the unreconstructed women of her time. We must infer from this that Wollstonecraft - in the course of arguing that women suffer this defect because “understanding [... has been denied to woman; and instinct, sublimated into wit and cunning, for the purposes of life, has been substituted in its stead” - is also concerned to show herself perfectly capable of “grasping] any thing great” (p. 61). In the course of doing so, it would seem necessary for her to perform in outlines, and the latter with familiarity, detail, smallness (Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 1757).

41 Jane Austen’s Catherine Morland voices a very similar opinion: “I can read poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and do not dislike travels. But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in. [...] I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me” (*Northanger Abbey* [wr. 1798-1803, pub. 1818] (London: Macmillan, 1957), p.90).
her writing an ability not only to read and grasp “history”, but also to write it. And perhaps more significantly, to write it in a style in which no sex appears.  

6. Any woman is at the same time a desiring being, that is, a speaking being, and a reproductive being  

Gary Kelly and Vivien Jones, in two of the most complete accounts of this work I have read, have demonstrated that Wollstonecraft was writing her Historical and Moral View with a full consciousness of Helen Maria Williams’s very popular Letters from France. Wollstonecraft reviewed Williams’ Letters written in France, in the Summer, 1790, to a Friend in England; containing various Anecdotes relative to the French Revolution; and Memoirs of Mons. and Madame Du F— (December 1790) in a piece which begins with the double-edged comment: “Women have been allowed to possess, by a kind of prescription, the knack of epistolary writing”. She describes Williams’ Letters as “truly feminine”, but offers no explanation of the term, or the characteristics it might involve. Later in the review she describes Williams as “true to every soft emotion”.  

Gary Kelly suggests that Wollstonecraft’s View was consciously “aimed to be less immediate and personal than Helen Maria Williams’s ‘feminine’ Letters”. Kelly represents Wollstonecraft’s View as a successful “Revolutionary feminist reading of the Revolution” by ascribing a conscious agency to what he finds here, as in his chapter on her second Vindication, to be a sort of feminist gender-pluralism; a combination of “discourses conventionally regarded as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, in terms of the gendering of writing in her time”. But the View is not of the same order as the second

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42 By this phrase she means an avoidance or overcoming of any reference to the feminine, as exhibited by Catherine Macaulay’s prose, which - as I have discussed above - she had described as “masculine”, although later revised the description.  
44 See note 17 above.  
46 Gary Kelly, Revolutionary Feminism, p. 153. Further references to this edition will appear after quotation in the text.
Vindication, and any attempt to represent these very different writings as covering the same ground must depend upon a naive definition of feminism, in order to claim both as equally feminist texts. It is, however, far too easy to assume a common feminist strategy across the entire range of Wollstonecraft’s writings.

Mary Wollstonecraft was pregnant during the time of writing the Historical and Moral View. Fanny was born on 14th May 1794, which would mean that Wollstonecraft started work before she knew of the pregnancy, so I am not suggesting a causal relation. But she would have experienced signs of pregnancy by September 1793, and communicated her certainty to Imlay in a letter probably dating from November of that year. A letter to Ruth Barlow suggests she had been concerned to finish the Historical and Moral View before the birth: “I am still very well; but imagine it cannot be long before this lively animal pops on us - and now the history is finished and everything arranged I do not care how soon”. In Rousseau’s terms (which had bothered her in her previous publication) her pregnancy would confirm her “business” in life as a bearer of children, and finally teach her that “the performance of her functions” places “[t]he search for abstract and speculative truths, for principles and axioms in science, for all that tends to wide

47 Kelly defines feminism in terms taken from the Oxford English Dictionary on page 2 (“advocacy of the rights or claims of women”) and only momentarily problematises the term with reference to Philippa Levine’s comment in her study of Victorian feminism that “[t]he definition of feminism in the historical context is [...] fraught with difficulties” (Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900 (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 14). For a male critic interested in feminism, and writing about Mary Wollstonecraft, evidence of gender-pluralism suggesting a desire for reconciliation between the sexes might be assumed to be a focus for discussion; see for example Kelly’s comment that throughout “the second Vindication Wollstonecraft plies the same theme, the way the sexes corrupt each other and their own human nature by complementary vices and vanities, and therefore become each other’s enemies, in the ‘battle of the sexes’, rather than joining in a marriage of true minds, in a co-operative, equal, and fully human solidarity” (“Expressive Style and “the Female Mind”: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Woman’, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 193 [Transactions of the Fifth International Congress on the Enlightenment, vol. 4], 1942-9 (p. 1943).

48 It might be significant that Gary Kelly’s analysis of Wollstonecraft’s View, like the book it analyses, elides any mention of the decapitated king.

49 She wrote to Eliza Bishop in June of 1793 that she was “writing a great book” (Collected Letters, p. 231). Fanny was probably conceived in August.

50 Her letter to Imlay simply says: “Ever since you last saw me inclined to faint, I have felt some gentle twitches, which make me begin to think, that I am nourishing a creature who will soon be sensible of my care” (Collected Letters, p. 237). After several lines deleted by Godwin’s editing, the letter also makes a possible reference to her work on the View: “So you may reckon on its being finished soon, though not before you come home, unless you are detained longer than I now allow myself to believe you will.—”.  

51 Ibid., p. 253.
generalisation [...] beyond [her] grasp". As a pregnant woman, she was confronted with her bodily difference: both the effect of the pregnancy on her body, and the effect of her pregnant body on observers. A letter to Imlay dated January 1794 - when she was nearing the end of the second trimester of pregnancy - mentions “the care and anxiety a woman must have about a child before it comes into the world”, as well as evidence that she was conscious of the effect of her pregnant body on observers: “Finding I was observed, I told the good women, the two Mrs. -------s, simply that I was with child: and let them stare! and -----, and --------, nay, all the world, may know it for aught I care! -- Yet I wish to avoid -----'s coarse jokes”. For a woman concerned to demonstrate a power of “generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations”, her pregnancy was a physical and visible confirmation of a femininity that was widely documented as excluding her from “the only acquirement, for an immortal being, that really deserves the name of knowledge”.

Janet Todd's introduction to her edition of Wollstonecraft's Political Writings mentions the chronological overlap between Wollstonecraft's pregnancy and the writing of the Historical and Moral View: “She began work in 1793 in a village close to Paris whither she had fled to avoid the imprisonment of the British and where she conceived her child with Imlay. She managed to finish the work in Paris and Le Havre, where her child was born”. In the next sentence she remarks on the uncharacteristic impersonal tone of this book: “Unusually in her writings, she avoided all personal reference” and refers readers to her letters to Imlay for “the miserable story of her private life during the period”. Gary Kelly is more interested in Wollstonecraft's sexual relationship with Imlay, but he suggests an effect on her “philosophy” of “her new sexual experience” and “her experience of child-bearing”. Meena Alexander finds in Wollstonecraft's Original Stories for Children - through the “grim posture” of Mrs. Mason - a “frustrated desire to mother” in a discussion of “the way in which women writers often turned away from the

52 Rousseau, Emile, p. 324 & p. 349.
55 Kelly, Revolutionary Feminism, p. 150.
abstractions or high sublimity of their male counterparts, to the concrete acts of nurture and care associated with maternity." In this formulation, Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View* is a turning away from the nurture and care associated with maternity (concrete and particular acts - the "million tiny stitches" of Adrienne Rich) to abstractions and high sublimity. Alexander cites Sara Ruddick's description of "maternal thinking" as "standing in direct conflict with [...] abstract principles".

7. A moment pregnant with great events

In this long introductory discussion I have tried to indicate the degree to which Wollstonecraft's writing of the *Historical and Moral View*, as a performative confirmation of her faculty for "generalizing ideas" or "drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations", might be founded on a displacement of anxiety about inhabiting a maternal body, and all that this implied for the female writer. The absence of an embodied narrator from the text, in this case, is not fully explained by a withdrawing from the Revolution due to political events, but might (also) be a symptom of producing writing in which - unlike any of Wollstonecraft's other late writings - no sex appears. The absence of the king's decapitated body, in this reading, is suggestive of a masking of castrating desire, and also repressed by association with the maternal body. And this repression of

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58 *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 7 [*Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*], p. 64. Further references will be given after quotation in the text.
59 In this reading I am drawing on the work of Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Butler theorizes gender as a performance choreographed by the unconscious to mask forbidden desire. Wollstonecraft's avoidance of the first-person and of gendered identification in this work would suggest in Butler's scheme a swerving away from femininity, and a masking of the castrating desire of the writing woman (heightened by a corporeal immersion in femininity - pregnancy) by masquerading as the object of that desire. That is, Wollstonecraft avoids figuring herself through her narrator as a woman, as this would highlight the
significant and signifying bodies re-surfaces in the text's images of revolution, so that the revolution itself becomes a female, labouring, productive body in contrast to the diseased and lax body of the aristocracy it replaces.

The "people" throughout the Historical and Moral View are spoken of as bodies, or a "body", or as parts of the body. The "body of the people" is comprised of individual bodies, but these bodies have a tendency in Wollstonecraft's narrative to act spontaneously in accord, as if directed by a common will, as if comprising a macro-body of individual bodies governed by the rules of sentiment. She describes the "citizens of Grenoble" acting in "one of those moments of enthusiasm, which by the most rapid operation of sympathy unites all hearts". The soldiers are "[t]ouched by it" and "threw down their arms" then "melting into tears". Their conduct, "quickly applauded with that glow of sensibility which excites imitation, served as an example to the whole army" (p. 40). When outlining the process by which influential writings were circulated producing a "change in the sentiments of the French" - an important aspect of the "Origins" of the Revolution - Wollstonecraft depicts the people as a mass of heads and tongues, "continually" exchanging information (pp. 18-19). Ideas are said to "fly from mouth to mouth" in an image evoking contagion. These images of contagious, spontaneous emotions are drawn from the discourse of sentimentalism, offering a "model of the social body as a nervous system rather than a machine". Rousseau's Social Contract "had been in the hands of all France" (p. 61). Theatre audiences are a sea of applauding hands castrating threat of a woman writing. The beheaded King in this case becomes overdetermined as a victim of castration, and is excluded from the narrative. Kristeva's essay Powers of Horror outlines her theory of abjection, in which traces of the trauma of the child's separation from the maternal body at the moment of entering the Symbolic (language) are carried in anxieties about the borders of the body and ambivalent objects. The corpse is the most ambivalent object, and is linked by Kristeva to the subject's trauma of separating from the maternal body. Kristeva takes the Oedipus myth as "the mythic variant of abjection" (p. 84).

60 Virginia Sapiro comments on the impression of the body metaphors and images used throughout the Historical and Moral View: "At the end of the book we are left not with the mechanical metaphors often associated with Enlightenment constructions of social phenomena, but with a most graphic organic image of a body politic maturing, sickening, and healing" (Vindication of Political Virtue, p. 33).  

agitated by "one heart" (p. 19). The people assembled to take the Tennis-Court Oath "encouraged each other; and one mind actuat[ed] the whole body" (p. 65).

These metaphorical and metonymical bodies function in several ways. Primarily they are "hands", "hearts" and "eyes" which "grasp", "feel", "go cold", are blind or opened depending on the demands of the argument. The "body politic" is sometimes a crowd of real bodies, sometimes a trope. The underlying suggestion is a familiar one of an ailing social body, infected by the (largely digestive) bodily and moral excesses of the king, that has been awoken by enlightenment and is now purging itself of its infected parts, in order to become a new, republican, healthy body:

the people could no longer bear bleeding -- for their veins were already so lacerated, it was difficult to find room to make a fresh incision; and the emollient prescriptions, the practice of former times, were now insufficient to stop the progress of a deadly disease (pp. 42-3).

Vivien Jones describes Wollstonecraft’s View as “a particularly revealing example” of Foucault’s notion that the bourgeoisie was concerned to “provide itself with a body and a sexuality”, to “convert[] the blue blood of the nobles into a sound organism and a healthy sexuality”, which Jones identifies in Wollstonecraft’s ideas of social and intellectual progress. The second Vindication can be read as an elaboration of this agenda, in which “virtue” is embodied in healthy, well-regulated individuals whose “passions” are balanced by “reason.” Throughout that Vindication she repeatedly draws embodied images of virtue, or perfectibility, or reason (often interchangeable) as strong, healthy bodies. Women must acquire (a favourite verb, suggesting struggle) healthy, strong (virile?) bodies before they can become equal: “I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists-- I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire

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62 See for example p. 41: “Besides, when the manners of a nation are very depraved, the men who wish to appear, and even to be, more moral than the multitude, in general become pedantically virtuous; […] the manners are rendered stiff, and the heart cold”; and p. 43: “Carried away by the general impulsion, with the inconsiderate fervour of men, whose hearts always grow hard as they cool”.

strength, both of mind and body” (Rights of Woman, p. 11). “Strength of mind” she says at one point “has, in most cases, been accompanied by superiour strength of body” (p. 43).

In her first Vindication she had imagined “virtue” as the “only legitimate offspring” of the “invigorating impregnation” of “inactiv[e]” feminine “reason” by masculine “feelings”. In the later View she hints at a labouring by sometimes the Nation or Revolution, more often Reason, through which a “sound organism” will be born.

8. The body hides the mind

i. The king's body

Lynn Hunt has observed that “the very fact that political organization can be imagined as a body leaves open the potential for erotic connotations. In European history, this potential was increased by the political imagination of royalism, in which the body of the king was thought to have magic qualities. The establishment of a legitimate government under the hereditary monarchical form of government depended on the erotic functioning of the king's body”. The View is interested in the dysfunction of the king’s body, and in particular its erotic dysfunction. The three kings Louis (XIV, XV, XVI) are described individually as bodies characterised by physical decay, corruption, and disease caused by various excessive appetites. The king's disgusting body is infectious, and is offered as the reason for the poor state of both the social body, and the individual bodies

64 The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 5 [Vindication of the Rights of Men], p. 31. Further references to this edition later in the argument will be given after quotation in the text.

