

From Liberal to Radical: The Work and Life of Mary Wollstonecraft

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ABSTRACT

Mary Wollstonecraft has been regarded as a liberal feminist largely on the basis of her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. An examination of her work prior to and subsequent to this publication reveals her progression from a liberal position to a more radical approach to gender issues, especially to the question of sexuality and its management. An examination of her life and work provides an historical basis for contemporary feminist discourse.

RÉSUMÉ

Mary Wollstonecraft est considérée comme une féministe libérale surtout en raison de son livre *Défense des droits de la femme*. Cependant, un examen de son travail avant et après la publication de cette oeuvre montre son évolution vers une position plus radicale à l'égard de la condition féminine, et surtout la sexualité et sa gestion. Une étude de sa vie constitue une base historique pour le discours féministe contemporain.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S WORK HAS BEEN regarded as the quintessential feminist work in English of the eighteenth century. The focus of the analyses, appreciations, and critiques of her work have largely concentrated on her claim regarding the equal rationality of the sexes.¹ However, her work goes beyond this liberal claim and begins to question the dichotomy of reason and passion as indicated in male rationality and female sensibility. This dichotomy remains problematic today and carries powerful normative and structural consequences. An examination of Mary Wollstonecraft's work and life can illuminate the present issues and problems in a particularly apt fashion. In her later work, her radical endorsement of female sexuality and her demand for women's control over their own bodies provides an historical continuity with present feminist discourse.

Examining the progress of Mary Wollstonecraft's work provides a documentary of one woman's personal as well as theoretical journey through

the gendered structures and assumptions of her society in search for an egalitarian, enlightened society. More specifically, her journey, as revealed in her writings, illustrates her gradual realization of a critical basis for female subordination—sexual passion. Her own recommendations for social change become more radical as her understanding and personal experience of the nature and consequences of the sexual control of women developed.

She examines in her later work the patriarchal control of the female mind and body, at the same time illustrating the manner in which the male mind and body is corrupted by the desires that constructed the female as sexual object and patriarchal possession. From her early concern with the equivalent rationality of the sexes to her later recognition of the divisive nature of sexuality and the consequences of its "management" in the interests of male rational action, Mary Wollstonecraft's work is an early testament to the feminist position that "the personal is political," *always*.

The Passions of the Middle Classes

The management of sexual conduct and expression is critical to the exercise of power and, in most societies, this management is accomplished through the greater control and repression of female sexuality and desire. The structures and practices that embody control and repression are often only visible and understandable when problems arise and the effectiveness of the tried-and-true is called into question. More specifically, the "power" of sexuality and the problem with its management is most often the focus for more explicit efforts of social control when female sexuality and desire break, or are thought to break, the bounds of the traditional mechanisms of control and repression. Such a situation would seem to have been the case in many societies in eighteenth-century western Europe.²

The background to problematic female sexuality is to be found in the Cartesian divorce of mind and body. This separation made plausible the idea that women, when educated like men, could be as reasonable as men and would therefore be entitled to equality with men.³ The separation of mind and body neutralized the body in the seventeenth-century gender debates, and the question of women's reproductive difference was less central than the question of the training of women's intellect on the same terms as men. In a sense, however, the very mind/body split tended to highlight the physical body, especially the female body, because of its figurative absence in the political body of the rational citizen. By the eighteenth century, the physical body intrudes on the rational political realm in problematic ways that the Cartesian mind/body separation cannot satisfy.

The eighteenth-century concern with the physical as well as the psychic body is evident in the political and cultural changes that threatened and eventually overturned the traditional political "body"—the absolute monarch. The general attack on aristocratic power and privilege was mounted by radicals of the middle ranks⁴ on the basis of individual merit and effort sanctioned by the equal capacity for reason. As a result, the person of the prince, as the embodiment of the State, becomes

merely a matter of custom and tradition that has no necessary basis in nature or divine decree. The affirmation of the autonomous, rational individual that was the cornerstone of the enlightenment thus transformed the idea of the body, both political and corporal. It was the middle ranks of society in western European countries who were the most assertive of their rights and more conscious of the power of their numbers. It was on the basis of the rationally educated mind that the middle ranks opposed arbitrary tradition and unreasonable privilege. This opposition was, however, accomplished by divorcing the sexual, desiring, physical body from the political realm. The political body becomes the antithesis of the private, sexual, domestic body and, as a result, the political realm becomes antithetical to females. The separation reinforces the view that the female, desiring and desirable body was problematic and required stringent control in the interest of public order. As Browne has pointed out, for many eighteenth-century commentators, there was a "strong symbolic link between female rebellion and political upheaval," especially in the view of French and English authors and legislators.⁵

Foucault suggested that the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie was preoccupied with "creating its own sexuality and forming a specific body based on it, a 'class' body with its health, hygiene, descent, and race."⁶ It was the bourgeoisie that was critically concerned with sexuality and that shaped and attempted to use sexuality as a means for the assertion of political power. Sex was to replace the "blood" of the aristocracy as the legitimating and motivating agent of power, and the "sex" that acted as the agent of power was the male sex. The reproductive difference of women was seen to make them particularly unfit for public, political action.

The "neutral" body of the rational individual that grounded the claims of women to an equal education with men and equal participation in the political realm becomes a problematic gendered body in the writings of many eighteenth-century authors. Yet the commitment to the liberal ideal of the neutral political body in combination with the recognition of the different physicality of the sexes are the central themes in Mary Wollstonecraft's work. La-

queur claims that Wollstonecraft "shares with early socialist feminists a commitment to 'passionlessness,' whether out of some sense of its political possibilities, an acute awareness of passion's dangers, or a belief in the special undesiring qualities of the female body."⁷ This judgment is perhaps accurate for the early years, but Mary Wollstonecraft's later work reflects her understanding of the dangers to any notion of gender equality that this position entailed.

