

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Mary Wollstonecraft: Writing and Reading In(to) Institutions

by

Renée Lang

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Anne McWhir

Supervisor, Dr. Anne McWhir, Department of English

Lorne Macdonald

Dr. Lorne Macdonald, Department of English

Estelle Dansereau

Dr. Estelle Dansereau, Department of French, Italian, and  
Spanish

2 SEPTEMBER, 1994

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## Abstract

This thesis traces Mary Wollstonecraft's analysis and revision of the sentimental novel and its effects on young women. It starts with an examination of the assumption that a cultural product can affect those who consume it, then explores the limits and possibilities of resistance to such cultural prescription. The second chapter addresses the discourse of sentiment and its potential to be used by those with either an emancipatory or a reactionary agenda. It examines Wollstonecraft's own two sentimental novels as revisions of the typical novel of sensibility, and examines the emancipatory potential of these novels. The last chapter speaks to Wollstonecraft's own talking back, her reviews in the Analytical Review. These reviews offer readers, writers, and educators an alternative reading of sentimental novels: how they are dangerously prescriptive to young women and how this danger may be averted by teaching young women to read more critically.

## Acknowledgements

My first expressions of gratitude are owed to Dr. Anne McWhir, who has been an amazing supervisor, an inspiring professor, and a good friend. If I ever do a Ph.D. it will be because I want to be an Anne McWhir (or a reasonable facsimile) for a Renée Lang someday.

I should also thank my fellow graduate students (especially Sharron Turner, Rose Schlegl, Pippa Brush, Yaw Asante, and Melanie Kolbeins) for listening while I babbled on and on about cultural representations, Barbie dolls, feminism, Wollstonecraft, and how to solve all of the world's major problems.

My frog, Wilhelmina Van der Camp, deserves mention for patiently waiting for food while I ignored her.

Finally, and most importantly, I must thank my partner, Tonya, for reminding me that there is more to life than this thesis.

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## Introduction

A few years ago, Mattel Corporation released a Barbie doll equipped with a voice that says things like, "I can't do math; it's too hard." A few months before the Christmas season after that doll's release, a feminist activist group called the Barbie Liberation Organization (B.L.O.) bought a lot of these Barbies and a lot of G.I. Joe dolls (which had voices that said suitably militant macho things). The B.L.O. switched the voice devices, so that it was G.I. Joe who perceived that mathematical operations were beyond his capabilities. Barbie now rejoiced in her new found combative talents. (These dolls with the switched voices are now a hot commodity.)

The B.L.O. perceived a danger in that mass-produced cultural product aimed at young girls and designed to perpetuate gender myths such as women's lack of mathematical aptitude. Their actions were prompted by a concern for how a numerically challenged Barbie could affect the intellectual and social development of hundreds of thousands of young girls.

An animated television program, "the Simpsons," aired an episode in the 1993-94 season, in which the talking Barbie was directly addressed. A young female character (Lisa, the precocious activist in the family) receives a talking doll as a gift. She is extremely excited, as her

favourite doll finally has a voice (Lisa is aware of the dangers of women remaining silent). She sets her new doll up behind a tiny podium, facing all of her other silent dolls. Lisa pulls the string, and the doll which is to be the voice for a new generation of young women utters something like "I like to stay home where I belong." Lisa is shattered, then enraged. She produces and markets her own feminist talking doll, which is completely ignored by consumers.

What I see in that Simpsons episode and in the actions (and existence) of the B.L.O. is a kind of dialogue between cultural productions and the people who are meant to consume them. This dialogue is convoluted in the case of the "Simpsons" episode (itself a cultural product) and literal in the case of the talking Barbie. The fact that two such dialogues exist indicates that the talking Barbie stirred up considerable agitation, and that some agitated people were willing to react on a cultural level; that is, these dialogues took place within the sphere of cultural production. The B.L.O. did not distribute a manifesto; they recontextualized Barbie's voice by resituating it in a male doll. We could say that the B.L.O. operated at the level of the doll. The "Simpsons" episode directly addressed the controversy surrounding one cultural form in the context of another cultural form.

In either case Barbie's voice was the issue. Barbie's

words were not simply absorbed by all who heard them; some people talked back, attacking the assumptions that underlie the words and hopefully preventing young ears from absorbing those assumptions. This is exactly what Mary Wollstonecraft does in her two novels and in her reviews of novels. In Wollstonecraft's case, Barbie's voice came in the form of sentimental novels.

Hailed as "the first major feminist" by Miriam Brody in her introduction to A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (7), to the exclusion of all feminists before her,<sup>1</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft was obviously deeply concerned with the position of women (economically, intellectually, and socially) in eighteenth-century England.<sup>2</sup> She explicitly expressed this concern in her political essays and educational tracts. At the heart of this concern lay a distrust of mass-produced cultural products specifically aimed at women as consumers, particularly sentimental novels. She saw these novels as dangerously prescriptive; she cautioned women (particularly young women who had not yet developed a critical stance through a sound education emphasizing reason) not to read these books.

On the other hand, Wollstonecraft herself wrote two novels, Mary, a Fiction (1788) and the unfinished Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman (1798). Does this constitute an inconsistency? Not in itself, I will argue, although some have asserted that Wollstonecraft was unable to discard the

ideological assumptions that underscore the form of the sentimental novel, and that, because her project was to counter these assumptions, her having written sentimental novels undermines her own project.<sup>3</sup> I agree that Mary Wollstonecraft, like most or all active resisters of the oppressive and elusive powers that be, was complicit (to some extent) with the interests of those powers. This does not diminish her acts of resistance. However complicit Wollstonecraft may have been, she was also very loud and clear as an oppositional force to be reckoned with. Many of the feminist insights that she brought to bear on eighteenth-century English culture and society articulate issues that still exist today. Some of Wollstonecraft's ideas were so radical, then, that they have not been resolved two hundred years after her death.

The forum of Wollstonecraft's battles with patriarchal structures (of which she saw the sentimental novel as a cultural expression) was text. She was extremely well read and a very prolific writer. Her concerns about societal structures often took the form of texts that were reactions to texts. Some of her most scathing critiques of novels, for example, were written in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) was a direct and immediate response to Edmund Burke's conservative tract, Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790). Wollstonecraft's novels may be seen as revisions of

Wollstonecraft's greatest textual enemy, the sentimental novel. Wollstonecraft's reviews of novels in the Analytical Review contain explicit and implicit feminist commentary on the position of women readers within a patriarchal state.

Wollstonecraft is less interested than many twentieth-century feminists in language itself and its inscription upon those who use it. Wollstonecraft questions the uses to which language is put and, more specifically, how it is read. Wollstonecraft's concern is somewhat proto-Althusserian: she sees textual cultural products as representations of patriarchal ideology which work to reproduce that ideology in the minds of readers who do not have the skills to recognize it or resist it. She positions herself as the kind of reader who does recognize this intangible and dangerous message, who is willing to mentor other potential resisting readers. She is also attempting to provide a cultural alternative: novels that speak back to patriarchal ideology by warning potential sentimental heroines about the dangers of being sentimental heroines, not only to themselves, but to their daughters as well (as in Maria).