65 The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 4 [Thoughts on the Education of Daughters], p. 16.

66 Lynn Hunt, The Family Romance of the French Revolution (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1. For a full discussion of the origins of ideas of the relationship between the king’s body and his nation in Medieval theology and folklore see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). Lynn Hunt suggests that “[i]t is questionable whether this doctrine [of King's Two Bodies: corporeal and ideal/divine/social] still held for French kings by 1793, but it is certain that it never held for French queens” (p. 94). However, the treatment of the royal bodies in the View coincides with what Hunt identifies as representations of the queen's symbolic bodies presenting a “feminine and feminizing presence to republican notions of manhood and virility” (p. 94). Wollstonecraft's treatment of Marie-Antoinette - as an emasculating, excessively feminine, corrupted body - accords with Hunt's treatment of her in literature and images circulating in France in 1793.
of the people. Louis XIV's "heated breath" - a symptom of excessive appetite - becomes the "depraved appetite" of the people:

The glory of France, a bubble raised by the heated breath of the king, was the pretext for undermining happiness; whilst politeness took place of humanity, and created that sort of dependance, which leads men to barter their corn and wine, for unwholesome mixtures of they know not what, that, flattering a depraved appetite, destroy the tone of the stomach (p. 24).

Louis XV's "[i]mpotence of body" and "indolence of mind" made him "the slave of his mistresses". Here the route of corruption is a chain of dispersed lust, from the impotent king's "nauseous embraces", through mistresses who then sought out "knives" as a form of sexual purging of the king's body: "Every corner of the kingdom was ransacked to satiate these cormorants, who wrung the very bowels of industry, to give a new edge to sickly appetites; corrupting the morals whilst breaking the spirit of the nation" (p. 28). In this king's body, his erotic dis-function is dispersed throughout the nation, in ever-widening chains of moral and spiritual corruption.

Louis XVI's "[p]erson" is "in itself very disgusting" and "rendered more so by gluttony, and a total disregard of delicacy, and even decency in his apartments" (p. 73). He suffers a heightened combination of his ancestor's bodily vices ("gluttony" as well as excessive lust in the form of his "kind of devouring passion" for the queen) consistent with the idea of hereditary corruption at work in these images. In antithesis to the 'impotence' of kings (this king "impotently gave way", p. 200) the reader is offered the image of English "masculine writers" whose words "rouse the sleeping manhood of the French" (p. 28).

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67 Wollstonecraft might be writing as an eye-witness here, as she saw Louis XVI pass by her window in a Hackney coach on December 26th on his way to his trial for treason. While she emphasises his unexpected dignity in this instance, in opposition to the unrelenting disgust expressed in the View, her description of her response is interestingly physical: "I can scarcely tell you why, but an association of ideas made the tears flow insensibly from my eyes, when I saw Louis sitting, with more dignity than I expected from his character, in a hackney coach going to meet death" (Collected Letters, p. 227).
ii. The queen's body

Marie-Antoinette arrives in the View as a “young and beautiful dauphine” (p.29). Her “person” is “very fine”, her face “lovely” and “sparkling with vivacity”. She had a “dazzlingly clear” complexion, and “bewitching” manners (p. 72). This healthy body is corrupted by the “luxurious pleasures” of the court, and more specifically by her intimacy with the king's body. The king's “devouring passion” for the queen causes her to “shrink abhorrent from his embraces”, and causes her “empty mind” to be lost in “the most luxurious pleasures” (p. 73). Through a process of corruption she “manag[es] the disgust she had for [the king's] person” and becomes the familiar licentious prostitute: “she made him pay a kingly price for her favours” (p. 74). The feminine body of the queen is permeable to the moral and sensual contagion of the king's body. The “infamous transaction of the necklace” is mentioned, a story steeped in what Lynn Hunt has described as “the obsessive focus on the queen's sexualized body”. The queen's “heart” is hardened by “sensual enjoyments”. She is, in the end, an excessively effeminate “emasculat[ing]” body (p. 73).

iii. The maternal body

Reason - in line with a history of iconographic personification of abstract forces - is female, and as such has a female, and sometimes maternal, body:

68 Vivien Jones reads the View's treatment of Marie-Antoinette as part of a larger narrative tendency in the View to offer psychological explanations of characters' degeneracy (“the heroine of a silly novel”); Vivien Jones, 'Women Writing Revolution', pp. 182-185, esp. p. 183.

69 Mary, in Mary: A Fiction, experiences similar “disgust” for her husband, but significantly does not overcome it to her advantage as Marie-Antoinette is described to do. See Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, p. 72.

70 See Lynn Hunt, Family Romance of the French Revolution, p. 94.

71 See Tom Furniss, ‘Gender in Revolution: Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft’, Revolution in Writing, ed. by Everest, pp. 65-100 (pp. 93-4), for a useful analysis of Wollstonecraft’s treatment of Marie-Antoinette.

72 See also chapter 2’s discussion of Wollstonecraft’s feminisation of reason in the first Vindication, esp. footnote 82. Interestingly, it was in 1793 that the Revolution staged what Marina Warner has described as its “most notorious fete”, the Festival of Reason during which the Goddess Reason was enthroned in Notre-Dame in an imitation of the May ceremony of crowning a statue of the Virgin. Warner notes that the “blasphemousness of this rite was underscored, not just by the nature of the usurping goddess, but by her presence in flesh and blood” (Marina Warner, Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form, p. 286).
a new spirit has gone forth, to organise the body-politic [...] Reason has, at last, shown her captivating face, beaming with benevolence; and it will be impossible for the dark hand of despotism to obscure its [sic] radiance, or the lurking dagger of subordinate tyrants to reach her bosom. The image of God implanted in our nature is now more rapidly expanding; and, as it opens, liberty with maternal wing seems to be soaring to regions far above vulgar annoyance, promising to shelter all mankind (p. 22).

The 'body-politic' is being organised according to the demands of 'a new spirit', a phrase which seems to call forth the corporeal rather than systematic inflection of 'organise'. A discussion of the deficit crisis of 1787 pushes 'constitution' in a similar direction:

some sensible observers [...] adopted the opinion, that as the people had discovered the magnitude of the deficit, they were now persuaded, that a specific remedy was wanting, a new constitution, to cure the evils, which were the excrescences of a gigantic tyranny, that appeared to be draining away the vital juices of labour, to fill the insatiable jaws of thousands of fawning slaves and idle sycophants (p. 32; original emphasis).

The "tyranny" or "evils" "draining away the vital juices of labour" is a condensation of images: a consuming foetus (also present in the "blood-sucking minions" two pages earlier) with a labouring maternal body. Imagination also "drain[s] off the nourishment from the vital parts" causing "misery" (p. 22). The "nation", also female, also performs glorious "labours" (p. 72).
iv. The castrated body

We must get entirely clear of all the notions drawn from the wild traditions of original sin: the eating of the apple, the theft of Prometheus, the opening of Pandora’s box, and the other fables, too tedious to enumerate, on which priests have erected their tremendous structures of imposition, to persuade us, that we are naturally inclined to evil (pp. 21-2).

Aside from the conventionality of Wollstonecraft's rhetorical play on a metaphoric 'body politic', these circulating bodies and body-parts perform in a way that is fruitfully open to psychoanalytic interpretation. The (unmentioned) decapitated body of the king is - both by its absence and by certain associated images - particularly potent. As the symbolic linchpin of patriarchalism - representing the authority of Law in the form of the Father - his decapitation was "the most important political act of the Revolution and the central drama in the revolutionary family romance". There is an odd moment in Book 2, chapter 4 of the View, when an argument that "a civilization founded on reason and morality is, in fact, now taking place in the world", turns to ancient "tragedies" as an example of a degree of "cultivation of the passions and the taste" which remained "absolutely immoral" (pp. 111-2). In a passage approving of the "sublime terreur" invoked by tragedy, but lamenting the absence of "improvement" one tragedy in particular is called to mind:

What moral lesson, for example, can be drawn from the story of Oedipus, the favourite subject of such a number of tragedies?--
The gods impel him on, and, led imperiously by blind fate, though perfectly innocent, he is fearfully punished, with all his hapless race, for a crime in which his will had no part (p.112).

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73 In one respect the View’s images of diseased bodies are re-circulating the organic images of the body-politic made use of by Burke in the Reflections, as Gary Kelly notes: "The figures of disease and medicine are taken from Burke" (Revolutionary Feminism, p. 167). Ronald Paulson notes that Wollstonecraft is "writing [...] with the vocabulary of Burke and Paine [...] already a kind of lexicon upon which to draw" (Paulson, Representations of Revolution, p. 44).

74 Lynn Hunt, Family Romance of the French Revolution, p. 2.

75 Wollstonecraft is probably answering Burke’s comparison of the Revolution to Greek Tragedy in his Reflections: "[n]o theatric audience in Athens would bear what has been borne" (Burke, Reflections, p. 176).
As a figure representative of castration anxiety itself, Oedipus seems a peculiarly apt substitute for the otherwise unmentioned decapitated king. She describes Louis as “hapless”, and - true to her principles - blames “the education of this monarch” for his character as “a sensual bigot”, thus offering an explanation for his immorality removed from his will (p. 74). While the denial of the “moral lesson” of Oedipus's story is in itself a rich moment of irony, and possibly (although I wouldn't wish to press the point) suggestive of a displaced anxiety, considered alongside the aspects of this writing I have been discussing so far - the projection of a detached narrative voice in writing in which no sex appears - it might underline an interesting crisis in the text, and one which seems to be recorded in a disturbance of the historical narrative in Book II.

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76 I am, of course, not suggesting that Wollstonecraft was aware of any association between the Oedipus myth and the king's decapitated body. The association is in itself anachronistic, but suggestively so for a psychoanalytically informed argument.

77 A reinforcement of the argument that Louis's decapitated body is repressed by association with Wollstonecraft's pregnant body might be made on the basis of the first *Vindication's* insistence on associating kings with women, as sharing a commonly corrupting artificially elevated status: “a sex, who, like kings, always see things through a false medium”; “A king is always a king -- and a woman always a woman: his authority and her sex, ever stand between them and rational converse” (*Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 5, p. 48 & p. 64). The beheaded king can be taken as a figure of castration: “Beheading is well known to us as a symbolic substitute for castrating” (Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, Penguin Freud Library vol. 7, tr. by James Strachey, ed. by Angela Richards (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991), p.281). As such any mention of his decapitation would draw attention to, and hence threaten retribution for, what Judith Butler calls the “castrating desire” of a woman writer who, in order to write, must take over “the place of the father in public discourse”; “castrating desire might be understood as the desire to relinquish the status of woman-as-sign in order to appear as a subject within language” (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 51). This association is documented in J. Fligel's 1924 essay, 'A Note on the Phallic Significance of the Tongue and Speech', in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 6, 2 (1925), 209-15: "The unconscious equations, speech = sexual power, dumbness = castration or impotence" (p. 215). Helga Geyer-Ryan notes in a discussion of abjection in de Man and Benjamin that "...the resurrection of the maternal body from the pre-Oedipal space would [...] always be the presentation of a corpse lying concealed beneath the appearance". Helga Geyer-Ryan, *Fables of Desire: Studies in the Ethics of Art and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 198.
9. Exclamatory writing to the moment

Julia Kristeva's work on the maternal body as the suppressed object on which language takes place offers a reading of this text in which the maternal body of the writer sets up the conditions for writing. Vivien Jones identifies both the Historical and Moral View and Helen Maria Williams's Letters from France, as a "conjunction of (feminine) novel paradigms with (masculine) history". In spite of the View's introductory warning against "the erroneous inferences of sensibility" in its preface, Jones finds her "rationalist account" to be "dependent at moments of crisis on the kind of fictional paradigms deployed more pervasively in Williams's text" (p. 181). Wollstonecraft made use of the conventions of sensibility in her own novels, particularly what Janet Todd has called "exclamatory writing to the moment". In Book 2, chapter 2 of the Historical and Moral View what Vivien Jones might call a "novelistic lapse" takes place, in the "exclamatory" style of high sensibility. In this passage - which I reproduce below - the narrator's body comes into view as a fragmented, reflected image, at the same time as the narrator slips into the first-person. If the suppression of any sign of the writer's (pregnant) sex is the condition for writing this text, then this passage suggests a forceful and sudden surfacing of the repressed "maternal body". In Kristeva's terms such a surfacing would occur as a disruption by the "semiotic" or "abject" of Symbolic or paternal language. She describes this as an activity "which introduces wandering or fuzziness into language". It is the residue of "drives" experienced prior to the Oedipal crisis, "before recognising itself as identical in a mirror", before all the pieces are put together to make a unified whole separated from the desired union with the maternal body. This archaic experience of the maternal body is "retrieved" as "displacement and condensation, metaphor and metonymy, rhetorical figures". This "presymbolic and trans-symbolic relationship to the mother"

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79 Vivien Jones, 'Women Writing Revolution', p. 180
introduces "aimless wandering within the identity of the speaker and the economy of its very discourse".

In the second chapter of Book II of the View, then, a substantial shift in tone occurs, oddly incongruent against the impersonal historical narrative, more akin to sentimental self-reflection. Janet Todd has already noted the similarity between the language deployed in scenes of sentimental tableaux in the woman-authored novel of the 1780s and early 1790s and "the semiotic, pre-rational irruptions beloved of psychoanalytical feminists in the 1970s". I am suggesting that in this passage of the View the repressed maternal body of the author/narrator resurfaces in the form of a sudden break in the narrative style, in ways which coincide with Kristeva's notion of abjection.

The passage in question begins with a rhetorical declaration: "How silent is now Versailles!" and continues to describe the empty palace in terms which draw on Gothic conventions:

Warily entering the endless apartments, half shut up, the fleeting shadow of the pensive wanderer, reflected in long glasses, that vainly gleam in every direction, slacken the nerves, without appalling the heart; though lascivious pictures, in which grace varnishes voluptuousness, no longer seductive, strike continually home to the bosom the melancholy moral, that anticipates the frozen lesson of experience. The air is very chill, seeming to clog the breath; and the wasting dampness of destruction appears to be stealing into the vast pile, on every side.

The oppressed heart seeks for relief in the garden; but even there the same images glide along the wide neglected walks - all is fearfully still [...].

The "endless apartments" are "half shut up", an element of Gothic architecture recorded in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, in a mocking reference to "all the horrors that a building such as 'what one reads about' may produce", "uninhabited and left deserted for years".

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The passage then breaks into fragmented, emotive statements reflecting on the fall from past magnificence to present neglect:

Lo! this was the palace of the great king! the abode of magnificence! Who has broken the charm? - Why does it now inspire only pity? - Why; - because nature, smiling around, presents to the imagination materials to build farms, and hospital mansions, where, without raising idle admiration, that gladness will reign, which opens the heart to benevolence, and that industry, which renders innocent pleasure sweet.