The exclusion of women, especially those of the middle ranks from the rights of citizens that prompted Wollstonecraft's early protest in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In this work she insisted that the abstract rights claimed by men on the basis of their capacity for rational understanding must be extended to women. Furthermore, if women were excluded and were not educated to "become the companions of men," they would "stop the progress of knowledge and virtue."⁸ If women were not to be men's equals, then they would remain their "convenient slaves" and the result would be the degradation of "the master and the abject dependent equally."⁹ The problem was that the competitive, individualistic world of contractual relations that the rational, enlightened man inhabited required the separate, sentimental world of domesticity. In the domestic refuge, cooperation and mutual regard replace competition and the search for advantage. As a result, the central icon of this haven—the wife—should in no way challenge or threaten her husband. As her sexuality and her reproductive capacity were the most powerful threats to the husband, they had to be controlled. The most frugal manner in which such control could be accomplished was by women's self control over their unruly passions. As Poovey has suggested, "the very translation of sexual control into 'duty' is perfectly in keeping with the tenets of individualism: a woman's social contribution was ... self-control just as her primary antagonist was herself."¹⁰

Women's sexuality was controlled when domesticated and contained, but male sexuality remained unfettered in any direct sense. However, male sexuality was less problematic because, when women controlled their own wayward impulses,

they would also temper male desire. In addition, men were more capable of reasoned judgment in contrast to women and this acted as a check on their sensual indulgence. As a result, much of the progressive discourse around the question of female sexuality in the eighteenth century concentrated on educating women to become modest and virtuous wives and mothers. Their education, contra Wollstonecraft, was different from that of men because of their different "nature" and different needs.

As long as women were contained within the domestic sphere, "naturally" rational men had no objects to tempt them into unreason as they went about their economic and political tasks in the public sphere. Consequently, when women insisted that they should also have the right to independence and a role in the public sphere, the challenge this represented was not simply to the economic and political advantages of men, but also to the regulation of male sexuality. It was to meet this problem that the conduct books for women, which proliferated during this period, were designed. These books laid out the characteristics of the ideal, domestic woman, and equated woman's happiness with the fulfillment of the ideal.¹¹ Mary Wollstonecraft's first work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, falls into this tradition.¹²

Thoughts on the Education of Daughters is, however, a conduct book with a difference. First, as Janes observes, the advice proffered is not concerned with pleasing men but rather concentrates on the improvement of the mind in preparation for personal, individual "purity and happiness."¹³ Secondly, the potential difficulties that a woman of the middle ranks might confront without a sound moral and practical education are dealt with at some length. Wollstonecraft's comments in this context are explicitly autobiographical. From her own experience she was able to point out that the privileged position of women in the middle ranks was usually entirely dependent upon a father/husband provider. If the latter failed in any way, the dependent women—daughters as well as wives—were left with few resources upon which they could draw, as Mary Wollstonecraft and her sisters knew personally.

In articulating the problems women faced in a situation of declining occupational prospects, a clear picture emerges of why conduct books were so popular. From her own experiences, Wollstonecraft observed "How cutting is the contempt she meets with" and how quickly "love and friendship flay from poverty."¹⁴ Occupationally, the most respectable possibilities for women of the middle ranks were teaching and acting as paid companions to wealthy women. Wollstonecraft undertook both of these tasks and found them irksome.

The picture drawn in *Thoughts* reflected Wollstonecraft's personal understanding of the dislocations that women of the middle ranks faced with the disappearance of a household-based economy. However, her liberal solution of education on the same terms as men was basically flawed by the fact that autonomy and equality, especially equality of opportunity in a competitive marketplace, was based on the assumption of a separate, contained, domestic sphere. Furthermore, despite her recognition that marriage was not necessarily every woman's fate, the programme articulated in *Thoughts* was one designed to produce the rational wife and mother. Indeed, she insisted that no "employment of the mind is a sufficient excuse for neglecting domestic duties" and "A woman may fit herself to be a companion and friend of a man of sense, and yet know how to take care of his family."¹⁵

The educational programme outlined in *Thoughts* is one that would ensure female control over the "passions." Wollstonecraft suggests that the very unpredictability of the "passions"—that is, of female sexual desire—made love difficult if not dangerous for women. She pointed out that the "heart is very treacherous, and if we do not guard its first emotions, we shall not afterwards be able to prevent its sighing for impossibilities."¹⁶ Love should be based on "rational grounds" so that the "many petty disputes which interrupt domestic peace" can be avoided. More important, however, according to Wollstonecraft, was the fact that a "cultivated mind" offered good protection against the possibility of a bad marriage. The programme outlined in *Thoughts* was concerned with the production of the ideal domestic female who would offer no challenge, certainly no sexual challenge, to

a presumably enlightened husband. The key factor in marriage was companionship rather than passion and this was only possible when women's reason was cultivated. As Wollstonecraft concluded, "our passions will not contribute much to our bliss, till they are under the domain of reason, and till that reason is enlightened and improved."¹⁷

The frugal, passionless, domestic manager was the perfect counterpart to the rational, male capitalist. Because the domestic woman was a consumer rather than a producer, she could, as Poovey remarks, literally "devour" a man's wealth.¹⁸ Simplicity, moderation and care of others were therefore the cardinal virtues of the enlightened wife and mother, so that the "protestant ethic" as well as the "spirit of capitalism" prevailed in the domestic as well as the public sphere. In *Thoughts* the patriarchal structure went unquestioned. The modest woman, educated but not flaunting her understanding, was the ideal. In addition, a woman's educated reason was a defence and a comfort to her if the marriage should prove to be a disappointment.¹⁹

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman continues the themes articulated in *Thoughts* but from a more self-confident position. The focus in this book is on the political consequences of women's faulty education in the light of the enlightened liberal claim for the divinely given, rational capacities of *human* beings. As Wollstonecraft states at the outset, she would consider women "in the grand light of human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties."²⁰ The major impediment to the equality of women and men was the different and inferior education given to women that often encouraged vanity and vice. The cultivation of "sensibility" was, in Wollstonecraft's view, "false refinement" and produced beings who were in fact dangerous to social order because they were prey to any "momentary gust of feeling."²¹