This thesis will trace Wollstonecraft's analysis and revision of the sentimental novel and its effects on young women. I will start with what I perceive to be the impetus of Wollstonecraft's concern with sentimental novels, the assumption that a cultural product can affect those who

consume it. I will also explore the limits and possibilities of resistance to such cultural prescription, with the help of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. In the second chapter I address the discourse of sentiment and its potential to be used by those with either an emancipatory or a reactionary agenda. I also examine Wollstonecraft's own two sentimental novels as revisions of the typical novel of sensibility, and examine the emancipatory potential of these novels. The last chapter speaks to Wollstonecraft's own talking back, her reviews in the Analytical Review. These reviews offer readers, writers, and educators an alternative reading of sentimental novels, showing how they are dangerously prescriptive to young women and how this danger may be averted by teaching young women to read more critically. Wollstonecraft offers young women the possibility of becoming more powerful readers and, consequently, more active members of society.

## CHAPTER ONE

On the Page, On the Body, and In Your Face: Wollstonecraft  
Reads Women's Relationship to Institutions

It is definitely significant that Maria<sup>4</sup> (Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel, posthumously published in 1798) opens with its heroine imprisoned in a madhouse, a place that Mary Poovey describes as "emblematic of women's characteristic situation (both social and emotional)" (106). Maria is trapped in a place (literally, an institution) which is devoid of reason. Her fellow inmates are supposedly there because of a deficiency in reason, and Maria herself is there for no reason (or, more accurately, not the reason for which the madhouse exists). In some ways Maria is in a position representative of that which eighteenth-century women occupied: a place in which reason was not supposed to live. Maria, then, is an anomaly (though I think Wollstonecraft would say that every woman is an anomaly, in this sense): she retains her reason throughout the novel.

The madhouse setting also represents Maria's own situation throughout the novel. She grows up in a home tyrannized by her father, with a mother who is so tyrannized herself that she is unable to protect her daughter. Maria's only escape from this situation is marriage, which proves to be an even worse tyranny to her. Her brief escape from marriage is first punctuated by her husband's attempts to

get her home again, then leads to her incarceration in the madhouse. Her only real escape (in the sense that she escapes the clutches of her husband and the walls of the madhouse) occurs in one of the provisional endings of the book, in which her daughter miraculously turns out to be alive, thanks to Jemima, and the three of them live happily ever after (presumably without men in the picture).

The image of the woman alone in a cell of a madhouse, a situation which Maria also describes as being "buried alive" (85), emphasizes the individual nature (as Wollstonecraft sees it) of woman's predicament. In the Author's Preface Wollstonecraft says that "the history [Maria] ought rather to be considered, as of woman, than of an individual" (73). Wollstonecraft's intention is to present an example of woman in general, though the woman who is her example operates as an individual. Mary Poovey says, in her discussion of Maria,

Perceptive, intelligent writers like Mary Wollstonecraft continued to envision social change and personal fulfilment primarily in terms of individual effort, and therefore they did not focus on the systemic constraints exercised by such legal and political institutions as marriage. (109)

I do agree that Wollstonecraft falls into this trap to some extent in Maria, but I also think that in Maria Wollstonecraft shows a growing awareness of the power of



shared experience and collective action. Maria is alone in her cell, but she has repeated contact, and escapes, with Henry Darnford and Jemima.

There are moments in the text which seem to show women operating collectively; that one tentative ending is a good example. Another even better one is Maria's plea to Jemima to help her to escape. Maria "spoke with energy of Jemima's unmerited sufferings, and of the fate of a number of deserted females, placed within the sweep of a whirlwind, from which it was next to impossible to escape" (120-21). Jemima was a cog in the machine that operates to oppress Maria; now Maria asks Jemima to identify with her and all of the other women like Maria who have been subjugated by society, the "deserted females." Who deserted these women? Was it particular men, or was it the supposed protection of patriarchal institutions (which will desert those who defy them)? This passage seems to indicate an awareness of a greater structure at work--one which surpasses that of the asylum, and links together all institutions that oppress women and the poor.

Clearly Maria does not present itself as a "call to act" (that is, in a public way) as much as Rights of Woman does. If Wollstonecraft does stick to private experience, as exemplified by the several autobiographical texts (those passages in which Henry, Jemima, and Mary tell their own stories) in the novel, she does so to show how women must

make changes in their own lives if they want their lives to change. This is, of course, a very simplistic bourgeois individualist formulation, but it is not the only message in the novel. Maria recognizes several times in her early days in the madhouse that her reading and writing activities are only imaginary escapes and that she has been neglecting her first resolution, escape (which she eventually achieves, in a sense): for example, Maria "was, earnestly as she had sought for employment, now angry with herself for having been amused by writing her narrative; and grieved to think that she had for an instant thought of any thing, but contriving to escape" (85).

The relationship between individual women and institutions is, of course, complicated, but I think that we may examine it in terms of a fairly simple and perhaps overworked binary: private vs. public. I hope that I can freshen up my analysis of this binary by contextualizing it in terms not only of institutions and individuals, but also in terms of bodies and texts (a distinction I plan to blur).

I should start with Louis Althusser's complicated discussion of the relationship between individuals and institutions in his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Althusser formulates an analysis of "society" based on the idea that we all operate, from day one, within a system of institutions. These institutions may seem unrelated to each other but that is not the case. He says

that what ultimately controls society is "State power" which operates in "State apparatuses." These State apparatuses are made up of institutions, and can be divided into two general categories: the repressive State apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Under the heading of the first we find "Government, Administration, Army, Police, Courts, Prisons, etc." (Althusser 136). Some of the ISAs include: "the religious ISA ..., the educational ISA ..., the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA ..., the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), [and] the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.)." The legal ISA is both repressive and ideological (136). Althusser says that "while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses" (137). The main difference between the RSA and ISAs is that "the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly by repression (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology" (138), whereas "the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression" (138). Having created all of these neat and orderly distinctions, Althusser joins them all together with "ideology": "It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a (sometimes teeth-gritting) 'harmony' between the repressive State Apparatus

and the Ideological State Apparatuses, and between the different State Ideological Apparatuses" (142). It is ideology, too, that binds individuals to the institutions that compose the State Apparatuses that act out State power.

Althusser's now nearly famous definition of "ideology" is this: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (149). He goes on for a few pages emphasizing the imaginary nature of this relationship. Then he almost contradicts this notion in his assertion that "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (156). This does actually make sense. It seems that what Althusser is saying is that ideology exists only in its manifestation in the actions (practices) of institutions or individuals. Herein lies the problem: Althusser argues that subjects operate only as they are programmed by ideology to operate. He says:

It therefore appears that the subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system (set out in the order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief.

(159)

Not only does ideology ultimately dictate what we do, but it

also dictates who we think we are: "all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (160). Althusser says that ideology "recruits" individuals as subjects by "interpellation," a kind of invitation or call (162).