Weeping - scarcely conscious that I weep, O France! over the vestiges of thy former oppression, which, separating man from man with a fence of iron, sophisticated all, and made many completely wretched; I tremble, lest I should meet some unfortunate being, fleeing from the despotism of licentious freedom, [...] - and, if my pen is almost bound with eagerness to record the day, that levelled the Bastille with the dust, making the towers of despair tremble to their base; the recollection, that still the abbey is appropriated to hold the victims of revenge and suspicion, palsies the hand that would fain do justice to the assault, which tumbled into heaps of ruins walls that seemed to mock the resistless force of time - Down fell the temple of despotism; but - despotism has not been buried in it’s [sic] ruins! - Unhappy country! - when will thy children cease to tear thy bosom? - When will a change of opinion, producing a change of morals, render thee truly free? - When will truth give life to real magnanimity, and justice place equality on a stable seat? - When will thy sons trust, because they deserve to be trusted; and private virtue become the guarantee of patriotism? Ah! - when will thy government become the most perfect, because thy citizens are the most virtuous! (pp. 84-5.)

These effusive, emotive, disjointed sentences occur immediately following a narrative of Marie-Antoinette’s visit to “bribed ruffians”, and her incitement leading to their promise “not to sheath their swords, till France was compelled to obedience, and the national assembly dispersed”. She seduces them with “honied words” and “coquetish smiles” and “more substantial marks of favour” (p. 84). After describing the ruffians’ “savage ferocity”, “plans of death and devastation”, “orgies” and “animal spirits” the narrator pauses self-consciously, in a trope of deference to the “reader’s sensibility”, with a refusal to reflect “on the baneful effects of power, or on the unrestrained indulgence of pleasure, that could thus banish tenderness from the female bosom, and harden the human heart” (p. 84). Banishing tenderness from the female bosom calls on Lady Macbeth as a prototype
for Marie-Antoinette (a suggestive, and unelaborated analogy), and in doing so is necessarily an act of denying or replacing maternal instinct metonymically represented by the lactating breast. The passage in question, then, which represents the narrator's body appears immediately following an image dependent on, in an act of excluding, a maternal body. Its appearance is at the same time reflected (“the fleeting shadow of the pensive wanderer, reflected in long glasses”), fragmented (“foot” first, then “eye”, “nerves”, “heart”, “bosom”, “breath”), and refers explicitly to the “weeping” and “trembling” body of the narrator. The analytical style of the View here gives way to “exclamatory writing to the moment”, the typographically recorded feeling body in print, characterised by Janet Todd as “unbalanced, hyperbolic, eccentric and fragmented, suggesting suppressed thought by extra-verbal devices like the exclamation mark and the dash”, devices which “break up the prose to display the pre-logical character of sensibility and to convey a sense of female feeling and desire”. Claudia Johnson describes “the gaps in Wollstonecraft’s prose” affording space to “the unspeakable” in a discussion of the lesbian sub-plot of her novel Mary. If, as I have argued, the “unspeakable” in the View is the writer’s maternal body, in this passage the maternal body (recalled as “a kind of narcissistic crisis”) breaks the surface of the analytical narrative in order to make itself heard (and seen).

Kristeva’s discussion of the disruption of Symbolic (paternal) language by semiotic (maternal) pre-linguistic utterance of the drives describes this subversive occurrence as “intonations, scansions, and jubilant rhythms” representing “the voiced breath that fastens us to an undifferentiated mother, to a mother who later, at the mirror stage, is altered into a maternal language”. She identifies this as a possibility of “reactivating the experience of early childhood (the Oedipal stage) […], and undergoing the crisis of this particular reactivation in the midst of language, with no delayed action, directly on the body ‘proper’, and within the already ripe symbolic-logical system”. The subject “experiences the trauma of this collision” and at this point “either the subject

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83 Janet Todd, Gender, Art and Death, p. 143. This argument implies that sentimental writing in itself might be a symptom of abjection, as Janet Todd’s quote suggests.
84 Claudia Johnson, Equivocal Beings, p. 55.
85 “Abjection is […] a kind of narcissistic crisis”, Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, p. 14 (original emphasis).
submits inextricably to a reactivated Oedipal experience, or he and his semiotic capability flee beyond the burnt out, distracting mother who threatens symbolic unity, but who is ultimately carried along within a semiotic process, where the subject is alternately put together and pulled apart.” In these terms Wollstonecraft’s *View* undergoes the latter trauma at this point in the text.\(^6\)

In this discussion I have tried to do several things. Mostly I have been offering a way of reading one of Wollstonecraft's mature works which, if successful, might rescue it from neglect. I have tried to suggest some of the reasons for its relative absence from Wollstonecraft studies, and in this discussion have accounted for its position as “the least interesting and important of Mary's works”. I have also offered evidence that the style of the *Historical and Moral View* can in some ways be accounted for by Wollstonecraft's experience of maternity. I have encountered on the way a more diffuse concern with what it is we do when we read as feminists, and what it is we do when we read women's past writings, particularly in the case of a woman like Mary Wollstonecraft. My discomfort at the essentialist implications of this argument raised for me a question about the practice of reading Wollstonecraft as a feminist (by which I mean both what happens when we approach her as feminist readers, and what happens when we are interested in a claim for her feminism). My discussion of the *View* hovers around the points at which it records issues of femininity not only as historical curiosities subject to theorising, but as a form of corporealis. This is not a return to anatomy as destiny, it is a claim to resituting femininity as an embodiment of the woman writer; or, more accurately, as the shadow thrown by the writing subject in the act of recognising its embodiment. An unmarried, pregnant woman writing in the eighteenth century - particularly an unmarried, pregnant author of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* - might need to be taken account of in slightly different terms. Similarly, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapter, the

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\(^6\) See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, pp. 156-209, esp. p. 195. For Kristeva the ‘maternal body’ refers both to the mother’s body, and the child’s relationship to that body (the child’s body in relation to the mother’s body), and is not reducible to either. See also, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 79-141, and Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London & New York: Verso, 1986), pp.141-164 for useful critiques of Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic.
move from pregnancy to maternity made after Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View* might also be recorded in her writing.
Chapter 5

A Woman Scorned: *A Short Residence in Sweden* and *Wrongs of Woman*

1. Portraits of Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* was written during her trip to Scandinavia in 1795 and following her return, for publication in 1796. *Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* was written between 1796-7, and remained unfinished at the author’s death in 1797. It was edited and published by Godwin in Volumes 1 and 2 of the *Posthumous Works* in 1798. These are very different writings: the former a collection of open letters addressed to an undisclosed interlocutor, describing Wollstonecraft’s journey, accompanied by infant daughter and maid, through Scandinavia in 1795, and the latter a novel portraying the suffering caused by the legal and social position of women, through the story of Maria’s marriage to a man who turns out to be a domestic tyrant. In this chapter I am discussing both works in relation to the similar treatment they have received from critics and commentators, and suggesting that a template for this can be found in Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published alongside the *Wrongs of Woman*.

I will argue that the way in which these works have been read in Wollstonecraft studies is strongly influenced by a demand for autobiographical evidence to support a version of Wollstonecraft’s character, which in turn takes its form from a tendency to reconstruct her life as a narrative of a seduced heroine. If we shift the frame of reference,

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1 A phrase used by Richard Holmes to describe both Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'* and Wollstonecraft's *Short Residence*, in his introductory essay to the Penguin edition of these works. See notes 14 & 15 below.

2 Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Vol 7, and the *Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798), *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 1. Throughout this discussion I will refer to the former as *Short Residence*, and the latter as *Wrongs of Woman*.

3 This seems to be the point at which the dichotomy between versions of Wollstonecraft as a feminist and as a feminine heroine breaks down. Accounts of the last two substantial writings reproduce the seduced heroine narrative, even as an aspect of her feminism: Jennifer Lorch claims that “[i]n the relationship with Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft experienced what some have seen [she doesn't say who] as the very core of the feminist dilemma: how to love a man, live with a man, and retain feminist integrity and sisterly loyalty”, and follows by reading *Wrongs of Woman* as “the analysis of this experience” (Lorch, *Mary
from a preoccupation with seduction and its aftermath, to what Jane Spencer has described as “maternal authority”, it is possible to read these works as records of a mother-daughter relationship, rather than as the symptoms of a failed love story.4

The treatment I refer to can best be illustrated by some examples. Margaret George describes the *Wrongs of Woman* as “a miniature of Wollstonecraft” and a “marvellous window into Mary in her 38th year”. Both *Wrongs of Woman* and *Short Residence* are found by George to be revelatory of the author's autobiography: she describes the former as “autobiographically revealing” and claims that in the latter “Mary was self-revealing as always”.5 Jennifer Lorch perceives in the characters of Maria, Jemima, and Henry Darnford of the *Wrongs of Woman* an “analysis” of Wollstonecraft's “dilemma” in her relationship with Gilbert Imlay “set within a political framework”.6 Dale Spender finds the *Wrongs of Woman* to be a “more personalised construction” of the second *Vindication*, and suggests that “much of the personal experience and many of the accusations about ‘marriage’ are associated with her depressingly unhappy relationship with Gilbert Imlay” who, we are reminded, “abandoned her”.7 Gary Kelly and James Kinsley, in their introduction to the World's Classics edition of Wollstonecraft's two novels, find in Wollstonecraft's creation of Darnford (Maria's lover) both “an idealized Imlay” and later “an equally idealized Godwin”. They also find in the character of George Venables (Maria's husband) “a romantic hero spun from sheerest female fantasies”

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*Wollstonecraft*, p. 48). Gary Kelly claims that “Maria becomes a feminist heroine and martyr”, implying that, as “autobiographical material”, this is a reflection of Wollstonecraft's seduction by Imlay and its aftermath (Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*, p. 211 & p. 208).

4 Jane Spencer, “Of Use to Her Daughter”: Maternal Authority and Early Women Novelists*, Living by the Pen: Early British Women Writers*, ed. by Dale Spender (New York & London: Teachers College Press, 1992), pp. 201-211. There is a way in which this argument coincides with the challenge to the definition of ‘seduction’ Jane Spencer notices in *Wrongs of Woman*: “The most far-reaching of the feminist renderings of the seduction tale was Mary Wollstonecraft's second novel [...]. Wollstonecraft denied that her adulteress, Maria, had committed any crime. She also went much further than earlier novelists in the tradition of protest, by criticising not only the seducer and the social ostracism of his victim, but the very definition of seduction” (Jane Spencer, *Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p.132).

5 George, *One Woman's Situation*, p. 139, p. 146 & p. 132.


7 Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (London & New York: Pandora, 1986), p. 257. Spender also describes the novel as “[p]ure contemporary feminism: in fiction: almost two hundred years ago” (p. 257) - a comment which interprets Wollstonecraft and her novel in an anachronistic reconstruction according to Spender's version of "feminism". This is a tendency I have discussed in my introduction and chapter 1.
revealed to be a "tyrant" by marriage; "another version of Imlay". Janet Todd describes the character of Maria as an "autobiographical heroine" who "abandoned like her creator, [...] attempts suicide with laudanum".

Wollstonecraft's last novel, then, is widely read as a thinly-veiled autobiographical account of her relationship with Gilbert Imlay, and her feelings at his abandonment after the birth of their daughter, sometimes alternating with an account of her relationship with William Godwin. The 'autobiographical' aspects of the novel are easily recognisable, particularly in the heroine's memoirs, which are inserted into the story giving us a first-person account of her life. Kelly and Kinsley offer a series of carefully researched endnotes to their edition of the novel which link episodes with close correlatives in Wollstonecraft's life. They notice for example that "Maria's tyrannical father is patterned after [...] M.W.'s own" and her brother "patterned after M.W.'s brother Edward". They describe "Maria's romance with George Venables" as "based on M.W.'s love-affair with Gilbert Imlay". The notes include a suggestion that the narrator's description of Maria's "almost voluptuous figure" might be a reference to "Wollstonecraft's own". Gary Kelly expands this treatment of the novel in chapter 5 of Revolutionary Feminism, to which he gives the title: 'Love, Marriage and the Wrongs of Woman'. Here the "intimations of autobiography" he finds in the novel are described as "a rhetorical device, authenticating the fiction for the reader".

This justification of autobiographical fiction demands a reader's prior knowledge of Wollstonecraft's life details. The necessary degree of common knowledge could only be

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10 The novel begins at a crisis point in Maria's story (representing also a crisis point in her identity and consciousness), after she has been kidnapped by her husband (Venables), separated from her baby (in the very act of breast feeding), and imprisoned in the "mansion of despair" (an insane asylum, but also representative of women imprisoned in patriarchal law). Maria writes her memoirs for her lost daughter, and gives them to her lover (Darnford) and her jailer/friend (Jemima) to read. They are included in the novel as a first-person account of Maria's life up to the moment recorded in the novel's opening scene (Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, p. 85).
11 Wollstonecraft, Mary and the Wrongs of Woman, ed. by Gary Kelly, p. 223 (page 125, n. 2 & n.3, page 129, n. 1).
12 ibid, p. 219 (page 98, n.3).
13 Gary Kelly, Revolutionary Feminism, p. 208.
assumed after the publication of Godwin's *Memoirs*, and as such is evidently applying Godwin's version of Wollstonecraft's life to her novel. The fact that many of the instances recorded in the heroine's autobiography seem to record Wollstonecraft's known experience is taken to be evidence that she is here writing autobiography. This assumption largely rests on the first-person narrative employed in Maria's memoirs; the voice of the narrative character appears to mimic seamlessly Wollstonecraft's own.

Virginia Sapiro offers an intelligent and interesting discussion of the tendency in Wollstonecraft studies to focus on Wollstonecraft's life, because this "life has played an important role in the history of feminism as a symbol" and Wollstonecraft's "personal history itself became a text of political theory and practice that has been interpreted and reinterpreted by later writers". However, when she comes to discuss *Wrongs of Woman*, Sapiro seems to make the same assumptions as her predecessors, merging the "narrator"'s voice with that of the author: "[t]he narrator of the *Wrongs of Woman* struggled to understand the condition of her characters and to know what their choices should be. We know from the texts referring to the narrator's 'real' life that she faced the same issues there". After all, the narrator can only be said to describe and explain the choices of the characters (including herself?), so this merging is even more complete than those suggested by the various comments above. Sapiro goes a step further by synthesising narrators across Wollstonecraft's works, with the result that all narrative voices and positions in Wollstonecraft's writings might in the end be fragments of her autobiography (an intriguing idea, which would suggest multiple subjectivities finding a range of voices, but not followed through in this critic's discussion): "[t]he narrator of the *Wrongs of Woman* did not play the role of authoritative reasoner as she did in the *Rights of Woman*, in the former she took the part of a woman speaking with love to her daughter".