The education of women on the same terms as men was to provide women with the resources for independence and access to a variety of occupation, with even the possibility of producing a female Newton in the future. However, as women's unique duty was to bear and nurture children, it was still

primarily to this end that their education should be directed. Her view in *Vindication* of gender relations in the ideal society remains essentially a "separate but equal" programme. The result still produces the domesticated woman who is the active agent in the maintenance of her unequal status. Through the rational control of their problematic passions, women manage the site of sense, feeling, and morality, leaving men free to act without distractions as rational, enlightened, autonomous individuals in the public sphere. However, the equation is not quite as simple as that of *Thoughts* because men are accused in *Vindication* of encouraging women's vices, and of keeping women in a degraded state, in order to satisfy their own momentary sexual passion. Wollstonecraft suggests that it was not women who were essentially sensual beings but men, and female modesty and chastity was required because of men's unstable, licentious desires. The real cause for women's wickedness and depravity was "want of chastity in men." As a result, men must control their passions if "private virtue" is to become the "cement of public happiness."²²

Like other commentators of the period, Wollstonecraft understood the private, domestic sphere as the critical foundation for the enlightened, harmonious society. Because of this, Wollstonecraft advocates friendship and companionship as the foundation for marriage rather than the vagaries of love which she believed was a transitory passion. She advised that husband and wife should not love with passion because these emotions "disturb the order of society."²³ The enlightened, virtuous society that has its foundation in the enlightened marriage and family as the sober pursuit of duty was jeopardized by sensual indulgence, even in marriage; therefore, the passions must be under the control of reason.²⁴

Poovey has suggested that Wollstonecraft's commendation that passion be repressed, and companionship and friendship be the basis for gender relations, "betrays the fear that female desire might in fact court man's lascivious and degrading attentions" and therefore the subordinate position of women might be justly deserved.²⁵ Wollstonecraft recognized female desire as a problem but, in the

Vindication, she pointed out that its manifestations were the result of their socialization which, in turn, was determined according to male needs and desires. Women's sensuality was therefore an *unnatural* product that could be rectified through education.

The paradox in *Vindication* does not concern women's passion; rather, it revolves around men's passions and desires. The tyranny of male desire encourages women into those practices that provide momentary gratification for male sensuality, at the same time leaving women's minds to atrophy. The paradox is that, despite the benefit of a rational, enlightened education, men had not altered their view of women or changed in any noticeable fashion their sexual objectification of women. Women's education was therefore promoted as a means to "teach passion to submit to necessity" because the issue of unreformed male passion was not resolved. So-called rational, enlightened men such as Rousseau had encouraged women to be the repository of sensuality on the basis that this represented the essential nature of women, and also because men need women to service their passions that would, if unsatisfied, lead to disorder and anarchy. The result, as Wollstonecraft remarks, was that women were not created to be the companions of men, but "to save him from sinking into absolute brutality, by rubbing off the rough angles of his character; and by playful dalliance to give some dignity to the appetite that draws him to them."²⁶

The paradox of the rationally educated mind combined with sexual objectification of women is unresolved in *Vindication*. The education of women like men is to reform the domestic sphere and, by extension, force the reform of male sensuality and desire.²⁷ However, the public, masculine realm of temptation was closed to the majority of women because of their maternal roles. As Eisenstein has pointed out, in *Vindication*, monogamous marriage and motherhood remain the prime activities for the majority of women. As a blueprint for the enlightened, egalitarian society, it is therefore flawed, being based on the assumption that there is equality between the "realm of the family and the economy—between the mother and the citizen" which was already "negated by the growing differentiation of

the two realms."²⁸ In fact, *citizens*, with rights and responsibilities, inhabit the public sphere, whereas the domestic sphere is their refuge and inhabited by non-citizens such as children and women.

Thoughts and Vindication present an educational blueprint for the perfect "bourgeois" wife and mother.²⁹ The domestic, maternal woman regulates her own passions as well as those of her daughters on behalf of men's needs and requirements. With this agenda, the public/private, reason/passion, male/female dichotomies remain intact and patriarchal power is strengthened. However, Wollstonecraft's ideas developed beyond this point as her Scandinavian letters, her unfinished work, *Maria*, and the memoirs of her husband attest. Wollstonecraft comes to view passion or feeling as not necessarily opposed to morality and virtue, especially in the case of women. She suggests that it was because of the restrictions on women's individuality and independence that their true sensibility and virtuous passions were distorted and unfulfilled.

A Woman's Feeling Heart

In 1793, Mary Wollstonecraft was in Paris where she met and fell in love with an American, Gilbert Imlay. In 1794, their daughter Fanny was born and, by June 1795, the painful separation from Imlay had begun and Mary set off for Scandinavia with her daughter and a maid. The affair with Imlay was a traumatic event, the development of which is clearly seen in her personal correspondence as well as, in a more oblique fashion, in her letters published in *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*.³⁰ Reason no longer claimed first place in the *Letters*. On the contrary, reason was to be in the service of feelings and emotions which, when prompted by a pure heart, had more virtue than cold rationality.

Mary Wollstonecraft's re-evaluation of the power of feelings, emotions and love was the result of her affair with Imlay and his subsequent withdrawal and rejection. Her position after the birth of Fanny was difficult. To be an unmarried mother in eighteenth-century England was difficult, especially for someone who could not hope to conceal her situation with any effectiveness given her fame as

an author. The very passion that she had regarded as transitory had proved to be the case for Imlay, but it refused to relinquish its grip on Mary. Reason's control over passion proved to be far less simple and easy than she has supposed.

Wollstonecraft's re-evaluation of passion and reason was not an abrupt reversal or a simple endorsement of the eighteenth-century idea of innate female sensibility. Her position was more complex as she endeavoured to combine reason and passion in imaginative identification that would, in turn, produce enlightened political actions. Indeed, reason *and* passion were a necessary combination in the responsible citizen, and women were best able to promote such a combination given the poverty of masculine sensibility at that time.