If we all exist in ideology (actually, what Althusser says is "individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects" [164]), how do those of us who feel out of place in dominant ideology resist? Althusser says: "The class ... in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the (repressive) State apparatus ... because the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there" (140). We are all operating within ideology all of the time, and ideology operates within us at the level of the imaginary. What about the dominant ideology? Is it, as ideology, always with us? I suppose that most critics of just about any kind of analysis which posits itself as resistant assume that this is the case when they say that the author of the analysis under review is merely reinscribing ideological assumptions. What I'm wondering is this: if we are always in ideology, and ideology itself is an imaginary relationship, how do we characterize resistance to a particular ideology? Is resistance also an imaginary relationship, one in which the resistant party imagines her/himself as outside of the already imaginary ideology?

Is this as confusing to you as it is to me?

Althusser's formulation is particularly depressing because it is so deterministic. Taken to its extremes his model posits individuals as merely tools of ideology: we are constructed by ideology and we unwittingly reinforce ideology. For those of us (or should I say most of us) who do not particularly benefit from this arrangement, this is a depressing (because not constructive) view. According to Althusser, resistance lives only in the ISAs, a set of institutions which he sees as less powerful than the RSA.

There is at least one ISA which is, for women in the eighteenth century (and, arguably, now), really part of the RSA. I am referring to the family ISA. Even Daniel Defoe, not the most feminist of authors, recognizes, through the mouth of Roxana, the power of marriage. She says to her suitor: "It is not you, says I, that I suspect, but the Laws of Matrimony puts the Power into your Hands; bids you do it; commands you to command; and binds me, forsooth, to obey" (151). Perhaps it is because marriage is so regulated by law that it seems to operate as much within the RSA as it does as an ISA. At any rate, Roxana (if not Defoe) seems to view individuals' relationships with institutions in a way similar to Althusser. All agency disappears when one enters an institution: the institution now governs the actions of its individual members. Of course Althusser would say that we never really enter these institutions, it's more as if

they enter us. If we are not born into a family, for example, then we are born into the institution of state child care.

Michel Foucault, in his Discipline and Punish, talks about individuals and society as a whole in terms of the body. He speaks of a "political anatomy," which he defines as the study of

the 'body politic', [which is] a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge. (28)

He is using the word "knowledge" in a very broad sense: he says earlier that "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (27). The "body politic" is always engaged in a kind of power relationship with individual bodies: "What the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these grand functionings and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces" (26). The "grand functionings" are, I think, what Foucault proposes as "a 'knowledge of' the body that is not exactly the science of its functioning, and a mastery of its forces that is more than the ability to conquer them: this knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called

the political technology of the body" (26). So the "political technology of the body" and "the bodies themselves" are, in effect, mediated by "apparatuses and institutions," which are bound up with (if not equal to) the "body politic."

Institutions, then, have a public body which contains (in many senses) private bodies. I get a sense that Foucault's "political technology of the body" constitutes a relationship in itself, a way in which each body is a kind of Barthian "simulacrum" of the greater structure. Like Barthes' simulacrum,<sup>5</sup> the individual body is a function which creates an imperfect copy of the original structure. Like the simulacrum, the individual body has the potential to rewrite (or at the very least, reread) the structure. Foucault says, when discussing "the power exercised on the body":

In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions -- an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it,



resist the grip it has on them. This means that these relations go right down into the depths of society, that they are not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes and that they do not merely reproduce, at the level of individuals, bodies, gestures and behaviour, the general form of the law or government ... there is neither analogy nor homology, but a specificity of mechanism and modality. (26-7)

Foucault seems to acknowledge the possibility of affecting the structure, assuming that disenfranchised individuals have a hand in exercising the power which is normally taken to be the domain of the dominant. This power continues to function precisely because the dominated have access (however limited) to it, and exercise it on themselves, because it is power, and power is there to be exercised on the powerless. Presumably the dominated also may affect the power itself through their contact with it. Can they disable it by refusing to exercise it? Is it possible to refuse? In the context of Wollstonecraft's resistance, is it possible to redirect some of the power that is exerted upon us and/or that we exert upon ourselves? Toril Moi says, in her Sexual/Textual Politics, that "women's relationship to power is not exclusively one of victimization. Feminism is not simply about rejecting power, but about transforming the existing power structures

-- and, in the process, transforming the very concept of power itself" (148). I think that Wollstonecraft would agree. It seems that Wollstonecraft's project is not to dispense with power because of the effects it has had on women, but to see the patterns of power reconfigured to allow women a greater say in how they fit in to those patterns. Women must effect this change for themselves, and Wollstonecraft proposes women's relationship to texts as the arena for this change.

Like institutions, texts are both public and private. I do not plan to discuss the more obvious ways in which a text may be public or private (as in a published work as opposed to a private letter). I am concerned with the ways in which every text "shows" something explicit and hides something implicit. Text seems to function only to show, so that I need not expand on that idea. When I say texts hide a certain something I refer to ideology, which Fredric Jameson says is contained (in an active sense) and repressed by texts (The Political Unconscious 52-3). There is an interiority to texts, a kind of private sphere that not every reader (maybe no reader) has conscious access to. This is where Wollstonecraft's concerns lie. She would like more women to have conscious access to that "private" sphere of sentimental novels which affects women internally; that is, to the ideology which women internalize unquestioningly. Wollstonecraft's purpose seems to be to make "public" (open,

overt) that ideology so that women may have the power to resist it.

Obviously bodies, too, can be private or public, as in how we choose to expose certain parts of our bodies to the casual observer and choose to hide others. The issue becomes more interesting, though, if we consider the body as a text. Elizabeth Grosz, in her "Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason," distinguishes between two types of theorizing of the body:

The first conceives the body as a surface on which social law, morality, and values are inscribed; the second refers largely to the lived experience of the body, the body's internal or psychic inscription. Where the first analyzes a social, public body, the second takes the body-schema or imaginary anatomy as its object(s). (196)

Grosz goes on to say that these two approaches are not easily mixed. I can see how I could apply the first approach (which Grosz calls "inscriptive" [196]) to Wollstonecraft's Maria, but I am not so confident with the second, more private approach, mainly because my analysis of Maria is not based on psychoanalytic theory. The first approach may be subdivided into a public/private binary of its own, as Grosz says: "The body can be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold: it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that

produces interiority through the inscription of the body's outer surface" (196). To put this in an Althusserian context, then, we could say that State Apparatuses (the sociopolitical world) prescribe the landscape of the interior body, that which seems to be the origins of (exterior) social behaviour. As Grosz says, "The body becomes a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into. Social law is incarnated, 'corporealized'[:]; correlatively, bodies are textualized, 'read' by others as expressive of a subject's psychic interior" (198).