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14 Wollstonecraft could not have known at the time of writing that her novel would have been published alongside *Memoirs* of her life.
15 Sapiro, *Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. 266 & p. 267. Sapiro expands her treatment of Wollstonecraft's narrators in a footnote: "I describe Wollstonecraft's relationship to her characters in this way because I have long suspected a peculiar aspect of her fiction writing, especially in the *Wrongs of Woman*. [...] She placed her characters on a stage, making each represent a condition of society, and watched to see what they would do. It is, therefore, no wonder the book never reached a conclusion" (p. 266, n. 38). Sapiro's description of the second *Vindication* as "a woman speaking with love to her daughter" signals that this writing is modelled on "Maternal Authority", and coincides with the common
Short Residence was Wollstonecraft’s last finished piece of writing. It is interesting, as I shall discuss in more detail below, as a clue to how Wollstonecraft’s writing might have developed had she lived longer, and as a pre-figuring of, and influence on, early nineteenth-century writing. But its main interest to many modern commentators appears to be largely a result of its tantalisingly autobiographical tendencies and genuinely intriguing context. Short Residence describes the narrator’s experiences, observations and emotions during her travels, alluding only mysteriously to the business she is conducting, and offering occasional glimpses of a turbulent and painful relationship between herself and a significant other. She is accompanied only by her infant daughter and her maid. Critical attention is in this case, as with the Wrongs of Woman, usually fixed to the autobiographical glimpses offered by Short Residence. Richard Holmes describes this book in his introduction to the Penguin edition as “essentially confessional” and suggests it is “intimately linked” with Godwin's Memoirs “by the fact that they both give us portraits of Mary Wollstonecraft [...] the autobiography and the biography” in an edition which re-enacts the intimacy it claims by presenting these works as a natural pair.

The relationship between Godwin's Memoirs and Wollstonecraft's Short Residence is described in terms of their sharing a historical moment; both are “documents of this historic moment of transition and the Romantic renewal of hope and feeling”, “written within a few months of each other”. This presentation makes the two books sound as if they are different versions of the same story (“portraits of Mary Wollstonecraft”), and in
the process elides the stylistic, authorial and chronological differences between them (one a travel document, the other a memoir written later by a bereaved husband). It also makes Godwin's version of Wollstonecraft's life seem all the more authoritative, supported by, and reproduced in, a contemporaneous first-person confession.

In his own quasi-autobiographical book *Footsteps*, Richard Holmes alludes to the effect of love and maternity on Wollstonecraft's character, reflected in her writing of *Short Residence*, when he describes her letters as "softer and more affectionate". Ralph Wardle described *Short Residence* as a book which "clearly reflects Wollstonecraft's own personality". William St Clair finds it to be "[m]ostest, warm, good-humoured, and hopeful" matching "the new character of the author". Claire Tomalin praises the book in ambivalent terms - "some of her phrases were good enough to provide Coleridge with inspiration" - and proceeds from the assumption that Wollstonecraft "never could write without inserting more or less veiled remarks about her own life". Critical attention seems to hover over the fault line running throughout *Short Residence*, between public discourse and private musing. Mitzi Myers identifies a "seeming duality of personal and social motifs in the *Letters*". And it seems to be this dichotomy between the personal and the social charted by the narrative voice which attracts critical attention; what Richard Holmes calls "the essential confessional thread of the work". In addressing these critical and biographical versions of Wollstonecraft's last writings, I want to pose the following questions: If *Short Residence* is "confessional", then what is being confessed? And if the *Wrongs of Woman* is autobiographical, whose autobiography is it recording?

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20 *Wardle, Collected Letters*, p. 44.


22 Tomalin, *Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 40.


2. Feminizing Werther

Gilbert Imlay looms large in critical discussions of Wollstonecraft's last two substantial works. Richard Holmes's 'Chronology of Mary Wollstonecraft' included in his edition of *A Short Residence*, describes 1795, the year of her journey to Scandinavia and writing of this work, in a reconstruction which emphasises her relationship with Imlay as the catalyst for all her actions in that year:

1795 (April) Leaves France to join Imlay in London and discovers his infidelity. (May) Attempts suicide but prevented by Imlay, who persuades her to travel to Scandinavia on his business. (October) Arrives back in England and finds Imlay living with his new mistress; attempts suicide by jumping from Putney Bridge (November).

Virginia Sapiro makes explicit the causality sketched in Holmes's chronology when she claims that "Imlay […] also gave her the motivation and opportunity to write her last major publication, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, linking the writing and publication of this work directly with Wollstonecraft's "distress" and "first suicide attempt" in response to "his lack of interest and his relationships with other women". Virginia Woolf's sketch of Wollstonecraft leaves out *Short Residence* altogether, but claims that after "forc[ing] the truth from the cook" (that Imlay had as a "mistress" - "[a] little actress in a strolling company"), she "at once soaked her skirts so that she might sink unfailingly, and threw herself from Putney Bridge".

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25 ibid., p. xxviii.
26 Sapiro, *Vindication of Political Virtue*, p. 34. Critics seem to be equally fond of attributing Wollstonecraft's writing of her second *Vindication* to the influence of Henry Fuseli. Harriet Devine Jump notes that "Gary Kelly has suggested that the *Rights of Woman* was written, in part at least, as a result of Wollstonecraft's desire to impress Henry Fuseli, with whom by this time she was hopelessly in love". She acknowledges that "this suggestion may appear somewhat diminishing" but believes that "it should not be dismissed out of hand" (Devine Jump, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Writer*, pp. 65-6; Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*, p. 106).
Meena Alexander describes Wollstonecraft as a woman who “twice attempted suicide in 1795, both times in her despair at her lover Imlay's infidelity”.28

G. J. Barker-Benfield goes further, and describes Short Residence itself as a side-effect of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Imlay: “Wollstonecraft was writing Letters from Sweden to her lover”. It is because of this, according to Barker-Benfield, that Wollstonecraft presents “herself as a romantic heroine, ‘virtue in distress’, like one of Radcliffe's heroines”. This version of the circumstances surrounding her writing of Short Residence underlines Imlay's agency: “Imlay had commissioned her to go to Sweden in part to ditch her”, and picks up on Godwin's remark that this “was a book calculated to make a man fall in love with its author” - a protracted love letter which misses its target.29

Gary Kelly also reads Short Residence in this way: “it did not, as Wollstonecraft had hoped it would, reinspire Imlay with love for her [...]. Yet its exhibition of her ‘mind’ [...] does seem to have inspired that feeling in other men”.30 Ralph Wardle and William St Clair include Godwin's remark in their account of Wollstonecraft's biography and works, and St Clair also alludes to the fact that “other men felt the same”.31

Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, in the general introduction to the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, state that her Short Residence is “historically a more important book than has properly been acknowledged”. It was recognised as a possible (but not, as Richard Holmes emphasises, “certain”) influence on Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' as long ago as 1927, and has also been proposed as a possible influence on his ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ and ‘This Lime Tree Bower my Prison’, Byron's 'Childe Harold', Thomas Brown's 'The Wanderer in Norway', Southey's 'Thalaba the Destroyer' and 1797 Poems (which include a dedication to her), Shelley's 'Alastor', Godwin's St Leon, Fleetwood and Mandeville, Hazlitt's 'Liber Amoris', Wordsworth's 'Ruth' and 'The Ruined Cottage', and of course Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.32 This work records the journey of a woman and her child.
to a distant and unfamiliar country (an experience which entailed, as the first line of the first letter tells us, “eleven days on board a ship not intended for the accommodation of passengers”) investigating the loss of a treasure ship, and in the process studying and recording impressions of the economics, politics, geography, customs and history of the lands she saw; offering original reflection and an intriguing narrative persona, which has been shown to have had a marked influence on early nineteenth-century poetry and prose: yet critical attention seems interested above all in the failed love story and suicide attempts of its female author.  

William Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft offers the first reading of *Short Residence* as an autobiographical account of the author’s passionate and failed relationship with Gilbert Imlay, and represents her suicidal actions as standing in a certain relationship to her writing of this work: “The most inapprehensive reader may conceive what was the mental torture she endured, when he considers, that she was twice, with an interval of four months, from the end of May to the beginning of October, prompted by it to purposes of suicide. Yet in this period she wrote her *Letters from Norway*.” Godwin famously represented Wollstonecraft in his *Memoirs*, and in his preface to her “Letters to 

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*Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 6, p. 243 (further references to this edition will be given after quotations in the text). Contemporary reviews tended to focus on the figure of Wollstonecraft as a ‘wife’ and mother (in favourable comparisons with her second *Vindication*), her expressive style, and her descriptions of nature. See *Monthly Review*, 20 (1796), 251-257; *Analytical Review*, 23 (1796), p. 229; *Critical Review*, 16 (1796), 209-212; *Monthly Magazine and British Register*, 1 (1796), 278-281. When the book is criticised, it is usually in terms of its style, and the author's political opinions, see for example *The Monthly Mirror; Reflecting Men and Manners*, 1 (1795-6), 258-289 and *New Annual Register* (1796), 248-9. *British Critic*, 7 (1796), 602-610 praises Wollstonecraft for “joining to a masculine understanding, the finer sensibilities of a female” (pp. 607-8).  

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*Godwin & Wollstonecraft, A Short Residence & Memoirs*, p. 255. Further references to this edition will be given after quotation in the text.
Imlay" published in Volumes 3 and 4 of her Posthumous Works, as a “female Werter”.

His longest version of this comparison occurs during a description of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Gilbert Imlay, and seems to be motivated by a need to justify both her “attachment” to Imlay, and his summary of the “disappointments” she had suffered in her life previous to that relationship, at a moment when he recognises self-consciously that “[s]ome persons may be inclined to observe, that the evils here enumerated, are not among the heaviest in the catalogue of human calamities”. This leads Godwin to a generalised discussion of the relativity of human suffering (“evils take their rank [...] from the temper of the mind that suffers them”) and into a description of those “persons, endowed with the most exquisite and delicious sensibility, whose minds seem almost of too fine a texture to encounter the vicissitudes of human affairs, to whom pleasure is transport, and disappointment is agony indescribable” (pp. 241-2). He mentions Goethe's Sorrows of Werter as a literary portrait of “this character” and from this example extrapolates that “Mary was in this respect a female Werter” (p. 242).

Barker-Benfield comprehends Godwin's association of Wollstonecraft with “Goethe's sexually subversive Werther” as “assimilat[ing] his sentimental stereotype [of her] to this current romantic symbol”, suggesting that Godwin's reconstruction of Wollstonecraft was already a “sentimental stereotype” and “Werter” a culturally familiar hook on which to hang it. Godwin’s Memoirs, then, reconstructed Wollstonecraft in the image of a sentimental heroine: “[h]e organized the events of Wollstonecraft's life around her sorrows, virtually ignoring her intellectual work in favor of her relationships with others, with her parents, with Fanny Blood, and above all, with Fuseli, Imlay, and himself”, in a narrative which repeatedly emphasises her “capacity for exquisite feeling”.

Godwin made Wollstonecraft “a heroine of sensibility, the kind of female icon with which his readers were deeply familiar”. The gendering is important here, as Werther was

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35 See Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 6, p. 367: “They bear a striking resemblance to the celebrated romance of Werter, though the incidents to which they relate are of a very different cast. [...] The editor apprehends that, in the judgement of those best qualified to decide upon the comparison, these Letters will be admitted to have the superiority over the fiction of Goethe”. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Die Lieden des jungen Werthers (1774) was published as The Sorrows of Werther, translated by Daniel Malthus, in 1779.

36 Barker-Benfield, Culture of Sensibility, p. 372.

37 Ibid., p. 370.
clearly not a “female icon” but a late icon of the masculine incorporation of feminine qualities emphasised during what Janet Todd calls the “cult of sensibility” in literature between the 1740s and the 1770s. In this sense Godwin's presentation of Wollstonecraft as a “female Werter” foregrounds her femininity, and reaffirms this as the corporeal grounding for her “exquisite feeling”.

Godwin's earlier reference to Werther, however, does something quite different. This occurs during his description of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Fanny Blood - “the chosen object of Mary's attachment” (p. 219). Godwin compares their first meeting with “the first interview of Werter with Charlotte”; a phrase deleted from his less controversial second edition (p. 210). The moment of their meeting is then recreated as a sentimental tableau:

She was conducted to the door of a small house, but furnished with peculiar neatness and propriety. The first object that caught her sight, was a young woman of a slender and elegant form, and eighteen years of age, busily employed in feeding and managing some children, born of the same parents, but considerably inferior to her in age. The impression Mary received from this spectacle was indelible; and, before the interview was concluded, she had taken, in her heart, the vows of an eternal friendship (p. 210).

38 See Janet Todd, Sensibility: an Introduction (London & New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 4. As Jane Spencer has demonstrated in Rise of the Woman Novelist, sentimentalism and sensibility were feminine qualities, and maintained an association with femininity in their literary manifestations: “[t]he unification of feeling and morality which was at the heart of sentimental philosophy was also a characteristic of femininity as the eighteenth century defined it; and the true ‘man of feeling’ was therefore seen as ‘feminine’. Sentimental writing was ‘feminine’ too. The tender feeling and delicacy of expression seen as the hallmarks of feminine writing also characterised sentimental writing in general, and so at the height of the sentimental movement, the most fashionable kind of writing coincided with the kind of writing expected of women” (pp. 77-8).

39 After its initial publication, Godwin’s Memoirs was condemned for its vindication of Wollstonecraft’s unconventional morality. He revised the work, largely by deleting the most sensitive or controversial phrases and passages, and adding qualifications. Richard Holmes provides a clear and careful comparison of substantial alterations between the first and second editions of the Memoirs in Wollstonecraft & Godwin, Short Residence and Memoirs, Appendix (pp.274-7), and less substantial differences are indicated in endnotes.
Whereas in the passage discussed above the phrase “female Werter” seems to emphasise Wollstonecraft's embodiment of feminine suffering, this passage gestures towards her adoption of a masculine, desiring position in relation to Fanny, the object of her desire; “busily employed” and unaware of Wollstonecraft's gaze, performing feminine duties (“feeding and managing some children”) and embodying femininity (“slender and elegant of form”). The erotic impulse recorded in the passage is screened out by the feminine pronoun; read the passage again inserting masculine pronouns for Wollstonecraft, and its erotic suggestiveness seems overt, while “friendship” takes on a different tone.