The endorsement of sensibility, especially a woman's greater capacity for such feelings and emotions, was a potentially reactionary stance given the usual conclusions that such identification elicited—namely, that women were indeed only fit to act as wives and mothers. In general, sensibility was understood to denote feelings of altruism and sociability which, in turn, would provide the basis for moral and virtuous behaviour. In Bassner's words, sensibility was the quality "that could make every man a virtuous and well-mannered citizen if he only listens to his natural disposition."³¹ Although sensibility was a human quality, the nature of its expression and effects were thought to be different for women as compared to men. The physical and emotional capacity for intense feeling—for the judgment of the heart—was thought to be a special female capacity. In addition, female sensibility was thought to be more unstable and designed primarily to attract men, in contrast to the sensibility of men that "served a larger goal: the maintenance of morality."³²

Many women endorsed this view at the same time believing in the equal rationality of the sexes.³³ The connection between these seemingly oppositional beliefs was made through the maternal body. It was not as erotic *object* but as *mother* that women promoted the ideal of their special, finer sensibility as compared to men. The mother-child bond was regarded by many as an organic bond

and women could often be looked upon as both "the quintessence of life and an erotic object."³⁴ This dual status emerged from the designation of sensibility as an organic property and the connection between the womb and women's heightened sensibility. However, for women, the positive image was that of the fertile, nursing mother, enclosed in the patriarchal family. This image became an icon and was celebrated as the foundation of the well-ordered State.³⁵

Wollstonecraft had been most critical about the cultivation of female sensibility but her comments related to erotic behaviour. Although she thought that the erotic demands men made on women resulted in female immodesty and incompetent mothering, she did indicate sympathy with the idea that a special, instinctual bond existed between the mother and child. It was precisely this bond that, in *Vindication*, she thought could provide the means to cement affectionate ties between parents as well as curb the lasciviousness of husbands.³⁶

In the *Letters*, however, the difficulty of finding a resolution between erotic passion and the maternal tie is evident. Mary Wollstonecraft recalls her delight in her physical passion, at the same time expressing her surprise at the different but equally delightful love for her daughter. Between Mary and Fanny was a special bond that was nurtured by reason and duty but which was far stronger than any effect of rational education. Perhaps in the hope that her maternal role might rekindle Imlay's passion, she writes about their child producing emotions and feelings over and above dictates of reason. She noted that:

I lament that all my affections grow on me, till they become too strong for my peace, though they all afford me snatches of exquisite enjoyment. This for our little girl was at first very reasonable—more the effect of reason, a sense of duty, than feeling—now, she has got into my heart and imagination, and when I walk out without her, her little figure is ever dancing before me.³⁷

Wollstonecraft attempts to reconcile the erotic and the maternal sensibility in the *Letters* through the celebration of the imagination. Passion or sen-

sibility is joined with reason through the imagination and, through imaginative projection, the individual is able to empathize with others. This empathy expands the heart and increases the individual's love and appreciation of humanity at large. Imagination is the "true fire, stolen from heaven, to animate this cold creature of clay."³⁸ The source of a refined imaginative capacity was nature; in turn, the contemplation of nature and an appreciation of its language was the means for the purification of the human soul and, by extension, the improvement of society. For Wollstonecraft herself, it was the wild beauty of much of the landscape through which she travelled that produced philosophical reveries and, occasionally, some rather florid romantic prose, on the power of nature as a guide to a life lived in natural and social harmony. Reason or education plays a part in the production of the imagination, but nature is essentially the constant source of refined emotions or sensibility. Wollstonecraft's rhapsodic reactions to the landscape and natural wonders of Scandinavia, and her almost Wordsworthian belief in the healing powers of the contemplation of nature, were not unusual for her time. Wollstonecraft, like Wordsworth, seemed to believe that nature had a spiritual, virtuous nature of its own that, when contemplated with sufficient devotion, would improve the mind and manners of the observer. As she pointed out in one letter, "Nature is the nurse of sentiment, the true source of taste."³⁹ The contemplation of nature was a prerequisite for that "Truth of Imagination" that for Keats was the only certainty an artist should trust.⁴⁰

The imaginative truth and emotional resonance celebrated by Wollstonecraft in the *Letters* was largely a woman's prerogative. In her view, the development of the imagination was stunted in most men because of their pursuit of wealth and power. This pursuit coarsened their senses, made their reason too abstract, and compromised their virtue and morality. Commerce, she believed, "debases the mind, and roots out affection from the heart."⁴¹ This aversion to commerce was no abstract position. The Scandinavian trip was a commercial venture undertaken on Imlay's behalf. It was a potentially dangerous undertaking both commercially as well as personally, especially as her baby and the young maid accompanied her on much of the trip.⁴² Per-

haps Mary Wollstonecraft believed that the successful outcome of her venture would restore Imlay's affections, but it is clear that the venture often seemed too heavy a price to pay for this somewhat doubtful outcome. As she pointed out, men "cease to love humanity, and individuals" as they pursue wealth and, in their devotion to commerce, "never acquire, or lose, all taste and greatness of mind."⁴³ As a result, she came to believe that it was men rather than women who required education—specifically an education in feminine sensibility.

The pursuit of wealth and power resulted in the neglect of the imagination and produced problematic husbands, fathers and citizens. The impoverishment of the imagination was also the source of perverted male sexuality and desire. As Wollstonecraft suggested, a rational, enlightened education could not guarantee the refinement of feeling and delicacy of sentiment that was the purest form of love. Such passion could only result from the stimulus of the imagination and that was stunted in most men because of the demands of commerce. Addressing Imlay, Wollstonecraft explained:

my friend, you know not the ineffable delight, the exquisite pleasure, which arises from a union of affection and desire, when the whole soul and senses are abandoned to a lively imagination, that renders every emotion delicate and rapturous. Yes; these are emotions, over which satiety has no power, and the recollection of which, even disappointment, cannot disenchant; but they do not exist without self-denial.⁴⁴

Wollstonecraft's opposition to the world of capital and trade was based on its opposition to "life" and, by extension, to the maternal body as the repository of life. Jordanova remarks that the abstract quantification of life and individuals, commercial activity involved, generated its opposite in the organicist assumption that "living things were integrated wholes" of which women and children were a special example. Women gave life and children had just received life and, therefore, they "should not be treated as objects or commodities." The expression of this position is found in the language of nature in which women's bodies are both "natural and sacred," and this involved a "projection onto

the feminine of something men were actually, or in danger of, losing."⁴⁵

In the *Letters*, Wollstonecraft suggests that it is not the unrestrained passions of women that are disruptive for social order and harmony, but the rationally calculated commercial activities of men. There is the suggestion that it is through women's attention to their "real," uncorrupted, natural, feelings and desires—of which maternal love is the highest expression—that the hope for social order and harmony can be sustained. Passion was no longer opposed to reason in a search for a genderless virtue and morality. On the contrary, passion was gendered and, as such, an important basis for a reformed morality and society. The corruption of women's feelings and desires in the interests of male convenience and need was now regarded by Wollstonecraft as just as problematic, if not more so, as the failure to cultivate women's innate rationality. The potentially anarchic power of women's passion was recognized as a danger to social order only if it remained subverted by a misguided and corrupted male desire and was maintained in that state in marriage.