Wollstonecraft would not, I think, see the social inscriptions on women's bodies as expressive of their own experience; rather, I think that she would say that a system of institutions had written those signs and had also prescribed how they should be read. She would then add that it is possible to assert new interpretations of those signs, thereby altering the power that those signs represent. First and foremost, though, Wollstonecraft would say that many of these signs are seen passively, interpreted unconsciously, and therefore unwittingly accepted into the psyche of the unsuspecting (though complicit) reader. This is all very abstract, so a concrete example may be useful. A common image in sentimental literature is the pale woman wasting away on a couch. Clearly her pasty complexion is an inscription of this woman's internalized notion that weak women are more attractive. The unthinking reader of her

body, one who shares her assumption, would concur. If this same woman were one day to re-read her body as a manifestation of masculine power over her, then she might start eating more and exercising a little bit. Before long she could be a healthy robust and, gasp, strong woman. I am not saying that this is the magic answer to oppressive inscriptions, but that this is the formula that Wollstonecraft presents in her novels and in her readings of novels.

I would like to begin my discussion of bodies as texts in Maria with the obvious. Jemima's story contains the most obvious social oppression and the most obvious signs of that oppression on her body. Jemima's troubles start at her conception. Her father seduces her mother, a fellow servant. "The natural, the dreaded consequence" (102) of this, of course, is Jemima, the ultimate signifier of their extra-marital (extra-institutional) relations. All her mother has to do to avoid social censure for this deed which will inevitably be attributed solely to her (as if test tubes and turkey basters were the actual instruments) is to get the father-to-be "to screen her from reproach by marrying her, as he had promised in the fervour of seduction" (102). She cannot persuade him, and she dies giving birth to Jemima. This could be considered the ultimate form of bodily inscription: unsanctioned desire (as

enacted by a man -- Wollstonecraft is not very clear about the mother's part in this) leads to unwanted pregnancy. The unwanted pregnancy signifies a kind of improper behaviour and/or a "stained" character for the mother. The mother's attempts to resist this character (she continues her full duties as a servant) result in her death (presumably she exhausts herself), the end of the body and its interaction with the world. And what of the father? He, "after a slight reproof, was allowed to remain in his place ..."  
 (102). The inscriptions of oppression seem to take a punitive form: Jemima's mother's body displays signs that first enable her to be punished for her perceived transgression, then it displays the ultimate sign of the punishment she receives for that transgression (i.e., death).

As Jemima grows up under the inadequate "care of the cheapest nurse [her] father could find" (102), she is deprived of simple bodily comforts. She had "no kindred bosom to nestle in, no kindred warmth" and was left to "sleep without ever being prepared by exercise, or lulled by kindness to rest ..." (103). She is deprived of these very physical, material things, presumably because she is illegitimate. As a result she becomes "a weak and rickety babe" (103). Her treatment starts to affect her appearance:

Confined then in a damp hovel, to rock the cradle of

the succeeding tribe, I looked like a little old woman, or a hag shrivelling into nothing. The furrows of reflection and care contracted the youthful cheek, and gave a sort of supernatural wildness to the ever watchful eye. (103)

The circumstances of her birth are continually written upon her. The appearance of advanced age that Jemima describes in the above passage seeps into her, becoming a kind of look, a "supernatural wildness" in her eye. This same look is read by her father's wife as age, or at least age enough to put her to work for them: "I was young, it was true, but appeared a knowing little thing, and might be made handy" (103).

If Jemima transgresses her position in the house, by stealing candy or something like that, she is subjected to a kind of "trial," in which her "step-mother" plays the parts of police and prosecutor, and her father plays the roles of judge, jury, and punisher:

When detected, she was not content to chastize me herself at the moment, but, on my father's return in the evening ..., the principal discourse was to recount my faults, and attribute them to the wicked disposition which I had brought into the world with me, inherited from my mother. He did not fail to leave the marks of his resentment on my body.... (104)

My first question is, resentment for what? Her current

infracton (stealing candy)? Her "wicked disposition," as passed down from the original sinner, mom? The ambiguity residing in the word "resentment" opens up a myriad of possibilities, all of which concentrate on the father's purpose in the beating as an act of signification, and what he's attempting to signify is not something that originates in Jemima herself: he has to put it there. The "marks" are "of his resentment," not of her guilt.

The entire scenario turns into a Cinderella-esque masque (without the happy ending): Jemima blames her evil stepmother for everything. She explains how her sister and father could despise her. Her sister continually saw her "treated with contempt" and "conceived a contemptuous opinion of [her], that proved an obstacle to all affection" (104). Likewise, her father's contempt for Jemima is something that he learns from the mother: "my father, hearing continually of my faults, began to consider me as a curse entailed on him for his sins" (104-05). Jemima is then sent to work for a friend of her step-mother's. Her step-mother initiates the "mock trials" that lead to Jemima's beatings, she sets the father and sister against Jemima, and she eventually arranges for Jemima's expulsion from the family into an even more oppressive one.

In her new situation she is physically tormented (this is not new to her) by her mistress, and then by the maid:

Often has my mistress, for some instance of



forgetfulness, thrown me from one side of the kitchen to the other, knocked my head against the wall, spit in my face, with various refinements on barbarity that I forbear to enumerate, though they were all acted over again by the servant, with additional insults, to which the appellation of bastard, was commonly added, with taunts or sneers. (105)

Again, a woman in power acts out her aggression on Jemima (this time directly on her body), influencing someone else to do the same. Where Jemima's father attributes his treatment of her to his conception of her as a "curse" for his sexual transgression, the maid in the above passage attributes her abuse of Jemima to Jemima's condition as a result of that transgression; the maid, literally adding insult to injury, calls Jemima a "bastard."

It is starting to become obvious that Jemima reads oppression differently than her oppressors do. Her oppressors seem to need to point to something that Jemima is in order to explain how they treat her. The step-mother blames everything that Jemima does on a "wicked disposition ... inherited from [her] mother," the father sees her as a "curse," the maid calls her a "bastard." While all of these appellations stem from an event in which Jemima was the result, not the cause, her oppressors seem to see her as having inherently evil qualities which they discursively attribute to Jemima's unsanctioned conception. Jemima, on

the other hand, can trace her oppressors' feelings about her to some sort of environmental factor, usually seeing her abused by someone else or constantly hearing bad things about her.

Maria does not encounter such overt instances of corporeal inscription, although her body is the site of her husband's oppression of her. Venables, her husband, does many things which would deserve Maria's desertion of him, but the one that puts her over the edge, the one that finally convinces her to leave him, is the incident where he offers her sexually, in a letter, to a business partner. In this letter, Venables

assured him, 'that every woman had her price,' and, with gross indecency, hinted, that he should be glad to have the duty of a husband taken off his hands .... He advised him ... to attack my credulous generosity, and weak pity; and concluded with requesting him to lend him five hundred pounds for a month or six weeks.

(161-62)

Of course it is Venables' presumed ownership of her body that allows him to make such a proposition. When Venables says that "every woman has her price," he's really saying that every husband has his price.