Godwin's reference to Werter and Charlotte immediately following this scene not only illustrates the immediacy of Wollstonecraft's passion, but also signals its inappropriateness. In this sense, Wollstonecraft as a “female Werter” suggests something else; her adoption of a masculine position, enacted in her passion for a feminized Fanny Blood in this instance, but also available in Godwin's later comment that “many of her sentiments are undoubtedly of a rather masculine description” (p. 231).

Feminizing Werther, then, is a complex task, not complete in suggesting that Godwin simply figured Wollstonecraft as a Werther in petticoats. Barker-Benfield

40 Claudia Johnson discusses the “protolesbian narratives” available from Wollstonecraft's novels in chapter two of Equivocal Beings (pp. 47-69). Her description of Mary, A Fiction as a novel “trying to imagine the as yet unimaginable - a thinking woman whose desire is not narratable within the romantic plot”, a desire which, in Johnson's words, is “intensely homoerotic, and as such [one which] cannot be named or known” is interesting in relation to Godwin’s description of the meeting between Wollstonecraft and Fanny Blood (p. 50). Johnson notices that “[d]espite the outcry occasioned by his disclosures about Wollstonecraft's suicide attempts, he let the second allusion to Werther stand. [...] Yet the second edition of Memoirs expunges the earlier comparison of Wollstonecraft and Fanny to Werther and Charlotte: the barest hint that this relation could rival a heterosexual relationship was manifestly too unsettling to retain” (p. 53). Richard Holmes seems to approach the question of the mis-recognition of Wollstonecraft's desire for Fanny Blood in his editorial note to Godwin’s Memoirs: “Hugh Skeys [F.B.'s husband], a young Irish businessman, became a close friend of Wollstonecraft's after Fanny's death, and was one of Godwin's chief biographical sources. [Claire] Tomalin perceptively observes that perhaps 'they had more in common in their relationship with Fanny than they could acknowledge’” (Godwin & Wollstonecraft, Short Residence & Memoirs, p. 298, n. 17). He also notices in his editing of Short Residence, that Wollstonecraft “often picks out the prettiest girl from her companions” (see letters 5, 8 & 22) and suggests that “they remind her of Fanny Blood” (p. 283, n. 36).

41 Wollstonecraft reviewed one of the numerous off-spins from Goethe’s novel for the Analytical Review in 1790, where she makes the following, somewhat ironic, comment: “Few novels have given rise to so many strictures and imitations as the Sorrows of Werter, though none can be more injudicious than attempts to imitate, continue, or alter, a popular story, which in its first form made a lively impression on the minds of the readers, whom it could interest”. Her comments in an earlier review of a poem by Amelia Pickering which also reworks Goethe’s novel are also worth recording here: “The mind is so
correctly identifies the association between Werther and Wollstonecraft as characters who are “sexually subversive”, whose stories seem to value sexual desire above conventional moral duty. But while Wollstonecraft's suicide can be said to be a suicide of love-loss and despair, it is a story oddly familiar from popular literature of seduced heroines. And it is not the full story; after all, the outcome of Wollstonecraft's sexual subversion with Imlay was not only despair, but also pregnancy and motherhood. As Barker-Benfield observes, Godwin was primarily interested in Wollstonecraft's relationships with “Fuseli, Imlay and himself”, and this interest excludes other details, other relationships, other factors. So while it is possible (but not certain) that Wollstonecraft was writing autobiographically in her last two substantial works, the narrator of those works has been primarily depicted in her relationships with male lovers, and these works have been read as the direct or indirect symptoms of those relationships.

Patricia Jewell McAlexander has described Godwin's Memoirs of Wollstonecraft as a “passionate sentimental novel”, and Barker-Benfield suggests that, as “Godwin had modelled all his female characters on Richardson's” in his novels, it is not inconceivable that he applied a similar model to his reconstruction of Mary Wollstonecraft. His narrative of Wollstonecraft's life might be fictionalizing her as a heroine of a seduction narrative: a less determined Pamela, or a more persuadable Clarissa. Jane Spencer has demonstrated that while the “seduction theme” is most familiar (as Barker-Benfield's comment illustrates) in eighteenth-century novels by men, it was originally developed in the works of Delariviere Manley and Eliza Haywood in the early decades of the century, as “the story of the woman whose forbidden feelings overrode her chaste duty, with usually tragic effects”. Spencer demonstrates how in these writers' and their successors' works “the

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42 While Richardson's heroines do not commit suicide as a result of love-loss, Godwin might have been drawing on Richardson for his portrayal of Wollstonecraft as a seduced heroine: Clarissa's suicide is a morally justifiable and tragic act. For a full discussion of the phenomenon of the seduced heroine, see Jane Spencer, Rise of the Woman Novelist, pp. 107-139.


44 Jane Spencer, Rise of the Woman Novelist, p. 112.
novel with a seduced heroine became a vehicle for feminism”, leading to “a connection between feminist protest and the seduction novel” by the time that Wollstonecraft was writing Wrongs of Woman. This connection, we might say, has been inverted with regard to the subsequent attention to Wollstonecraft's biography, so that her “feminist protest” has been contained within, and made subject to, a seduction narrative, both in readings of her life and of her late works.

3. Because she was in love with him

Dale Spender, as I mention above, reads Wollstonecraft's last novel as a working out of the author’s “personal experience” and her “depressingly unhappy relationship with Gilbert Imlay” in a celebration of Wrongs of Woman as an important example of women's writing in England before Jane Austen. A couple of pages later she begins to speculate about what she has noticed to be an absence in the history of women's writing: “It has always struck me as strange that at a time when for so many women childbirth was such an overwhelming issue in their lives, no mention is made of it in women's writing”. She finds evidence that women “did write about their anxiety, their anguish - and their resentment: in their diaries”, but “they did not articulate their experience in fiction”. She longs for “the accounts of women who on the eve of childbirth give voice to their fears and doubts as they risk death”. She explicitly singles out Wrongs of Woman as a novel in which the author “does not discuss the fears and pains of childbirth”, even though, as Spender must have realised in forming these speculations, Wollstonecraft was experiencing her second pregnancy during its drafting, and gives the character Maria an opportunity to tell the story of her pregnancy in the memoirs she writes while imprisoned.

The second half of this chapter can be read partly as an answer to

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45 A reviewer criticised Wrongs of Woman on the grounds that the narrator's sufferings were her own fault, as she had fallen in love with Venables in the first place; see Critical Review, SS, 22 (1798), p. 418. Quoted by Jane Spencer, Rise of the Woman Novelist, p. 209.
46 Spender, Mothers of the Novel, p. 262; original emphasis.
47 Wollstonecraft became pregnant during December 1796. She died in September 1797, after her second daughter, Mary, was born on 30th August. She began working on the manuscript of Wrongs of Woman during the summer of 1796.
Spender’s question. In the following discussion I am going to shift the frame of reference applied to Wollstonecraft’s *Short Residence* and *Wrongs of Woman*, from a preoccupation with her relationship with Imlay (and/or Godwin), towards the genealogy of mothers and daughters that is also recorded in these two works. This genealogy becomes more visible, and more complete, if we also take into account her less substantial late work: the ‘Lessons’ which were also written in the last year or so of her life.

First, let me explain what I mean by a genealogy of mothers and daughters by returning to my discussion of the *Wrongs of Woman*. The central characters of the *Wrongs of Woman* have, as I have suggested above, been transposed onto Wollstonecraft’s life details to produce the following equation:

\[
\text{Venables/Darnford} + \text{Maria} = \text{Imlay/Godwin} + \text{Wollstonecraft}.
\]

The George Venables/Henry Darnford combination works either as impressions of Imlay at different times of their relationship (as in Dale Spender’s account), or sometimes as a straight Imlay/Godwin split (bad guy/good guy - as in Gary Kelly's account), or again, sometimes the relations are just plain confusing, because, as Margaret George observes, Wollstonecraft was finding “personal contentment” with Godwin when she was writing a novel with an “emotional message” of female distress repeated in the layering of stories contained within the novel.⁴⁸

A complete synthesis of Imlay and/or Godwin with Venables/Darnford seems to be striven for in these accounts, frustrated by material which doesn’t fit the autobiographical model. Only rarely has the suggestion been made that Venables might in fact not represent Imlay at all, but that he might instead represent Wollstonecraft’s brother-in-law, Meredith

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⁴⁸ Margaret George, *One Woman’s Situation*, p. 139. *Wrongs of Woman* contains a series of female stories within the narrative frame of Maria’s own: we hear Jemima’s account of her life and how the behaviour of men caused her prostitution; the “lovely maniac” whose parents forced her to marry a man she didn’t love, and whose madness is post-natal psychosis; the “girl” Jemima wanted to replace as a merchant’s mistress, who drowns (pregnant) in a horse trough; Peggy, whose husband dies at sea, and leaves her to provide for two small children; the mistress of Venables, who dies giving birth to his unwanted child; a woman with a despotic husband, who refuses to shelter Maria.
Bishop. If, as I am going to argue, Venables owes more of his character and story to Meredith Bishop than to Gilbert Imlay, then Maria can no longer be assumed to be a version of Wollstonecraft, and the novel can be peeled apart from the narrative of Wollstonecraft’s failed love story. Once this happens, we can find in Wollstonecraft’s writing of this novel a record not (only) of her personal experiences of heterosexual love, but a working out of several stories of mothers and daughters. The editors of the *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* have already suggested that this “novel’s central relationship” is “structurally not that of Maria and her lover Henry Darnford, but that of Maria and her rescuer Jemima”. I want to suggest that the central relationship in this novel is that of Maria and her daughter, and that Maria’s narrative layers stories of mothers and daughters familiar from Wollstonecraft’s biography, but overlooked in accounts which focus on her failed affair with Gilbert Imlay. So in place of the Venables/Darnford + Maria = Imlay/Godwin + Wollstonecraft equation, I want to introduce some new pairings, including not only Eliza Wollstonecraft and Meredith Bishop, but also Fanny Blood and Hugh Skeys. The first thing that happens is a need to abandon the attempt at closed equations completely; Venables doesn’t represent or mirror any single figure from Wollstonecraft’s life, but is a layering of incidents and characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venables/Maria</th>
<th>Bishop/Eliza</th>
<th>Skeys/Fanny</th>
<th>Imlay/Mary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V is a seaman</td>
<td>B is a seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>I trades in ships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V appears a gentleman prior to marriage</td>
<td>B appears a gentleman prior to marriage</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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49 W. Clark Durant mentioned the similarities between Wollstonecraft’s creation of Venables and the story of Eliza Wollstonecraft’s marriage to Meredith Bishop; see Godwin, *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by W. Clark Durant (London: Constable, 1927). Gary Kelly and James Kinsley record Durant’s opinion in a note to their edition of the novel, but flatly deny the connection, and reassert that “Maria’s romance with George Venables is based on M.W.’s love-affair with Gilbert Imlay” although they later recognise that Maria’s escape from Venables is describing M.W.’s “escape with Eliza from Eliza’s husband Meredith Bishop, in 1784”. See *Mary and the Wrongs of Woman*, p. 223 (p. 129, n. 1) and p. 227 (p. 170, n. 1). Edna Nixon, in spite of getting the important details of Eliza and Bishop’s marriage wrong, remarks that Wollstonecraft’s novel was “based on her sister Eliza’s unhappy experiences of matrimony” (Nixon, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 222).

50 Marilyn Butler and Janet Todd, *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 1, p. 25.
There are, on a simple level, very clear correlations between the incidents and patterning of *Wrongs of Woman* and Eliza Wollstonecraft's story.¹ The linchpin of the model of this novel as an autobiographical account of the author's life is, as I have indicated in the discussion above, the apparent transparency of Maria's first-person narrative and Wollstonecraft's early life. But if, as I am suggesting, Maria's memoirs might be an account not of Wollstonecraft's experiences of 'marriage', but a remembering of, and meditation on, her sister's experiences of marriage, this evidence for reading the novel as autobiography dissolves.² After all, what we have read as Wollstonecraft's life details (the tyrannical father, the preferred elder brother, the weak mother especially) are also the life details of her younger sister.

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¹ There are also correlations between the narrative and MW's life, but I am beginning to distrust these. After all, evidence of Wollstonecraft's suicide attempt by laudanum seems to be derived from her description of this event in Maria. It is possible (but not certain) that the scene described was also Eliza's experience. There is no evidence of Bishop having tried to 'sell' his wife to a friend, but there is also no evidence of this happening to Wollstonecraft. I am trying to indicate the extent to which we are willing to read this novel as autobiographical, even where the evidence doesn't fit Wollstonecraft's known life.