How a woman's "feeling heart" was to become the active agent of change was not spelled out directly in Wollstonecraft's work. Whereas in *Vindication* women were to be given the same education as their male counterparts, there is no suggestion that a similar procedure was to be instituted for the education of male sensibility. Wollstonecraft's general position has similarities with the romantic assumption of some uncorrupted, simple, communal life lived in harmony with nature that Rousseau and others sought, although she did seem to recognize that the picture might be fantasy, a fable of "the golden age" in which there was "independence and virtue; affluence without vice; cultivation of the mind, without depravity of heart; with 'ever smiling liberty,' the nymph of the mountain."⁴⁶ More specific suggestions are not advanced in Wollstonecraft's work, but this should not be construed as a major criticism because these same issues—how can human beings be transformed so that the gendered, as well as racist, assumptions about reason and passion, morality and desire, be eliminated—remain unanswered in any collective, universal sense.

Controlling the Passions

Wollstonecraft began her feminist journey with a continuation of the seventeenth-century appeals for equality on the basis of their reasoning power. As human beings, women were as entitled as men to the fundamental rights of autonomy, equality, and dignity. However, the enlightenment faith in the power of reason that was the basis for the equality claim also emphasized "natural law." This law was immutable (even God-given for some authors) and it governed all human and animal life. Natural law not only guaranteed equality and liberty, but it also determined the biological and, by extension, the social differences between the sexes. In her earlier work, Wollstonecraft had emphasized that there was no incompatibility between equal social and political rights and the special, biological role women had as mothers. In fact, women's equality and independence was a necessity for their rational conduct as wives, mothers, and citizens. However, in a situation in which the biological body is understood as a political body, the compatibility of the wife/mother/rational citizen caused difficulties. The sexual, reproductive body of the female represented a potential, if not actual, disorderly body that could threaten the rational, profit-seeking world of masculine individualists.

For Wollstonecraft, as for many other eighteenth-century authors, sexuality was a central concern that coloured their ideas on the reform of society in an ambiguous manner. The search for the means to contain sexuality, especially female sexuality, was itself an expression of its power, and it was in reproduction that many writers found a convenient basis for biological, social, and moral reflections on power and gender relations. These reflections tended to produce two somewhat contradictory meanings. As Jordanova has remarked, the positive meaning was concerned with "responsible" procreation. The negative connotation concerned "premature, illicit, excessive" sexual expression which, in theory, applied to both sexes but, in fact, a "surfeit of passion or voluptuousness" was usually understood as a typical female weakness.⁴⁷ The various conduct books emphasized the positive meaning because of the danger that the negative

represented. The books urged women's self-control over sexuality. As Wollstonecraft suggested in *Thoughts*, "The heart is very treacherous," and women must therefore "try to dismiss the dangerous tenderness, or it will undermine your comfort, and betray you into many errors."⁴⁸ The problem that Wollstonecraft faced in her later work was to reverse the negative judgments of female sexual desire and combine a positive assessment of its power with the celebration of maternal feelings. Such a re-evaluation would invariably result in a transformed social and political world.

The containment and control of the passions within the domestic sphere is critical to the pursuit of rational capitalism. As Macfarlane has pointed out, capitalist rationality is threatened by the irrationality of sexuality.⁴⁹ The potential menace of this irrational impulse was controlled with the domestication of sex in the ideology of romantic love. Romantic love becomes central to the capitalist system, the chief means whereby the "dead and cold world" of autonomous, rational male individuals could be given meaning. For the middle ranks especially, romantic love was the foundation for marriage. Consequently, it was the enlightened middle ranks of society, from whom Wollstonecraft had expected so much in *Vindication*, who became the most reactionary group when it came to the question of women's sexuality and reproduction and, as a result, women's equality claims.

Wollstonecraft was aware in *Vindication* of the manner in which romantic love was used to maintain female subordination. As she remarked, "women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men think it manly to pay the sex, when, in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority."⁵⁰ The assumption in *Vindication* was, however, that the female body could be redeemed and, as "love" could be rationalized, then women's passions were merely the result of faulty socialization. It was in her latter work that the power of female sexual desire and maternal concern became the ethical touchstone for control over the irrationality of masculine actions. In the later work, the celebration of romantic love is recognized as a masculine control tactic. The basis for

reformed morality and social harmony was to be found in a woman's pure heart.

It is in her Scandinavian letters that we can see the reversal of the equation that made romantic love and the feminized domestic sphere the safety valve for masculine desire. In Wollstonecraft's view, it was the world of commerce that was irrational, a world that did violence to its masculine inhabitants, estranging them from their emotions and feelings and, as a result, from their humanity. Rational, profit-seeking individuals were, in her view, incapable of virtuous action. An enlightened, rational education was no guarantee that an egalitarian society would result. So-called rational and enlightened men were often the severest critics of women and the most vigilant guardians of their subordination.⁵¹ The key to unlocking the contradictions and paradoxes, Wollstonecraft came to believe, lay in asserting the power of female passions, both sexual and maternal.