It is safe to say that not much has changed in two hundred years. There have been at least two recent major Hollywood films in which the main plot involves a woman as

an object of exchange in a financial transaction between men: Nicolas Cage gives his girlfriend to a wealthy gambler for the weekend in order to pay a poker debt in Honeymoon in Vegas and Woody Harrelson sells his wife for one night for the modest price of one million dollars to Robert Redford in Indecent Proposal. The biggest difference between these cultural productions and Wollstonecraft's Maria is that Maria does not allow herself to be used as an object of exchange as the characters in these films do.

In the letter (the text) from Venables to his business partner (the subject of which is Maria's body), we can very easily see Maria's domestic oppression. Venables is obviously aware of how this paper exposes him: "He threw the letter in the fire" (163) right after Maria renounced their marriage. Venables de-materializes his act of oppression by erasing its physical manifestation.

Just before he flings the evidence in the fire, Venables reminds Maria that she has no legal reason to divorce him. He says to her: "[She] had no resource; [she] could not swear the peace against him! -- [she] was not afraid of [her] life! -- he had never struck [her]!" (163). Maria can leave him only if she can show the legal authorities marks on her body (marks of his resentment). He refuses to supply those marks, because then she would be able to take herself and her money out of the marriage. He restricts his acts of oppression to those which will leave

no visible trace, no text.

For the most part, Venables oppresses Maria in ways that are legal and socially acceptable. It is all right for him to spend everything she owns on bad business deals and wild nights out. It is even acceptable for him to sleep with every woman in town, because, as Maria says, a wife cannot drive an unfaithful husband from his house, nor separate, or tear, his children from him, however culpable he may be; and he, still the master of his own fate, enjoys the smiles of a world, that would brand her with infamy, did she, seeking consolation, venture to retaliate. (136)

A man can be confident that the world will sympathize with his position, no matter what he does. And a woman is expected to yield to all of her husband's demands, no matter how disgusting. After a long dissertation, in the autobiography that she's writing for her daughter, on how it is a crime against virtue when women marry men whom they are not genuinely attracted to, then sleep with them, Maria says:

The greatest sacrifice of my principles in my whole life, was the allowing my husband again to be familiar with my person, though to this cruel act of self-denial, when I wished the earth to open up and swallow me, you owe your birth; and I the unutterable pleasure of being a mother. (154)

We might say that in her intimate encounters with Venables the earth didn't move quite enough for Maria. This passage is of particular interest because of Maria's maternal enthusiasm. For the first time in this book a woman who has been forced into sex is happy about the biological outcome. Unlike Jemima, Maria has the luxury of reading her pregnant body positively. (It is not always positive, of course: her pregnancy does prevent her from running off to Lisbon to live with her uncle.) It is easy enough to explain Maria's attitude economically: Maria almost always has some hope of regaining control of her inheritance from her uncle, whereas Jemima, at the time of her pregnancy, is utterly destitute. For whatever reason, anyway, Maria reads her pregnancy differently than pregnancy has been read so far in the novel: to her, the sign of her oppression is also the sign of her hope.

This brings me to the re-materialization of oppression in Maria. Maria and Jemima both have opportunities to tell their own stories as they wish to. They both read the events in their lives; they both read the inscriptions on their bodies, and they read them differently than does the society around them. Maria and Jemima have had access to the texts that have been erased (for example: Jemima's pregnancy and Venables' letter to his business associate). Maria and Jemima read these texts and they rewrite them: Jemima tells her story for Maria and Henry Darnford (Maria's

fellow inmate), and Maria writes her autobiography to "perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the tyranny, her mother knew not how to avoid" (82). Their audiences are not very large, then, suggesting that their rewritings are intended, at least in part, as reclamations of themselves as texts. As we can see from the many very negative proposed endings (the novel was not finished), in which Maria often commits suicide, Maria does not presume to propose that an active reading of oppression's inscriptions will immediately eradicate the oppression of women or of woman. The novel does seem to suggest, though, that if Maria could get her autobiography to her daughter, then the daughter's struggle would not be as intense as her own has been. If only her daughter could read Maria's reading of her own life, then perhaps she could avoid being inscribed in the same ways, though she would not be able to avoid inscription altogether.

Assuming Wollstonecraft wanted Maria to end happily, the novel provides a maternal model for feminist change. If we posit Wollstonecraft as Maria and her daughter as the "rising generation" of women, then we could say that Wollstonecraft sees change as slow, yet possible. Laurie Langbauer says, in her "An Early Romance: Motherhood and Women's Writing in Mary Wollstonecraft's Novels,"

Maria's book takes the place of--in fact, becomes--the experience she wishes to hand on to her daughter ....

through Maria [Wollstonecraft] bolsters her own position as experienced--a position she certainly takes in the Vindication-- passing that legacy through her writing on to her readers, who fill in the place of Maria's lost daughter. (211)

Wollstonecraft wants her daughters to read her own mistakes and misinterpretations so that they will not repeat them. Her daughters will likely be inscribed upon, but they will have the tools to read their own and one another's inscriptions in a way that empowers them. They will not marry the first sentimental man to come along; they will not allow their husbands to treat them like chattels; if "thief" is written on their foreheads they will loudly offer their own interpretation; they will not languish sick on couches in their living rooms with the latest sentimental novels in their hands. Neither will their daughters, nor their granddaughters, nor their great-granddaughters, or so it is supposed to go. Of course, we from our late twentieth-century perspective know that it did not work out that way.

## CHAPTER TWO

## The Ins and Outs of Sensibility

Janet Todd, in her Sensibility, an Introduction, describes the literature of sensibility in terms of its characteristics and intended effects: "The arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familial characters and rhetorical devices is the mark of sentimental literature. Such literature buttonholes the reader and demands an emotional, even physical response" (2). For woman readers, this emotional and physical response would manifest itself as a kind of inscription on the body, an outward sign that tells the world that they had been properly affected by what they had read: "Women were thought to express emotions with their bodies more sincerely and spontaneously than men; hence their propensity to crying, blushing and fainting" (Todd 1986, 19). Women readers of sentimental fiction (apparently there were many) would internalize the emotions projected by the novels they read, then metabolize these emotions and reproduce them in a way that was conspicuously visible, and therefore had an effect on how they interacted with other people. At least that is how the late-eighteenth-century critic of literature (such as Mary Wollstonecraft) would see it. Of course, Wollstonecraft had a lot to say about women as writers and readers within the conventions of sensibility, some of which



she said within the sentimental novels that she wrote.

It is not difficult to see how sensibility could become the tool of both the radical and the reactionary in Wollstonecraft's time. Arguments based in sensibility were seen as incredibly persuasive. Syndy Conger says, in her introduction to Sensibility in Transformation, "By the 1790's it was equally possible to believe either that the sentimental ethic could precipitate the decline of established institutions or that it could reinforce the status quo..." (13). Mary Wollstonecraft did believe in both possibilities; she wrote very critically about sensibility (particularly about sentimental novels) in A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) and in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). On the other hand, she wrote two sentimental novels, Mary, a Fiction (1788), and Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman (1798). In these novels Wollstonecraft does not abandon her feminist agenda; rather, she seems to incorporate the conventions of sensibility in order to support that agenda. Wollstonecraft's fiction invites us, her late twentieth-century readers, to question the discourse of sensibility in a feminist context: is the discourse of sensibility (however written or rewritten) emancipatory or restrictive?