² Wollstonecraft was registered as Imlay's wife at the American Embassy, to enable her to stay in Paris after the National Convention legislated for the imprisonment of British citizens in August 1793, but they didn't undergo a marriage ceremony. She used Imlay's name for herself and Fanny until her marriage to Godwin in 1797.
4. The incendiary in this shocking affair

Eliza Wollstonecraft married Meredith Bishop in October 1782. After the death of their mother earlier that year, Wollstonecraft, as the eldest daughter and after the experience of nursing her mother in her final illness, assumed a parenting position in relation to the younger children. Wollstonecraft’s letters give numerous details of her efforts to support her younger siblings, and she became financially responsible, especially for her two sisters. On Eliza’s first becoming acquainted with Meredith Bishop and his family, Wollstonecraft was approving of the match, but soon after the wedding Eliza seems to have taken a strong aversion to her husband, compounded and heightened by her experience of pregnancy and the birth of a daughter. Eliza clearly suffered psychologically after the birth, as Wollstonecraft’s astonishingly graphic letters from this period indicate, and this suffering has been understood subsequently to have been a severe experience of post-partum psychosis. Wollstonecraft went to stay with Eliza and Bishop to nurse her sister, and became attached to the baby, who was being fed and cared for by a nurse. Eliza’s health seems to have deteriorated, and Wollstonecraft was involved in lengthy discussions with Bishop as to the best solution to what she saw as a life-threatening situation for her sister. Eventually, with the assistance of Fanny Blood, Wollstonecraft planned an escape for Eliza. They waited until Bishop was out of the house, and left secretly in a carriage which took them to Church Street in Hackney (now Stoke Newington Church Street) where Wollstonecraft had arranged lodgings under the

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53 A phrase used by Wollstonecraft to refer to her role in Eliza’s marriage in a letter to Everina. Wardle, Collected Letters, p. 86.
55 She describes Bishop as “a worthy man, whose situation in life is truly eligible” in a letter to Jane Arden, ibid., p. 79.
56 For a detailed and careful account of Eliza’s marriage, and the ensuing events, see Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft, pp. 36-42. For Wollstonecraft’s contemporaneous description of events, see Wardle, Collected Letters, pp. 79-89. The various interpretations of Eliza’s illness are interesting in their own right: James Kinsley and Gary Kelly’s chronology of Wollstonecraft’s life in their edition of Mary and the Wrongs of Woman describe Eliza’s illness as an “hysterical aversion to her husband” (my emphasis), while Edna Nixon describes it as “a basic post-natal depression made abnormal by a naturally neurotic nature - part of the Wollstonecraft inheritance” (Mary Wollstonecraft, p. 21; my emphasis).
57 Collected Letters, p. 83.
pseudonym, Miss Johnson. Eliza was clearly very frightened of retribution, and emotionally distressed; Wollstonecraft describes her biting her wedding ring to pieces on the journey across London. Some letters speak of the pressure brought to bear on Wollstonecraft to take Eliza back to her husband, and the refusal of her elder brother to shelter them. Eliza was also clearly distressed at having left her baby daughter behind, and after they had settled a little into their new lodgings, Fanny sent her brother George with a note to Hugh Skeys, her fiancé and friend of Meredith Bishop, for news of the baby, but the “answer was cool and unsatisfactory”. The baby, Mary, died some months later, so Eliza never saw her child again.

Wollstonecraft established the school in Newington Green as a way to support herself, her sisters and Fanny Blood. Fanny Blood’s health was in rapid decline, and she accepted Hugh Skey’s proposal of marriage partly as a means to travel to Lisbon, which, it was believed, would improve her chances of recovery. Fanny and Hugh Skeys married in February 1785. Fanny became pregnant within a month of marriage, and Wollstonecraft travelled to Lisbon in November to nurse her friend through the birth, fearing she would never see her again. Fanny and the child (a daughter) died on 29th November. The school collapsed early in 1786 largely as a result of Wollstonecraft’s absence, and she was left responsible for the livelihoods of her two sisters. It was at this point that she took up the position of governess with the Kingsboroughs in Ireland, and began writing *Mary, A Fiction*.

There is no mention of Eliza’s experience, or the dead child, in any of the existing letters after 1785. As Claire Tomalin comments: “whatever feelings of guilt and

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58 ibid., p. 84.
59 ibid., p. 84.
60 ibid., pp. 86-9
61 ibid., p. 88.
62 Wollstonecraft speculated on possible plans in her January 1784 letter to Everina, ibid., p. 86.
63 Wollstonecraft describes her arrival in Lisbon shortly before Fanny gave birth in a letter to Eliza, ibid., pp. 100-1.
64 See Wollstonecraft’s letter to George Blood, ibid. p. 102.
65 Wollstonecraft tells George Blood that “[i]n a very short time I shall plunge again into some new scene of life” in a letter dated May 1786, ibid., p. 105. A letter was sent to Everina describing her arrival in Ireland, dated 30th October 1786, ibid., p. 120. She informs Henry Dyson that she has “lately written, a fiction” in a letter dated September 1787, ibid., p. 162.
unhappiness Mary and Eliza suffered at that moment are not recorded. Later, around the time that Wollstonecraft’s relationship with Gilbert Imlay is disclosed, Eliza seems to have become bitter and sarcastic towards Wollstonecraft. When she was embarking on her trip to Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft wrote an uncomfortable letter to her sisters, apologising for the long silence, and promising them financial assistance, but also indicating that they were not welcome visitors now that she had found what she described as “domestic happiness”. Eliza returned the letter to Wollstonecraft addressed to “Mrs Imlay”. Eliza then seems to have severed all communication with Wollstonecraft.

After Wollstonecraft’s death, when Eliza and Everina heard that Godwin was intending to publish an account of her life, both sisters objected strongly to the plan. They had moved to Ireland, and become respectable teachers, and feared a loss of clients through association with Wollstonecraft’s name. When Wollstonecraft’s daughter Fanny was 22, and very unhappy after the elopement of Shelley and her sister, Mary, Eliza and Everina seem to have rejected a plan for her to come and live with them in Ireland. Shortly afterwards Fanny was found dead in Bristol, wearing her mother’s stays, having taken an overdose of laudanum.

Wollstonecraft’s first novel was a reconstruction of, and reflection on, her experience of the death of Fanny Blood. Her last novel, I am suggesting, was a reconstruction of the distressing events of 1782. Maria’s early life, as recorded in her memoirs, are a version of Eliza’s through Wollstonecraft’s eyes - a replaying or re-imagining of her sister’s otherwise unrecorded experience. Maria’s narrative does not

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66 Tomalin, *Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 42.
68 See Tomalin, *Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 225.
69 Godwin offers an odd version of the events of 1784 in his *Memoirs*: “Mary was ever ready at the call of distress, and, in particular, during her whole life was eager and active to promote the welfare of every member of her family. In 1780 she attended the deathbed of her mother; in 1782 she was summoned by a not less melancholy occasion, to attend her sister Eliza, married to a Mr Bishop, who, subsequent to a dangerous lying-in, remained for some months in a very afflicted situation. Mary continued with her sister without intermission, to her perfect recovery” (p. 213). Claire Tomalin suggests that Wollstonecraft might not have mentioned the affair to Godwin, as she had become less sure about her own motives or judgement. There is a possibility that Godwin adapted his version of the events to placate and protect Eliza and Everina. He doesn’t mention the death of the baby.
70 For a suggestive and moving account of Fanny’s life and death, see Janet Todd’s essay, “Thoughts on the Death of Fanny Wollstonecraft”, chapter 7 of *Gender, Art and Death*, pp. 120-135.
reproduce Eliza’s story, it re-writes it. As the “incendiary” in the affair, the agent of Eliza’s separation from her husband (and, perhaps more significantly for this argument, from her baby daughter), Wollstonecraft was aware of her responsibility. Her pride in her own action at the time of the abduction of Eliza, is replaced by a long silence until she started writing *Wrongs of Woman*. Now a mother of a daughter herself, more sympathetic to the experience both of post-partum psychosis (after all, two suicides in four months might not only be caused by love-loss), and of separation from the father of her child, and having come close to abandoning her own baby daughter through suicide, she also became pregnant again during its composition.

I do not wish to over-stress the point of Eliza’s representation in this novel, and am not claiming that it bears no relation to Wollstonecraft’s own experience of ‘marriage’. I am signalling what I have found to be an over-determining of the Maria + Venables/Darnford equation, at the expense of the novel’s detailed treatment of Maria’s relationship with her child, which, in readings of the novel concerned to prove Wollstonecraft’s autobiographical position in the narrative, have delimited its significance as an account of “a woman speaking with love to her daughter”. Removed from the referent of her affair with Gilbert Imlay, *Wrongs of Woman* makes an interesting contribution to a mother-daughter dialogue begun in *Short Residence* and made explicit in ‘Lessons’.

5. The importance of being William

Jane Spencer draws on Adrienne Rich’s description of mother-daughter relationships as the “great unwritten story” in her essay on “Maternal Authority and Early Women Novelists”, and suggests that this story is “not so much unwritten, maybe, as

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71 Wollstonecraft dramatised her role as saviour in these letters: “B [Bishop] cannot behave properly - and those who wish to reason with him must be mad or have very little observation. Those who wish to save Bess must act and not talk” (*Collected Letters*, p. 82).

72 Janet Todd comments in her introduction to *Gender, Art and Death*, in relation to her speculations on Wollstonecraft’s suicides as “self-dramatization” (see chapter 6), that “the ‘real’ Mary Wollstonecraft no doubt jumped because of hormones, lack of vitamins, the weather, any number of things” (p. 8).

unread: for although they have received little recognition for it, many women writers in the late 1700s and early 1800s were using their new forum, the novel, to express their sense of this relationship. In the remaining space of this chapter I want to indicate a way of reading Wollstonecraft’s last writings which progresses Spencer’s argument that early women novelists were “centrally concerned with the interplay between mothers and daughters”, and to suggest that this concern also, although at the heart of Wrongs of Woman and Short Residence, has in turn been side-lined by the tendency to fix attention on correlations between Maria’s relationships with Venables and Darnford, and the author’s relationship with her lover/husband.

Spencer suggests that the novels of Frances Sheridan, Charlotte Smith, Jane West, Mary Hays and Amelia Opie made use of “the authority vested in the mothers of daughters” as a “paradigm of their own literary authority” (p. 201 & p. 202). She describes Wrongs of Woman as a novel in which Mary Wollstonecraft uses “maternal authority to challenge the patriarchal system”, and as “the most thorough attempt to revise the concept of maternal authority” (p. 204 & p. 206). Wollstonecraft’s novel, then, follows “the tradition of the female conduct-book and the didactic novel” and “dramatizes the mother’s advice to her daughter” so that “the mother’s educational role” becomes “the source for her identity as a writer” (p. 206). If we place this novel at the end of a run of writings Wollstonecraft had been working on in the few years between the birth of Fanny and her own death - in the light of Jane Spencer’s perceptive account of its concern with maternal authority - a pattern emerges which suggests that Wollstonecraft’s attention in these years was not limited to her regret and pain at the end of the Imlay affair, but was, more interestingly, involved in developing a maternal writing.

It is possible that what begins to take on the appearance of a project when viewed in this way has been overlooked, possibly because it remained undeveloped at - and was curtailed by - Wollstonecraft’s sudden death. Godwin, however, seems to have noticed a significant relationship between Wollstonecraft’s unfinished novel, and her work.

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concurrently on 'Lessons'; a series of set pieces for the purposes of educating young children, which is styled as a number of dialogues between mother and child. He made an editorial decision to “annex[]” ‘Lessons’ to the Wrongs of Woman when preparing the latter for publication in the second volume of Wollstonecraft’s Posthumous Works. His “Advertisement” justifies this decision (one he expected to “excite surprise in some persons”) on the grounds of a “slight association (in default of a strong one) between the affectionate and pathetic manner in which Maria Venables addresses her infant, in the Wrongs of Woman, and the agonising and painful sentiment with which the author originally bequeathed these papers, as a legacy for the benefit of her child”. Godwin is referring to the sentence Wollstonecraft seems to have offered as the subtitle for this work: “The first book of a series which I intended to have written for my unfortunate girl”. Godwin uses this title, which he tells us is “indorsed on the back of the manuscript” to date this work 1795, as he assumes it “to have been written in a period of desperation, in the month of October, 1795” (p. 468). This dating has been picked up and recirculated by Gary Kelly, who also finds this “slight work” to derive from the time of “her suicide attempt in October 1795”. In fact, as Meena Alexander observes, this work could not have been written at that time, as a glance at its content reveals, but must have been written during Wollstonecraft’s second pregnancy, in 1797. ‘Lessons’ records a series of short conversations between a mother and her child, which progress from lists of basic, monosyllabic words (‘Lessons’ I and II) through simple sentences which touch reference points in the child’s life (“Stroke the cat” etc., ‘Lessons’ III and IV) to more complex sentences which begin to discuss moral and relational questions, and include references to a baby, who is compared with the child to give examples of her own development (‘Lessons’ V - XIV). The baby discussed in these one-sided dialogues (only the mother’s words are recorded) is called William, the name of the imaginary son Wollstonecraft and Godwin believed she was carrying in 1797.

55 Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 4, p. 467.
57 Meena Alexander, Women in Romanticism, p. 143.
58 See Wollstonecraft’s letter to Godwin, dated June 6th 1797, where she speaks of “the disturbance produced by Master William’s joy, who took it in his head to frisk a little at being informed of your
The ‘Lessons’ record in moving detail a mother’s careful interaction with her infant daughter, and refer to the daughter’s age: “Have you seen the baby? Poor little thing. O here it comes. Look at him. How helpless he is. Four years ago you were as feeble as this very little boy” (p. 469). ‘Lessons’, then, posits the existence of the child Wollstonecraft was carrying as she was writing (it is set approximately one year in the future, when Fanny would have been four years old) and in the process records her desire for the domestic stability she believed she would experience after its birth:

Away you ran to papa, and putting both your arms round his leg, for your hands were not big enough, you looked up at him, and laughed. What did this laugh say, when you could not speak? Cannot you guess by what you now say to papa? - Ah! it was, Play with me, papa! - play with me! (p. 470)

‘Lessons’ VII describes the child’s weaning, offering a unique record of Wollstonecraft’s experiences of parenting:

When you were hungry, you began to cry, because you could not speak. You were seven months without teeth, always sucking. But after you got one, you began to gnaw a crust of bread. It was not long before another came pop. At ten months you had four pretty white teeth, and you used to bite me. Poor mamma! Still I did not cry, because I am not a child, but you hurt me very much. So I said to papa, it is time the little girl should eat. She is not naughty, yet she hurts me. I have given her a crust of bread, and I must look for some other milk (p. 470).

As well as providing an intriguing and carefully documented record of Wollstonecraft’s relationship with Fanny, then, the ‘Lessons’ might also represent an instance of maternal writing in the unique position of being written for publication. Meena Alexander

remembrance” (Collected Letters, p. 395). The lists of words in ‘Lessons’ I and II are directed at a child’s early acquisition of language, and so might have been noted during Fanny’s first 2 years, but even this internal evidence can only suggest that Wollstonecraft had kept notes during that period, and does not undermine the later dating of the work.

Gary Kelly notes that Wollstonecraft’s ‘Lessons’ “resembles Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s Lessons for Children (1778-88)”, but that work is concerned with children from 2-4 years old, and does not record the child’s acquisition of language. Barbauld’s Lessons for Children has more in common with
discusses an entry in Dorothy Wordsworth’s ‘Commonplace Book’ which records the first sounds uttered by her nephew, John, in painstaking detail, as if recording a foreign language, and so concerned to avoid misrepresentation:

First inarticulate sounds about 4 months old Googes Googes
Gorgen and something like diddle diddle after -
Before he was 6 months - Dad Daad - Succeeded by man mam
man incessantly - Then dad dad Mam Man.
Now 12th March - Man Mam Ma - Dad dad - da pap pap -
sometimes - ta ta - often nan, nan nan. Na na, da da nong -

Alexander notes that “immediately following this first entry on the baby’s sounds [...] she records the fact that the young child was weaned” and “she links his severance from his mother’s breast with first a ‘low-spirited’ silence and then, after two or three days, an impatient demand for food: ‘always with non nan nan nan and something like the German Nein - very quick’.”