Wollstonecraft's re-evaluation of the power of female desire and maternal feeling is apparent in her *Letters*, as well as her personal correspondence, and in her unfinished novel, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria. A Fragment*. This re-evaluation emerged out of her own struggles with the seeming imperviousness of her passions to reason. As she remarked:

Why am I forced thus to struggle continually with my affections and feelings? —Ah! why are those affections and feelings the source of so much misery, why they seem to have been given to vivify my heart, and extend my usefulness!⁵²

In her view, love, both sexual and maternal, was the basis for positive humanity, and, when love deserted her, she felt her heart had been deadened and that she had "almost destroyed all the energy of my soul—almost rooted out what renders it estimable." As a result, she determined that her recovery depended upon her regaining "respect due to my emotions—sacred emotions, that are the sure harbingers of the delights I was formed to enjoy—and shall enjoy, for nothing can extinguish the heavenly spark."⁵³

Wollstonecraft identifies marriage as the critical context in which the unequal power relationship between the sexes is maintained. The celebration of sexual and maternal love that might form the basis of a reformed society was, in her view, perverted by the laws and customs surrounding marriage. In *Maria*, her intention was to illuminate the "evils that are too frequently overlooked, and to drag into light those details of oppression which the grosser and more insensible part of mankind make little account," which are enshrined in the laws governing marriage.

In *Maria*, marriage is identified as basically an economic connection essential to the protection of patriarchal inheritance and as having nothing to do with the mutual satisfaction of sexual needs and desires. As a result, Wollstonecraft presents a revolutionary challenge to patriarchy by advocating the removal of the female body and its reproductive capacity from the control of men, and resting it in the hands of women themselves. Women's independence became independence in matters of sexuality, reproduction, and love. Economic independence remained significant but it now paled in comparison with the need for women to take charge of their bodies and their passions. The reconciliation of the positive maternal feelings and the negative sexual impulses is to be effected by women's control over their own sexual and reproductive lives.

A loving, domestic relationship was Wollstonecraft's ideal, but the possibility of such a state was, in her view, remote given the unequal status and responsibilities born by wives and mothers. As her heroine, Maria, remarks, "With proper restrictions... I revere the institution which fraternizes the world." At the same time, however, Maria exclaims:

against the laws which throw the whole weight of the yoke on the weaker shoulders and force women, when they claim protectorship as mothers, to sign a contract, which renders them dependent on the caprices of the tyrant, whom choice or necessity has appointed to reign over them.⁵⁴

What Maria claimed was that no relationship that was not based on reciprocal passions, uncontaminated by any material considerations, should be forced to endure. Consequently, if the law does force this immorality upon any individual, then, in being true to themselves and their feelings, the individual must reject the law and act on the dictates of the purified passions of their heart. As Maria states, she would like the law to grant her divorce and thus enable her to regularize her relationship with her lover, but if this was not to be, she would continue to follow the dictates of her heart rather than the structures of the law.

Maria claims what is impossible in a patriarchal society: the freedom to control her own body. The sexual disposition of the female body is essential to patriarchal power, and a woman's rejection of control on the basis of her own feelings and judgment was precisely the concern of the various moralists and philosophers, who celebrated feminine sensibility and maternal feelings but who had no intention that women, in subscribing to these ideas, would then use them in such a subversive way. The "class body" to which Foucault referred was a capitalist body that required, for optimum performance in the marketplace, control over the "natural," "instinctive" impulses of sexual desire and reproduction. To suggest that the chief objects of patriarchal desire control the disposition of their own bodies was to mount an attack on the whole capitalist-patriarchal system. As Spencer has suggested, the "wild scenes of the Gothic imagination" that are part of *Maria*, for Wollstonecraft, "differ from reality only in being too pale a reflection of women's opposition."⁵⁶

Wollstonecraft distinguished sexual passion from maternal love although both were an indispensable part of the fully rounded human being. In the *Vindication*, she had recognized the difficult nature of sexual passion and, of course, had had this confirmed in her several romantic connections. What Wollstonecraft understood was what Morgan has called "moral insanity" that romantic love entails. As Morgan points out, romantic love is both "morally paradoxical and deeply threatening" to

women because it requires as a means of "growth and identity realization" the "submission and absorption into the identity of another" and, in the heterosexual relationship, that "other" is the culturally designated patriarch.⁵⁷ It was in the confirmation of this insanity in her relationship with Imlay that the more radical position in her thinking began to take shape. At the same time, Wollstonecraft was experiencing a new and generally positive experience with the birth of her daughter. Her maternal feelings were not, however, "instinctive" in the sense of spontaneously developed, but were, she realized, affected by her social and educational conditioning. However, the tie between mother and child was the fundamental tie that, in the context of "good mothering," was of critical moral worth to society. As she had stressed in *Thoughts* as well as in the *Vindication*, educated mothers are a vital part of any enlightened society. Her own experiences in this context reinforced this view with the additional understanding that uncorrupted sexuality and maternal nurturance was the foundational moral domain for the enlightened society.

Wollstonecraft was well aware of the revolutionary nature of her ideas. In the last paragraph of the unfinished manuscript, the judge has rejected Maria's petition for divorce, stating:

if women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality. What virtuous woman thought of her feelings? —It was her duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could for herself.⁵⁸

This last paragraph cannot, with any confidence, be taken as the intended ending of the story, although the headings that remain to indicate the progression of the work do not suggest a tragic ending to the tale. Like her heroine, Mary had followed the dictates of her heart with Imlay and, later, with William Godwin. It was with Godwin that she found contentment for a short period with a congenial friend *and* lover in a relationship that was close to egalitarian.

There is an irony, however, in Godwin's later description in his *Memoir* of their respective talents that made for their compatibility. He stated that his propensity for skepticism and sophistry was balanced by Mary's outstanding imaginative and intuitive abilities.⁵⁹ This evaluation does not do justice to Mary Wollstonecraft's own understanding of what constituted the fully human individual. The cultivation of the sensible imagination was not to be an exclusively female accomplishment, just as the cultivation of the rational mind was not to be the exclusive male preserve; both capacities had to be combined in the development of the individual citizen. As she pointed out in a letter to Imlay, the imagination was the "mother of sentiment, the great distinction of our nature, the only purifier of the passions" and, although reason provides the basis for necessary social connections between individuals, it is imagination that is "the true fire, stolen from heaven" which produces the sympathies that render "men social by expanding their hearts."⁶⁰ As it was in women that the imaginative capacity was more fully developed, it was women who were the best hope for the reform of humanity. The complementarity that Godwin celebrated in the *Memoirs* was not to be a feature of a heterosexual relationship but was to be the attribute of each woman and man.