In Lawrence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey (1768) there is an episode where Yorick encounters a voice crying "I can't get out." The voice is that of a caged starling.

Yorick attempts vehemently to free the bird, but he can't. The incident prompts him to leave the scene to contemplate liberty: "Mechanical as the notes were, yet so true in tune to nature were they chanted, that in one moment they overthrew all my systematic reasonings upon the Bastile" (96). A little later we find out the history of the bird: an English groom found it, bought it a cage, and taught it those words. He gave it to the master of a hotel in Paris who, not understanding the English words it uttered, sold it to La Fleur, who gave it to Yorick. Yorick brought it to England, where the bird passed from hand to hand amongst several Lords, then "From that rank he passed into the lower house, and passed the hands of as many commoners -- But as all these wanted to get in -- and my bird wanted to get out -- he had almost as little store set by him in London as in Paris" (99). The commoners want to "get in" on the fad, while the bird declares that it wants to get out: that the bird says exactly these words is what makes it such a coveted object. The commoners' interest in getting in, though, directly clashes with the bird's professed wish. If they let the bird out, they will no longer have the means of getting in. Obviously the bird's various owners are not listening too carefully to what the bird is saying.

Sterne's starling utters words that it, like the Parisian hotel master, cannot understand. Yorick knows this (he refers to the bird's words as "Mechanical"), yet he acts

as if he thinks the bird really wants to escape. Whether or not the bird desires escape is immaterial. Yorick wants the bird to desire escape, so that is what he reads in the bird's mechanical notes (which were taught to the bird by the same man who caged it: presumably the groom was amused by a desire that he had discursively created). Yorick then walks away, using the feelings he acquired from his encounter with the bird to think intensely about liberty. He later acquires the bird itself and turns it into an object of exchange of which he is reluctant to relinquish original ownership: "if any [of my readers] by mere chance have ever seen him -- I beg leave to inform them, that that bird was my bird -- or some vile copy set up to represent him" (99).

To Yorick the bird is a commodity; it is an object capable of producing strong sentiments in him. He says, just as he gives up on opening the cage, "I vow, I never had my affections more tenderly awakened" (96). The most important result of Yorick's encounter with the bird is his reaction to it; it is the occasion of his intense contemplation of liberty, his imagined Bastille inmate. Claudia Johnson writes of the man of sensibility as a consumer of feelings:

What is emphasized in this literature is the feeling of the onlooker, not the feeling of the sufferer, who indeed is only there so as to occasion the sentimental

displays of the watchers. Men of feeling, in other words, require a constant supply of pitiable objects in order to arouse the benevolent meltings that validate their moral status. (169)

Yorick's feelings about the bird facilitate a display of his moral sentiments about the great evils of imprisonment. The facts that the bird utters words devoid of meaning to itself and that Yorick, no matter how determined he is, cannot open the cage, help to emphasize the unimportance of the bird's situation. Sensibility, in this context, is a discourse that keeps the bird in the cage instead of freeing it and, consequently, that opposes a political discourse of liberty and empowerment of the oppressed.

If the discourse of sensibility can be used to reduce a political situation (imprisonment) to a feeling that does nothing except "validate [the observer's] moral status," then sensibility can facilitate complacency. Complacency, of course, runs counter to Mary Wollstonecraft's agenda. She would like to see the "man of feeling" do something about his sentiments instead of sitting around thinking of how great a guy he is for having feelings of pity.

Mary Wollstonecraft's depictions of sensibility in her non-fiction are almost always negative or, at the very least, cautious. In A Vindication of the Rights of Men, Wollstonecraft sees sensibility as the basis of Burke's argument in his Reflections on the Revolution in France (to

which her first Vindication was a direct and immediate response). She says to him: "all your pretty flights arise from your pampered Sensibility; and that, vain of this fancied pre-eminence of organs, you foster every emotion till the fumes, mounting to your brain, dispel the sober suggestions of reason" (7). Burke's over-charged sentiments have rendered reason inaccessible to him. It is precisely this lack of reason which enables Burke to argue for tradition and the status quo.

In his Reflections,<sup>6</sup> Burke says that he disagrees so vehemently with Dr. Richard Price's public acclaim of the French Revolution

because it is natural I should: because we are so made as to be affected at such spectacles [i.e., the French Revolution] with melancholy sentiments upon the unstable condition of mortal prosperity and the tremendous uncertainty of human greatness; because in those natural feelings we learn great lessons; because in events like these our passions instruct our reason.... (91)

Burke explicitly states that his biggest concern is to uphold the stability of things as they are. The order of things (the harmonious hegemony) must remain intact, or else Burke will become very upset; it is natural for him to do so. It is not very difficult for Wollstonecraft to argue that such a strict adherence to tradition arises from lack

of reason.

Burke sees tradition as natural, therefore not open to debate. He places great importance on feeling deeply for society's structures (as they are). He recognizes that it is difficult to feel strongly for something so abstract, so he proposes that "We procure reverence to our civil institutions on the principle upon which nature teaches us to revere individual men: on account of their age and on account of those from whom they are descended" (39).

Obviously Burke does not believe that any kind of acquired personal merit is important in a "man" (especially one who is young and of "low birth"). By extension, he also does not believe that any new civil institution of questionable pedigree is of any worth. Nature<sup>7</sup> teaches us, Burke says, to believe tenaciously in the authority and merit of such institutions as church, monarchy and primogeniture. To question these "facts" would be unnatural.

Burke uses the family structure to naturalize feelings towards established institutions. Chris Jones says Burke's "appeal to the loyalties of Nation and Church were [sic] based firmly on the model of the family and the feelings associated with it, creating the image of one great British family..." (85). At the head of this family, of course, sits the father, whose authority should be questioned only hesitantly, as Burke elucidates quite clearly:

we have consecrated the state that no man should

approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution, that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion, that he should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. (109)

Zounds! The father/state's wounds are like those of the Judeo-Christian God: they are unapproachable by reason; only emotions ("pious awe and trembling solicitude") are allowed anywhere near them. It is natural, then, to feel apprehensive about reforming traditional patriarchal structures.

Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, sees traditions as "unnatural customs" which reason obliges us to question. After accusing Burke of having a "mortal antipathy to reason," she says "if there is anything like argument, or first principles, in your wild declamation, behold the result: -- that we are to reverence the rust of antiquity, and term the unnatural customs which ignorance and mistaken self-interest have consolidated, the sage fruit of experience..." (8). Sensibility is restrictive, then, because it allows people to forgo reason in favour of raw feelings -- in Burke's case, a nostalgia for the institutions of the past, which Wollstonecraft sees as acting only in the interests of wealthy men.