Wollstonecraft’s ‘Lessons’ I and II do not record Fanny’s babble in the same detail, but offer lists of nouns and verbs that as a cluster suggest an unusual (in literary terms) attention to the detail of the child’s everyday life. It is for example interesting that she includes in a list of nouns pertaining to the human body ("Neck. Arms. Hand. Leg") the word “breast” (p. 468).

‘Lessons’ III offers the following basic sentences and phrases:


80 Dorothy Wordsworth’s entry in her first Commonplace Book, immediately following an entry for November 1802. John Wordsworth was born in June 1802. The heading is “John’s Language”. Quoted by Meena Alexander, Women in Romanticism, p. 60.

81 ibid., p. 60; original emphasis.
What does the woman do? The question begged by 'Lessons' III seems to find an answer in IV and V: “What do you want to say to me? Speak slow not fast [...] Come to me, my little girl. Are you tired of playing? Yes. Sit down and rest yourself, while I talk to you” (p. 469). The mother listens and talks to the child. This imaginary dialogue between mother and daughter, central to Spencer’s notion of “maternal authority”, is, I am suggesting, a form of writing Wollstonecraft was developing in the last years of her life. Short Residence records an early attempt to find a maternal voice, but one which as yet is only speaking in the presence of, rather than addressed to, the daughter.

6. Still harping on the same subject

Short Residence is formed out of the mingling of a private discourse addressed to Gilbert Imlay, Fanny’s father - based on a journal Wollstonecraft kept throughout the journey, and written in parallel to the series of private letters in which she negotiated the breakdown of their relationship - and a public discourse addressed to a wider reading audience. Mary Wollstonecraft highlighted the peculiarly mixed focus of this writing in an author’s “Advertisement” which draws attention to the self-reflexive interest at the heart of travel writing: a reflexivity which focuses the writing on the first-person whose voice narrates the subject matter (travelling experiences, observations, facts) and in the process becomes the object of the reader’s interest and of its own writing. The “Advertisement” opens this book with an attempt to balance a necessary (but uncomfortable) narcissism with a desired objectivity:

The writing of travels, or memoirs, has ever been a pleasant employment; for vanity or sensibility always renders it interesting. In writing these desultory letters, I found I could not avoid being continually the first person - ‘the little hero of each tale.’ I tried to correct this fault, if it be one, for they were designed for publication; but in proportion as I arranged my thoughts, my letter, I found, became stiff and affected: I, therefore, determined to let my remarks and reflections flow unrestrained, as I perceived

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82 Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 6, p. 325.
that I could not give a just description of what I saw, but by relating the effect different objects had produced on my mind and feelings, whilst the impression was still fresh.\textsuperscript{83}

The Lockean reference implicit in this construction of writing “travels” aside, what is foregrounded here is the author’s ambivalence about the autobiographical nature of the material she is offering “for publication”, the very aspect of this work taken up by twentieth-century commentators.\textsuperscript{84} She offers a series of unresolved oppositions: “travels, or memoirs”, “vanity or sensibility”, “this fault, if it be one” which seem to record an alternating between an immersion in personal detail and a sense of a need for a more formal composition of experience.

A departure from both the \textit{Vindications}, with the immediacy of their first-person didacticism, and the \textit{Historical and Moral View}, with its abstract theorizing of historical events, \textit{Short Residence} was the first piece of writing produced by Wollstonecraft after becoming a mother. The possibility that an experience of maternity might have had an effect on Wollstonecraft’s writing style is recognised by Richard Holmes when he describes her as “oblivious to all but milk and love” and identifies a “contrast between milk and blood” in her letters.\textsuperscript{85} The mythical softening of motherhood, available as an idea in Holmes’s comment that Wollstonecraft’s writing was “softer and more affectionate” after becoming a mother, is interesting in its own right, particularly within the context of the debate concerning the influence of this work on early nineteenth-century literature, but it is not the point I wish to pick up here.\textsuperscript{86} If \textit{Short Residence} records a

\textsuperscript{83} ibid., p. 241. Further references to this edition will appear in the text after quotations.

\textsuperscript{84} John Locke’s notion of the mind as ‘tabula rasa’ seems to be to be implicit in Wollstonecraft’s description of the “impression” made on the “mind and feelings” by the “different objects” she encounters. See John Locke, \textit{An Essay Concerning Human Understanding}, Book 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 43-65. Catherine Macaulay refers to the disproving in philosophy of “innate principles” in the mind, in her \textit{Letters on Education} (pt. 1, p. 203).

\textsuperscript{85} Holmes’s writing at this point in his discussion of Wollstonecraft becomes a self-conscious meditation on “something I could not really express” (I think the pun is unintentional). He is interested in “Mary’s happiness as a mother, in her act of breast-feeding” recorded in her private letters, and concludes that “this extraordinary and exceptional woman had become a mother - just like any other” (Holmes, \textit{Footsteps}, pp. 119-120).

\textsuperscript{86} If Romanticism is influenced by Wollstonecraft’s \textit{Short Residence}, and \textit{Short Residence} records her more ‘maternal’ voice, then the ‘feminization’ of the poetic ego that is recognised as Romanticism can be said to be an incorporation of the feminine/maternal by male writers. The implications of such a
maternal writing, the nature of that writing can be said to occur in response to a new addressee. While it has become commonplace to talk of Imlay as the mysterious interlocutor addressed in *Short Residence*, it is possible to read these letters as writing in the presence of a child (after all, they were largely written during the trip to Scandinavia, where Fanny was a near-constant presence, and when her absence was reflected upon). While critical attention has tended to hover around fascinating glimpses of the author’s attempted suicides and unhappy affair, explicit and surprisingly detailed glimpses are offered of the author’s relationship with, and reflection on, her infant daughter. It is a question not only of who she was writing to in these letters, but who they were written for.

7. **My babe**

The narrator’s first disclosure of the presence of a child occurs some way into the first letter, after a detailed description of their arrival in Norway. The “Advertisement” makes no mention of the maid or child accompanying the traveller, and until the passage in question occurs, this information is not available to the reader. It comes, then, as quite a suggestion demand a survey of Romanticism as the resolution of a cultural Oedipal crisis. The eighteenth-century worrying over definitions of, and differentiations between, the sublime and the beautiful is suggestive evidence of the crisis itself: experience of the ‘Sublime’ recording the boy’s castration anxiety at encountering the Father’s phallus, and of the ‘Beautiful’ recording the boy’s incestuous desire for the mother’s body. As the girl experiences a different relationship to both figures, and to castration anxiety itself, female writing of the period, in this construction, takes on a new significance.

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87 See letter 6, discussed below.
88 To my knowledge no other literary writing “designed for publication” offers detailed observations on breast-feeding, weaning, infant language, or records the presence of a child in the same way. These historically unique moments, however, have remained overshadowed by the Wollstonecraft/Imlay affair. But see Meena Alexander, *Women in Romanticism*, for a discussion which emphasises and values mother-child relationships in writing of this period.
89 *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 6, p. 247.
90 Marguerite is mentioned twice before the child, and both times is represented as a timid, feminine foil to the narrator’s boldness and observations: she is described as “poor Marguerite, whose timidity always acts as a feeler before her adventuring spirit” and as unnecessarily frightened of rape (“the other evil which instantly, as the sailors would have said, runs foul of a woman’s imagination”) when they put themselves “into the power of a strange man” in a bid to get ashore (p. 244 & p. 245). Later we learn that the narrator, during a “troublesome” drive, “played with my girl, whom I would not leave to Marguerite’s care, on account of her timidity” (p. 249).
surprise when, after the party have arrived at the lieutenant’s cottage, after a lengthy description of the house, a meal of “[f]ish, milk, butter, and cheese, and I am sorry to add, brandy”, a reflection on “the politeness of the north” in relation to “the coldness of the climate”, and once the narrator has persuaded her host to allow her to “climb the rocks to view the country”, where with the “help of the lieutenant’s telescope” she sees “the vessel underway with a fair though gentle gale”, she describes her walk among the rocks:

Straying further, my eye was attracted by the sight of some heart’s-ease that peeped through the rocks. I caught at it as a good omen, and going to preserve it in a letter that had not conveyed balm to my heart, a cruel remembrance suffused my eyes; but it passed away like an April shower. [...]
The gaiety of my babe was unmixed; regardless of omens or sentiments, she found a few wild strawberries more grateful than flowers or fancies (pp. 246-7).

Later in the same letter (during the same day) we learn that a neighbouring family were “overflowing with civility”, and that she shortened her visit there “to prevent their almost killing my babe with kindness” (p. 248). That evening the narrator observes that she could “write at midnight very well without a candle” and in a passage “contemplat[ing] all nature at rest” she contrasts her own wakefulness with the image of her sleeping child:

What, I exclaimed, is this active principle which keeps me still awake? - Why fly my thoughts abroad when every thing around me appears at home? My child was sleeping with equal calmness - innocent and sweet as the closing flowers. - Some recollections, attached to the idea of home, mingled with reflections respecting the state of society I had been contemplating that evening, made a tear drop on the rosy cheek I had just kissed (p. 248).

Meena Alexander suggests that “women writers were much more literal than their male counterparts in their attachment to their own bodily being” and notes that “this was most striking in their images of maternity”. She contrasts William Wordsworth’s “abstract” description of his wife breast-feeding their child in terms of “the gravitation and the filial bond/ Of nature” with Wollstonecraft’s descriptions in letters of a literal “inundation of milk” after Fanny’s birth, and her reference to the power of the child’s suckling “so
manfully that her father reckons saucily on her writing the second part of the R-ts of Woman".  

The narrator pictures herself at one point, on the boat back to Sweden after a brief trip to Norway, where she had travelled without Fanny:

Wrapping my great coat round me, I lay down on some sails at the bottom of the boat, its motion rocking me to rest, till a discourteous wave interrupted my slumbers, and obliged me to rise and feel a solitariness which was not so soothing as that of the past night (p. 268).

The solitary figure wandering through nature is an elemental refrain of early nineteenth-century poetry, and is one of the points at which Wollstonecraft's *Short Residence* has been recognised as an influential precedent for Romantic poetry. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler identify the "introverted traveller, nursing memories of a tragic and perhaps guilty passion, wandering off into desolate, dangerous places" as the prototype for Romantic poetic and prose narratives, and argue that the later "substitution by male writers of a hero for a heroine" does not "necessarily mean that ‘romantic subjectivity’ was experienced at its point of origin as male rather than female".  

If this is the case, the solitary wanderer that is at the heart of Romantic writing has as an origin a mother separated from her baby.  

The narrator describes "a sort of weak melancholy that hung about my heart at parting with my daughter for the first time" immediately before a meditation on her fears for her daughter's future:

You know that as a female I am particularly attached to her - I feel more than a mother’s fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of her sex. I dread lest she should be forced to sacrifice her heart to her principles, or principles to her heart. With trembling hand I

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92 Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1 [general introduction], pp. 23-4.

93 Richard Holmes makes the claim that in Wollstonecraft's “description of the solitary wanderer, sailing through dangerous waters towards an unknown, misty shoreline” in Letters 5 and 6 “something of the Romantic predicament itself is prophesied” (Wollstonecraft & Godwin, *A Short Residence & Memoirs*, p. 27).
shall cultivate sensibility, and cherish delicacy of sentiment, lest, whilst I lend fresh blushes to the rose, I sharpen the thorns that will wound the breast I would fain guard - I dread to unfold her mind, lest it should render her unfit for the world she is to inhabit - Hapless woman! what a fate is thine! (p. 269)

Later in the same letter she again draws on the image of her daughter’s cheek, this time as a sign of innocence, contrasting with adult emotions which offer the same physical symptom: the blush. The passage recalls Fanny Blood, and part of it is selected by Godwin as an illustration of how much Wollstonecraft suffered the loss of her friend, a loss recalled in this passage ten years after her death:

When a warm heart has received strong impressions, they are not to be effaced. Emotions become sentiments; and the imagination renders even transient sensations permanent, by fondly retracing them. I cannot, without a thrill of delight, recollect views I have seen, which are not to be forgotten, - nor looks I have felt in every nerve which I shall never more meet. The grave has closed over a dear friend, the friend of my youth; still she is present with me, and I hear her soft voice warbling as I stray over the heath.

This recollected loss seems to recall one closer to home, in an image of the flushed breast, signalling remembered desire:

Fate has separated me from another, the fire of whose eyes, tempered by infantine tenderness, still warms my breast; even when gazing on these tremendous cliffs, sublime emotions absorb my soul. And, smile not, if I add, that the rosy tint of morning reminds me of a suffusion, which will never more charm my senses, unless it reappears on the cheeks of my child. Her sweet blushes I may yet hide in my bosom, and she is still too young to ask why starts the tear, so near akin to pleasure and pain? (pp. 271-2).  

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94 The blush as a sign of contrasting emotions (the child’s innocent pleasure, and the adult’s sexual pleasure) is recalled in a later reflective passage: “Tokens of love I have received have rapt me in elysium - purifying the heart they enchanted. - My bosom still glows. - Do not saucily ask, repeating Sterne’s question, ‘Maria, is it still so warm!’ Sufficiently, O my God! has it been chilled by sorrow and unkindness - still nature will prevail - and if I blush at recollecting past enjoyment, it is the rosy hue of pleasure heightened by modesty; for the blush of modesty and shame are as distinct as the emotions by which they are produced” (p. 280). Gary Kelly suggests that the scene from Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, by Mr. Yorick* (1769) alluded to in this passage “dramatizes an important
She mentions weaning the child as a factor in her weakened health: “My imprudence last winter, and some untoward accidents just at the time I was weaning my child, had reduced me to a state of weakness which I never before experienced” (p. 280). And she describes the fear, on returning to Gothenburg, that her child may have forgotten her in her absence, in a passage which offers a beautiful observation of her longing for her absent child:

Tonsberg was something like a home - yet I was to enter without lighting-up pleasure in any eye - I dreaded the solitariness of my apartment, and wished for night to hide the starting tears, or to shed them on my pillow, and close my eyes on a world where I was destined to wander alone. […]

Employment has beguiled this day, and to-morrow I set out for Moss, in my way to Stromstad. At Gothenburg I shall embrace my Fannikin, probably she will not know me again - and I shall be hurt if she do not. How childish is this! still it is a natural feeling. I would not permit myself to indulge the ‘thick coming fears’ of fondness, whilst I was detained by business. - Yet I never saw a calf bounding in a meadow, that did not remind me of my little frolicker (pp. 298-9; original emphasis).