Summary

Tracing Mary Wollstonecraft's personal and theoretical journey illuminates the historical continuity of the feminist conversation.⁶¹ It is one of the ways in which we can understand the continued relevance of the idea that for women the personal is always political. It is also one of the ways in which we can understand this idea on a generational basis. For many who came to feminism in the 1960s, the response from a younger generation that a strong feminist movement was somewhat obsolete because all the significant gains had been made, and that all that was necessary was to consolidate those gains, has often been upsetting and anger provoking. Wollstonecraft's life and work remind us that experience is critical for the penetration of ideology, that theory alone is insufficient. Each generation learns from its ancestors, but each learns in its own

way. Wollstonecraft's life and work remind us that, although the particulars may have changed, the general issues remain salient. As the current debates on abortion, reproductive technologies and pornography attest, the control over women's sexuality and reproductive capacity remains the lynch-pin of the power of the patriarchy.

Wollstonecraft's celebration of women's feelings and imagination as the basis for their reclamation of control over their bodies was a risky move, just as present claims for women's special understanding and knowledge on the basis of their experience of subordination and their biological capacity are risky. Too easily these claims can be turned against women and block any moves toward independence and personal autonomy. That would seem to be the case with Wollstonecraft's life and work shortly after her untimely death. Tomalin points out that the radical positions taken by Wollstonecraft were rejected in the subsequent decades by many women as well as men. The reaction that stressed the traditional, "natural," or "biological" basis for women's control and subordination to men triumphed, and Mary Wollstonecraft's work and life became the negative example for any discussions of women's position and rights.⁶² The nineteenth-century wife and mother who acted as the moral and ethical touchstone to the avaricious, commercial world of the husband/father reinstated the domestic "angel" that Wollstonecraft so despised. Mary herself was denigrated as "that hyena in petticoats" by Horace Walpole in a letter written to Hannah More.⁶³

Wollstonecraft's life and work were always connected. The connection was always made in the judgments of her critics so that her defence of Maria's adultery—her own liaison with Imlay, her illegitimate child—all combined to make her work unacceptable to the more cautious feminists in subsequent decades. Indeed, it has been largely her *Vindication* that has survived as a more or less respectable liberal feminist statement. However, this work was superseded by her personal experiences that enabled her to develop a more radical interpretation of women's abilities. The rational, enlightened citizen was masculine and, in his progress

through the world, was critically devoid of that humanity which resided in the attention to one's "passions," one's sensibility, activated through the imagination. The poverty and perversion of masculine passions produced the unenlightened, unequal society that mutilated the bodies and souls of women. Men were, in Wollstonecraft's view, united in their power over women, and women were, therefore, estranged from each other and from their positive, natural being. The thread that runs through *Maria* concerns the connections between women and their sexual and maternal roles, and the manner in which all of these are controlled and perverted by men.

For Mary Wollstonecraft, it was not simply the education of women's reason that was the key to the enlightened society; this had also to be combined with the liberation of their sexual passions and an unfettered enjoyment of maternal nurturance. Women had the right to the enjoyment, expression and satisfaction of all of their needs and desires, and, when those desires were heterosexual, to satisfaction as independent and equal partners with men. Reproduction was not in and of itself a disabling feature; on the contrary, it was merely made up so by social arrangements, but could, in

Wollstonecraft's view, become the critical basis for the production of enlightened citizens.

Mary Wollstonecraft's work has most often been acknowledged in the liberal bourgeois tradition of feminist work, but the trajectory of both her work and life are more radical than a focus on the *Vindication* suggests. As she herself pointed out, all of "the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of my sex," and all of her experiences were grist to the unfolding of her radical feminist stance.⁶⁴

Wollstonecraft's voice remains timely. Women still await the conditions that will satisfy the hopes she expressed. The "beauty" industry thrives, wedding services are great money-makers, and the pressure to conform to the twentieth-century versions of feminine modesty and chastity continue. In the aftermath of suffrage, educated and enlightened female citizens remain trapped by the dichotomous assumptions surrounding sexual desire and expression and the patriarchal controls over reproduction. Wollstonecraft's claim for a woman's control over her body and its needs and desires remains a revolutionary claim.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987); Zillah R. Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1986); Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983); Regina Janes, "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary, or Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft Compared," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 5, ed. Ronald C. Robertson (Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1976).
2. For further discussions of this point, see Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur, eds., *The Making of the Modern Body* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); L.J. Jordanova, ed., *Languages of Nature*, foreword by Raymond Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986).
3. Browne (82) points out that the "Cartesian emphasis on the mind's independence of the body weakened arguments from physiology against women's rationality."
4. In using the term "middle ranks" rather than "middle class," I follow Nancy Armstrong's adaptation of Perkin's usage. Perkin contends that there was nothing resembling a middle class in England until the nineteenth century, and that the middle ranks were distinguished from the "gentry and the nobility not so much by lower incomes as by the necessity of earning a living, and at the bottom from the labouring poor not so much by higher incomes as by the property, however small, represented by stock in trade, livestock, tools, or the educational investment of skill or expertise." See Nancy Armstrong, "The Rise of the Domestic Woman," in *The Ideology of Conduct*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Methuen, 1987); H. Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).
5. Browne 19.
6. Foucault 124.
7. Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," in Gallagher and Laqueur, eds., 24.
8. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. with an introduction, chronology and bibliography by Charles W. Hageman Jr. (New York: Norton, 1967) 24.

9. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 26.
10. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 27.
11. As Armstrong points out, the conduct book as an educational handbook for women had a precursor in the household and courtesy books, and the religiously inspired educational works produced prior to the eighteenth century. The conduct books represented something different from these precursors, however, in that they were concerned with the transformation of the female into a "naturally" domestic woman in opposition to the productive, material world of men who would therefore act as the "bearer of moral norms and socializer of men" (129).
12. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (London, 1787).
13. Janes 132.
14. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts* 74.
15. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts* 56.
16. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts* 89.
17. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts* 116.
18. Poovey 5.
19. The pessimistic tone is understandable here when it is recollected that Wollstonecraft's personal experience had presented her to this date with few positive examples of marriage. Her parents' marriage had been far from harmonious; her sister Elize had been married to a brutal man from whom she had fled, leaving her child behind; and her best friend had recently died in childbirth.
20. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 33.
21. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 105.
22. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 217.
23. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 64.
24. The identification of the family as the critical basis for public order preoccupied eighteenth-century political philosophers precisely because the old political "family" embodied in the patriarchal authority of the monarch was under attack. In reinstating authority and hierarchy, it became essential to distinguish the correct relations between the sexes. If there is no basis in nature for any sort of authority, how then can the sexual divisions and the domination of men over women be explained? By making women's bodies maternal bodies and separating the home from the public sphere, gender inequality can be maintained although in a disguised form of "separate but equal" notions.
25. Poovey 76.
26. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 114.
27. In *Vindication*, the independence of women is basically an intellectual rather than economic independence that can provide the basis for a companionate marriage. Wollstonecraft's occasional references to women's economic independence are confined to a discussion of its necessity for widows and the need for more occupational opportunities for women of the labouring poor.
28. Eisenstein 101.
29. In appealing for equality and directing her appeal to men of the middle ranks, Wollstonecraft's argument was "geared to the 'interest' of men who might well have thought that it was in their interest to oppress women." See Melissa A. Butler, "Wollstonecraft versus Rousseau: Natural Religion and the Sex of Virtue and Reason," in *Man, God and Nature in the Enlightenment*, eds. Donald C. Mell, Jr., Theodore E.D. Braun and Lucia M. Palmer (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1988). As Wollstonecraft pointed out, if the perfectibility of "man" was the desired end, then women must also be included in the process or it would receive "continual checks."
30. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Richard Holmes (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1987). Hereafter referred to as *Letters*.
31. Frank Bassner, "The Changing Meaning of 'Sensibilité': 1654 till 1704," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol. 15, ed. O.M. Brack, Jr. (Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1986).
32. Jordanova 98.
33. See Katherine Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth Century England* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1982) 143, who suggests that "While sentimentalism might undermine the cause of women's rights by glorifying female martyrdom or exaggerating female helplessness, the movement as a whole provided an essential impetus towards feminism. By asserting the worth of feminine perceptions and values, it gave women confidence to express themselves and to claim emotional fulfillment. When stiffened by reason, ... it could promote analysis of women's unfair situation."
34. Jordanova 106.
35. The maternal body as the embodiment of social order was an important image in the art produced in the later decades of the eighteenth century. See Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth-Century French Art," in *Feminism and Art History*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) for a discussion of the maternal body as artistic icon.
36. As Wollstonecraft suggested, "Cold would be the heart of a husband, were he not rendered unnatural by early debauchery, who did not feel more delight at seeing his child suckled by its mother, than the most artful wanton tricks could ever raise." *Vindication* 215.
37. Ralph M. Wardle, *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979) 259-260.
38. Wardle 263.
39. Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 99.
40. Quoted in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1963) 61.
41. Wardle 271.
42. Wollstonecraft's travels in Scandinavia were a most unusual undertaking on several counts. First, she was a woman travelling alone except for a young child and a relatively young nursemaid and, for a good part of the time, she travelled alone. Secondly, she was travelling in countries that were off the beaten track; they were certainly not part of the usual European Grand Tour that wealthy young men undertook. Finally, she was on a serious commercial errand that, according to one author, involved the recovery of "nothing less than a treasure ship." It would seem that Peder Ellefsen, a Norwegian captain of one of Imlay's trading vessels, had stolen a ship packed with silver and Bourbon plate and Wollstonecraft had been entrusted with the task of discovering the fate of the ship and its cargo and, when found, trying to reach some agreement with the

- captain. As Holmes points out, "It was by any standards an onerous undertaking, involving a foreign legal system, a series of delicate interviews, a six-hundred-mile round trip from Gotenburg and the prospect of an extremely difficult meeting with Peder Ellefsen himself on his home ground as Risor" (25-26). Only "someone as daring and determined as Mary Wollstonecraft would have attempted" the trip, but then she had a great deal at stake. The trip was designed to give Imlay some time to reflect upon his intentions towards Mary and their child as well as demonstrating the depth of Mary's commitment to Imlay.
43. Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 193.
 44. Wardle 291.
 45. Jordanova 111-112.
 46. Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 149.
 47. Jordanova 98.
 48. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts* 89.
 49. See Alan Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).
 50. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 100.
 51. When the Jacobins declared the Republic of Virtue in 1792, women were called upon to be "the divinity of the domestic sanctuary." See Barbara Corrado Pope, "The Influence of Rousseau's Ideology of Domesticity," in *Connecting Spheres*, eds. Marilyn Boxer, Jean Quataret and Joan Scott (New York: Oxford UP, 1982).
 52. Wardle 296.
 53. Wardle 302.
 54. Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 195.
 55. Foucault.
 56. Spencer 209.
 57. Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Women and Moral Madness," in *Science, Morality, and Feminist Theory*, eds. Marsha Hanen and Kai Nielsen (Calgary: Canadian Journal of Philosophy, U of Calgary P, 1987) 217.
 58. Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 199.
 59. Godwin remarked that "Mary and myself perhaps each carried farther than to its common extent the characteristics of the sexes to which we belonged." In his view, "Her feelings had a character of peculiar strength and decision; and the discovery of them, whether in matters of taste or of moral virtue, she found herself unable to control.... In the strict sense of the term, she had reasoned comparatively little.... Yet a mind more candid in perceiving and retracting error, when it was pointed out to her, perhaps never existed" (131-132). This assessment, whilst it may have been lovingly produced, does not do justice to Mary Wollstonecraft's work and her own insistence on the value of reason for women as for men in connection with imagination and feeling.
 60. Wardle 263.
 61. See, especially, Jean Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) for a discussion of Wollstonecraft in the context of the western tradition of discourse on women's rights.
 62. Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974).
 63. Hannah More wrote a work that was intended as a refutation of Wollstonecraft. Her *Structures on the Modern System of Female Education* was published in 1799, but, in many respects, her work reflects Wollstonecraft's ideas, especially those articulated in *Vindication*.
 64. Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 171.

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