Wollstonecraft also sees sensibility as an excuse for

complacency. She says, in a passage worth quoting at length,

Men who possess uncommon sensibility, whose quick emotions shew how closely the eye and heart are connected, soon forget the most forcible sensations. Not tarrying long enough in the brain to be subject to reflection, the next sensations, of course, obliterate them. Memory, however, treasures up these proofs of native goodness; and the being who is not spurred on to any virtuous act, still thinks itself of consequence, and boasts of its feelings.... We ought to beware of confounding mechanical instinctive sensations with emotions that reason deepens, and justly terms the feelings of humanity. This word discriminates the active exertions of virtue from the vague declamation of sensibility. (56)

Here Wollstonecraft hints at how sensibility may be reclaimed. The emotions evoked must linger "long enough in the brain to be subject to reflection" so that they can become "emotions that reason deepens." Also, the person affected by these powerful feelings must be "spurred on to [a] virtuous act." Wollstonecraft draws a line here between the Yorick-esque display of sentiment meant to advertise moral validity and the kind of feeling, filtered through reason, which spurs on benevolent action. In fact, sensibility becomes important in this context because a



combination of reason and sensibility produces magnanimous action: "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" (31). Sensibility gets reason all fired up, so to speak.

Wollstonecraft extends this argument in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, where she once again sees sentiment in itself and for itself as a restrictive discourse: in this case, specific to women. The man of sensibility feels deeply for something outside of him, then moves on. Middle-class women (the subject of Wollstonecraft's book) are all trained to be women of sensibility: they have no other choice. Women are taught very early in their lives to live in their senses and not in their brains. This limits women's capacities for acting in the world: they are too busy feeling to think. Wollstonecraft says that "Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry" train women so that "This overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others..." (152). The end result of freeing women's minds will be to render them useful to other people. If women are useful, they have the power to act in the world, rather than merely to be there as someone else's

toy.

Women are trapped in a vicious sensibility circle because women gain validity and some measure of power only by conforming to this formulaic sensibility: "to their senses, are women made slaves, because it is by their sensibility that they obtain present power" (153). The "present power" that women gain is illusory, however, because it is the power to please men by appearing (thereby becoming) weak. Wollstonecraft warns that

the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and ... those beings who are only the objects of pity, and that kind of love which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt. (81-2)

The same sensibility which gives women a sense of power is precisely what robs them of real power. The woman of sensibility, weak and ineffective, is viewed by those with power (men) with contempt.

Edmund Burke says as much himself in A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1759):

There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire,

but we love what submits to us; in one case we are forced, in the other we are flattered into compliance.

(212)

One does not have to be Mary Wollstonecraft to see the gender lines that are drawn here. It is highly unlikely that Burke would position women as great and terrible, consequently admired by little pleasing men from below. Each gender will receive compliance from the other, but women are forced into such compliance whereas men are flattered. Men, presumably, have a choice in the matter. If women are little enough (and I take little to mean generally non-threatening and powerless, as well as physically small), they will gain compliance from their big (imposing) sublime men. Of course, men then have the upper hand. The little women of sensibility are in no position to question those men or the power that they wield.

Wollstonecraft has not abandoned sensibility altogether, however. Again, in her second Vindication, Wollstonecraft does acknowledge the importance of feelings:

To endeavour to reason love out of the world would be to out-Quixote Cervantes, and equally offend against common sense; but an 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, appears less wild. (110)

Here she is specifically talking about love (which she seems to define differently than Burke), that feeling to which the woman of sensibility is most susceptible. Wollstonecraft does not want to obliterate love; she just wants to temper it a little.

In her "What Kind of Heroine is Mary Wollstonecraft?" Catherine Parke says that Wollstonecraft hoped to redefine sensibility, to move away from its conventional meaning as a "physical and emotional capacity for feeling" understood to be woman's "essential characteristic" and toward a new definition that would combine the qualities of self-definition with justice. (104)

Since Wollstonecraft's concept of justice has something to do with virtuous action, her notion of self-definition probably has something to do with exceeding or reaching out of the self. Self-definition, then, paradoxically contains an element of other-definition. Women define themselves within relationships with others. In her fiction, Wollstonecraft posits the maternal relationship as the one in which women's self-definitions may best be developed, and the marriage relationship as the one in which self-definition is most restricted.

The heroine of Wollstonecraft's first novel, Mary, a Fiction (published in 1788 -- a year before the French Revolution), gets caught up in a complex subject/object

position with herself in her quest for self-definition. Constantly being defined by others according to traditional socially constructed roles (daughter, wife), Mary strives to define herself by throwing herself into the role of maternal benefactor for anyone who is less fortunate than herself. In Mary there is a complex relationship among maternal sensibility, benevolence, escape, self, and other.

Mary's sensibility, very strong from the beginning, is what prompts her to read sentimental novels:

Her sensibility prompted her to search for an object to love; on earth it was not to be found: her mother had often disappointed her, and the apparent partiality she shewed to her brother gave her exquisite pain -- produced a kind of habitual melancholy, led her into a fondness for reading tales of woe, and made her almost realize the fictitious distress. (6)

The man of feeling wanders around looking for objects of pity, then turns his feelings inward and walks away from the pitied object; Mary looks for "an object to love," someone to receive the feelings that she projects outward. Her sensibility either springs from or is nurtured by her mother's neglect: Mary would not have to look very far for love if she was getting it at home. Mary was not treated as a loved "object" (i.e., she did not receive love), so she goes out into the world and treats people as loved "objects" (they are not subjects because they do not return her love).

She fills in the gap that her mother left open. This lack of maternal affection leads her to over-identify with the characters in sentimental novels. She internalizes the distresses that these characters encounter as an escape from her own distresses; in doing so she displaces her mother. Mary learns to feel for the characters in a way that her mother did not feel for her.

Mary goes from internalizing fictitious distress to internalizing the woes of the real people around her. When her parents refuse to give anything to beggars, "if she could do it unperceived, she would give them her own breakfast, and feel gratified, when, in consequence of it, she was pinched by hunger" (7). Mary feels so strongly for the beggars' misfortunes, specifically the hunger which her parents refuse to relieve, that she wants to experience them herself. In a real (that is, physical) way, then, the distresses of others become a part of her. She takes in their distresses and makes them her own; in the process she alleviates the afflictions of other people--in effect, she exchanges her freedom from physical affliction for other people's abundance of it.

Mary's sensibility is strengthened by her mother's illness: "her sickness called forth all Mary's tenderness, and exercised her compassion so continually, that it became more than a match for self-love, and was the governing propensity of her heart through life" (5). Mary develops a

sensibility that is associated with compassion and overshadows "self-love." Taking care of her mother, Mary develops a kind of maternal sensibility, a sensibility that manifests itself as self-denial.<sup>8</sup> At the same time this kind of sensibility is a form of self-love. Her sensibility forms her and gives her a sense of who she is; it defines her as one who gives and does not receive. It defines her as a mother, although she is not a mother.