She describes “the sweetest picture of a harvest home I had ever beheld” in a passage meditating on her longing for the sort of domestic stability reproduced in the scenes of future bliss recorded in ‘Lessons’:

A little girl was mounted a straddle on a shaggy horse, brandishing a stick over its head; the father was walking at the side of the car with a child in his arms, who must have come to meet him with tottering steps, the little creature was stretching out its arms to cling around his neck; and a boy, just above petticoats, was labouring hard, with a fork, behind, to keep the sheaves from falling.

philosophical point - the relation of mind and body, including erotic desire and sexual pleasure. Wollstonecraft’s use of the episode indicates that her ‘glowing’ bosom and the ‘blush at recollecting past enjoyment’ refer to both her own sexual desire and the blushing afterglow of sexual pleasure” (Revolutionary Feminism, p. 188). See also Ruth Bernard Yeazell’s analysis of the blush in literature in Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
My eyes followed them to the cottage, and an involuntary sigh whispered to my heart, that I envied the mother, much as I dislike cooking, who was preparing their pottage. I was returning to my babe, who may never experience a father's care or tenderness. The bosom that nurtured her, heaved with a pang at the thought which only an unhappy mother could feel (p. 315).

And she seems to offer a glimpse of uncertainty regarding her parenting in a passage which might stand to compare the woman travelling alone with her child, with the “notable house-wives; without accomplishments, or any of the charms that adorn more advanced social life” who inhabit Copenhagen. Their “total ignorance may enable them to save something in their kitchens; but it is far from rendering them better parents. On the contrary, the children are spoilt; as they usually are, when left to the care of weak, indulgent mothers, who having no principle of action to regulate their feelings, become the slaves of infants, enfeebling both body and mind by false tenderness” (p. 321).

Towards the end of the journey, the mood of the letters shifts, and the playful moments recorded in earlier letters give way to a bleaker, more self-absorbed tone. Her references to the child reflect this: “Marguerite and the child often fell asleep; and when they were awake, I might still reckon myself alone, as our train of thoughts had nothing in common” (p. 333). We are also offered a sketch of a woman faced with the horrors of a hungry child, in a passage describing her crossing from Denmark to mainland Germany:

When I went on board at the Great Belt, I had provided refreshments in case of detention, which remaining untouched, I thought not then any such precaution necessary for the second passage, misled by the epithet of little, though I have since been informed that it is frequently the longest. This mistake occasioned much vexation; for the child, at last, began to cry so bitterly for bread, that fancy conjured up before me the wretched Ugolino, with his famished children; and I, literally speaking, enveloped myself in sympathetic horrors, augmented by every tear my babe shed; from which I could not escape, till we landed, and a luncheon of bread, and a bason of milk, routed the spectres of fancy (p. 334).
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The final reference to the child is perhaps the most interesting. Having arrived at Hamburg, the narrator complains of the “difficulties I might have to encounter to house myself and brat” (p.339).

These instances of writing about Fanny are embedded into a piece of writing that has to take into account her presence. The mother-daughter dialogue, however, only begins to emerge as an identifiable writing voice in the later novel, Wrongs of Woman.

8. Writing a book and giving birth to a child

The memoirs which make up a third of the Wrongs of Woman are written by Maria for her daughter; they begin with the words: “Addressing these memoirs to you my child”. They are didactic: “uncertain whether I shall ever have an opportunity of instructing you” (p. 123), and confessional: “Had I not wasted years in deliberating, after I ceased to doubt, how I ought to have acted - I might now be useful and happy” (p. 123). They are also self-justifying: “it is necessary, my dearest child, that you should know the character of your father, to prevent your despising your mother”, and so offer an account of what caused Maria to marry the man she later comes to fear and despise (p. 127).

This novel is an exploration of the conditions of female suffering, particularly psychological suffering, and repeats in various forms the refrain of a woman either estranged from her child, or dead and hence unable to educate and assist her child. Jane Spencer observes that Maria’s “separation from her baby is the culmination of all those injustices to mothers and daughters” and that the “image of the baby torn from the mother’s breast” which “recurs several times in the narrative” is representative of “the many ways in which society denies women the right to nourish their daughters”. Maria’s greatest terror is that her child is motherless, alone and exposed to suffering:

96 Namely those autobiographical facts that have been read as Wollstonecraft’s own - the tyrannical father, weak mother, overbearing elder brother, father’s new wife, and the economic and social breakdown of the family etc. - pp. 124-126.
97 See note 47 above.
Her infant’s image was continually floating on Maria’s sight [...] She heard her half speaking half cooing, and felt the little twinkling fingers on her burning bosom—a bosom bursting with the nutriment for which this cherished child might now be pining in vain. From a stranger she could indeed receive the maternal ailment, Maria was grieved at the thought—but who would watch her with a mother’s tenderness, a mother’s self-denial? (p. 85)

Jane Spencer finds in Maria’s memoirs “an attempt to provide the mothering that has been denied her”, and hence, on a larger scale, “a model [...] of women’s writing”. This model, then, is an elaboration of the simple mother-daughter dialogue Wollstonecraft worked on in ‘Lessons’, as well as a version of the accounts “of women who on the eve of childbirth give voice to their fears and doubts as they risk death” that Dale Spender is looking for in women’s writing. Maria frames her memoirs with the words: “Death may snatch me from you, before you can weigh my advice, or enter into my reasoning” (p. 123).

The description of Maria’s meeting with Venables’s illegitimate, neglected daughter, whose mother is dead, whose legs are malformed from bad feeding from a careless nurse, and whose features are ravaged by suffering, causes her to reflect on his future treatment of the child she is carrying: “Why, her legs bent under her like a bow when she came to me, and she has never been well since; but, if they were no better paid than I am, it is not to be wondered at” (p. 142). Imprisoned in the “mansion of despair” (p. 85), Maria is unable to come to the rescue of her daughter: “To think that she was blotted out of existence was agony, [...] yet to suppose her turned adrift on an unknown sea, was scarcely less afflicting” (pp. 85-6).

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99 ibid., p. 258. For an interesting account of this novel as an example of hermeneutic writing in which “the introduction of the reader as a structural element of the text opens up and also complicates a commerce between present and future” and which is “structured as a series of attempts by people who are literally or metaphorically imprisoned to communicate to others”, see Tilottama Rajan, ‘Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 27 (1988), 221-251 (p. 222 & p. 223).

100 Spender, *Mothers of the Novel*, p. 262.
Whether we read the novel as a psychological parable (women suffer psychosis under patriarchy, and are rendered useless) or as a social parable (women are imprisoned by convention and legal restraint, so are rendered powerless), the narrative seems to replay the painful experience of Eliza: estranged from her child, with no legal rights to claim the child, unable to retrieve the child, and finally, hearing of the child's death through another, having never seen it since the day she escaped from her husband. But it is not a biography of Eliza as much as a layering of multiple versions of a story about women estranged from, or prevented from nurturing and educating, their daughters. The neglected illegitimate child in this scene embodies the effect on future generations of women, of denying mothers the right, opportunities, and necessary conditions to nurture and educate their daughters. It is no coincidence that she can hardly walk.

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101 We know that Wollstonecraft repeated phrases she had heard at moments of emotional crisis through her fictional writings, notably her mother's dying words "a little patience and all will be over" (see Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, p. 132). The scene in which Jemima informs Maria that her baby is dead is detailed, and records Maria's words: "Spare yourself the pain of preparing me for your information. I adjure you! - My child is dead!" and "'Leave me,' added Maria, making a fresh effort to govern her feelings, and hiding her face in her handkerchief, to conceal her anguish - 'It is enough - I know that my babe is no more - I will hear the particulars when I am' - calmer, she could not utter." There is no record of who was responsible for breaking the news to Eliza, but this scene might be more descriptive of a recalled scene than has been recognised (p. 122; original emphasis).
Conclusion

Ralph Wardle commented in 1947 that “Mary Wollstonecraft was not born a feminist”. The process of literary criticism by which she became one has raised the profile of women’s literary history, but at the same time has allowed a foreclosing of her significance in that history. Mary Wollstonecraft entered the literary critical establishment not only through the work of feminist academics arriving in universities in the 1970s, but also, already, through the interest of a number of male scholars, far from feminist: Ralph Wardle, Derek Roper, Charles Kegan Paul, W. Clark Durant. And today she is not only the object on which feminist critics cut their teeth, but also a respectable object for the study of male academics such as Gary Kelly, G. J. Barker-Benfield, and Richard Holmes. Why Mary Wollstonecraft rather than Catherine Macaulay or Mary Astell or Eliza Haywood? A failed feminist, a flawed feminist, a feminist with a weakness for intelligent, literary men, or so the story has been told and re-told. In this thesis I have tried to raise aspects of the writings which get left out when this profile of Wollstonecraft is drawn, and also to speculate on the genealogy of the figure of Mary Wollstonecraft that has become familiar through the re-telling of her story.

In place of the reconstructions of Mary Wollstonecraft I have been tracing, I am aware that this thesis also reconstructs her and her writings, according to my own dimensions. The desire to lay one’s hands on material entities of the living past, delineated so poignantly in Henry James’s novella The Aspern Papers, is an activity we tend to cloak with scholarly exactitude. James describes the “impetus” for this story as his discovery that “Jane Clairmont, the half-sister of Mary Godwin, Shelley’s second wife, and for a while the intimate friend of Byron and the mother of his daughter Allegra, should have been living in Florence, where she had long lived, up to our own day, and that in fact, had I happened to hear of her but a little sooner, I might have seen her in the flesh”. He describes the intensity of feeling arising from “the mere strong fact of her having testified

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for the reality and the closeness of our relation to the past” and “the thrill of learning that she had ‘overlapped,’ and by so much, and the wonder of my having doubtless at several earlier seasons passed again and again, all unknowing, the door of her house, where she sat above, within call and in her habit as she lived” (p. vii and viii). James explains the intensity of his reaction to the news of Claire Clairmont’s existence as “delight in a palpable imaginable visitable past” (p. x; original emphasis). The additional anecdote that “an ardent Shelleyite” had once, on discovery of Claire’s existence, been “accepted as a lodger on the calculation that she would have Shelley documents” touches on the peculiar fetish of academic research for the living past that is also an aspect of this thesis (p. viii). James’s story plays with the concept of acquiring living history, without sticking to its original inspirational theme. Yet his Preface captures something of the present’s aching desire for real, tangible, primarily sensory contact with an otherwise shrouded and ‘Other’ past; what James describes so accurately as the “mere essential charm […] of a final scene of the rich Shelley drama played out in the very theatre of our own ‘modernity’” (p. ix).

There is, also, something peculiarly powerful in the literary and philosophical remains of Mary Wollstonecraft. Her unusually well-documented unusual life, recording in writing an unusual period in European history, and her dominating presence within a complex web of fascinating figures of literary history, are associations with her name that it is probably impossible to disarticulate from the project of evaluating her writings. The lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley - maybe more so than those of their male counterparts, William Godwin and Percy - are symbolically and psychologically woven into the fabric of their writings. Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written During a Short Residence*, read alongside her private letters to Gilbert Imlay, form a cluster of words and images which make it tantalisingly possible to imagine the lived emotions of the writer - a possibility grasped in the absence of sensations available from viewing the shadings on a photographed face, or the recorded inflexions of a long-dead voice. The fragmented, unfinished ending of her last novel is difficult to read without speculating on the reason for its abandonment, the identity and relationship of the editor who finally published it, and the identity of the child born shortly before the author’s death. The younger Mary’s journey from a Godwin to a Shelley - the names recording a history entangled with that of her
Conclusion

haunting first novel - was made via her mother’s grave, and through a shared appreciation and re-living of her writings. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* captures anxieties of parentlessness, motherless birth, love and responsibility, writing and reproduction, which it is hardly possible to read in isolation from the story of the author’s own birth. And so many peculiarly female deaths; Fanny by laudanum wearing her mother’s stays, Harriet - late in pregnancy - by water (the memory of Wollstonecraft weighting her skirts in the water of the Thames before she throws herself in), Wollstonecraft herself by septicemia.

In a literary present mapped by the polarities of the detailed biography of exposure on one side, and the play of the signifier of texts which author themselves on the other, writing about Mary Wollstonecraft is a project impossible to take lightly. Feminist literary criticism, the theoretical and practical home of this thesis, has reached a complex point in its own history; and by writing about Mary Wollstonecraft I am inevitably writing about the theory and practice of feminist literary history. A re-negotiation of Wollstonecraft’s position in that history is at the same time a negotiation of the present writer’s position. Throughout this thesis I have been balancing a concern to communicate aspects of Wollstonecraft’s writings overlooked in accounts preoccupied by a particular version of her life, with a concern to make sense of the patterns I have traced in feminist commentary on Wollstonecraft. But something remains beyond this formal agenda, something glimpsed from the top of the 73 bus route as it makes its way through the chaos of modern Newington Green. Something visible from the scribbled signature closing her last letter to Gilbert Imlay - and significantly absent from the discussion of Wollstonecraft and Fuseli, because their letters were destroyed. The notion of the death of the author, I have come to believe, is only conceivable in a condition of late, living, over-determined resurrection. It is possible that this female author should not be killed off without a chance at that living past in the present. This thesis has been an attempt at offering glimpses of Mary Wollstonecraft which resist the various and varied accounts of her life and works available; it is also an attempt to reclaim her feminism from the (necessarily) over-simplified models imposed on her writings in the 1970s, and to reclaim her life from the gentle fantasies of male academics haunted by the ghost with wet skirts. It is also, necessarily, a re-membering of Mary Wollstonecraft in my own image; hence its negativity,
unsatisfied with the popular version of Wollstonecraft in circulation, and with the way in which her writings have been so comfortably absorbed (some of them at least) into the idea of a pre-Romanticism.
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