Mary's friendship with Ann is maternal and also nurtures her sensibility. Mary's affection for Ann is not reciprocated, so Mary compensates for this lack of love with an excess of compassion: Mary

would ... imagine that [Ann] looked sickly or unhappy, and then all her tenderness would return like a torrent, and bear away all reflection. In this manner was her sensibility called forth, and exercised, by her mother's illness, her friend's misfortunes, and her own unsettled mind. (9)

Also in this manner Mary's sensibility becomes connected with benevolence. We would think, given Wollstonecraft's views expressed in her two Vindications, that sensibility linked with benevolence would be positive. In Mary's case, however, benevolence becomes problematic: "In order to be enabled to gratify herself in the highest degree, she practised the most rigid oeconomy ... [so] that when her understanding or affections had an object, she almost forgot

she had a body which required nourishment" (12). Mary's benevolent sensibility, sometimes described by the narrator as "compassion," is often physically detrimental to her. Wollstonecraft formulated an ideal pattern for the relationship between sensibility, reason, and virtuous action: they were to come in that order. Mary's benevolence rebounds, having an effect on both her reason and her sensibility. She feels for people's distress, to the point of actually feeling their distress. Then she relieves their distress, often at no small cost to herself. She gains from this loss, however; she is gratified by sacrificing her needs to fulfil other people's.

Part of what gratifies her is that benevolence allows her an avenue of escape. Her profuse attention to Ann provides her with an excuse to go to Lisbon with her, thus escaping the husband whom she had recently married because her family desired a connection with his family. Mary does not even have to think about her husband as long as she has Ann's illness to preoccupy her: "An extreme dislike took root in her mind; the sound of [her husband's] name made her turn sick; but she forgot all, listening to Ann's cough, and supporting her languid frame" (17). In her letter to her husband, in which she reluctantly asks permission to accompany Ann to Lisbon, Mary says of Ann: "Continual attention to her health, and the tender office of a nurse, have created an affection very like a maternal one..." (19).



Mary's feelings for Ann are like a mother's, but they are not the same as a mother's feelings.

Eventually even Ann herself becomes a person from whom Mary escapes. When Henry is "ill and low-spirited" Mary has an excuse to spend a lot of time with him: "This divided attention was of use to her, and prevented her continually thinking of Ann, whose fluctuating disorder often gave rise to false hopes" (30). Henry's need of companionship while ill gives Mary an opportunity of escaping Ann or, more specifically, the feelings which Mary experiences ("false hopes" and the dashings thereof) while thinking about Ann. It is as though Mary has two children, each of whom separately demands a certain amount of her attention and energy, so that she gets a break from one by attending to the other. While paying so much attention to either of these other people she pays little or no attention to herself.

Her benevolent actions and feelings afford Mary a means of escaping herself. Early on in the text the narrator tells us: "Her benevolence, indeed, knew no bounds; the distress of others carried her out of herself..." (10). Mary's benevolence, spurred on by emotion, paradoxically helps her to escape her emotions. When she thinks about how she loves Henry, and that she will be leaving him soon, she thinks about the stormy seas that prevent her immediate departure: "what of that, the tempest in her soul rendered

every other trifling -- it was not the contending elements, but herself she feared" (37). This suggests that the narrator defines Mary's "self" by her capacity to feel. The fact that Mary has to escape from her strong emotions hints at a kind of restriction that they place on her. This is made more explicit in the narrator's comments after the hitherto ungrateful, recently ill woman thanks Mary profusely for all of her help: "the affections which bound [Mary] to her fellow creatures began again to play, and reanimated nature" (53). It is as if Mary is imprisoned by her feelings for other people; the irony here is that those feelings that chain her to unfortunate people are often precisely what harm her. At one point she cries, "Too well have I loved my fellow creatures! I have been wounded by ingratitude..." (52). Once wounded, Mary seeks escape, usually by helping out another "fellow creature." Another irony here is that Mary's virtuous acts help to free other people from affliction: that same woman refers to Mary as "her deliverer" (53).

In Mary, sensibility is neither unproblematically restrictive nor unproblematically emancipatory. Part of the problem is that Mary's sensibility has the power to gesture toward liberation, but it does not have the power to effect any permanent change on the structures around her. Mary is capable of alleviating other people's physical afflictions, but she is ultimately unable to liberate herself from a very

significant material restriction, marriage. Mary's defining "trap" is her marriage to that man whom she does not love or even respect. Her sensibility, as expressed in mostly maternal ways, is part of what makes her marriage, and her existence, undesirable. The novel ends with Mary thinking about death as the only way out for her: "She thought she was hastening to that world where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage" (68).

Mary is like a daughterless mother; her search for self-definition takes the form of a search for a daughter, "an object to love," a person who does not necessarily have to return that love. Her attempts at surrogate motherhood are unsuccessful: she never really becomes Ann's mother, and her maternal relationship to Henry evolves into a filial one. Henry comes to think of Mary as his daughter: "the tenderest father could not more anxiously interest himself in the fate of a darling child, than he did in her's" (35). Of course, Henry loves Mary with more than a parental affection, but he "was afraid to discover his passion, or give any other name to his regard but friendship..." (42). After he tells her how he loves her as a father, she starts to acknowledge to herself that she has strong feelings for him, but does not call these feelings love: "she never asked herself what kind of affection she had for him ... nor did she know that love and friendship are very distinct..." (36). Finally someone returns Mary's affections: at the

moment that she realizes this, she no longer feels maternal toward Henry -- he is no longer her "loved object," because he now returns that love. He is a loved subject. Mary and Henry are unable to do anything about their mutual affection, however, because of her marriage to another man.

In order to really become a mother Mary must resolve her position as reluctant wife; she must accept the patriarchal structure of the family (as represented by the husband whose permission she needs to travel) in order to find that sense of self that wants nothing to do with that structure. The emancipatory potential of maternal benevolence depends upon the restrictive forces of the institution of marriage. The only way to escape from this double-bind is to die.

There is a restriction/escape scenario defined by a marriage/motherhood split in Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman as well, although it is much more obvious and concrete. Also, the protagonist is a mother whose cruel husband has separated her from her infant daughter. The novel opens with Maria alone in her cell in the madhouse, agonizing over her recent incarceration there. Unlike Sterne's starling, when Maria says "I want to get out" she knows what she's saying and she means it. Obviously Wollstonecraft does not intend her reader to cry over Maria's plight then pass the book on and forget about it. She wants her readers to understand Maria's situation as one which extends out of the

novel; it is an example of all women's situations: "the history ought rather to be considered, as of woman, than of an individual" (73). Wollstonecraft is also very explicit, in her Author's Preface, about the political agenda of her novel, namely, "exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society" (73). Unlike Mary, Wrongs is not just a novel about one intelligent woman's feelings and actions. Wrongs is also a political tract, a document outlining the particular problems that patriarchal society can (and does) create for women.

Maria's incarceration is, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, representative of women's relationship to society in general. The narrator, commenting on the apparent hopelessness of Maria's situation, asks: "And to what purpose did she rally all her energy -- Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (79). Maria is a bit more optimistic than the narrator, so she pursues many avenues of escape: she befriends her guard, Jemima; she enlists the aid of a fellow prisoner, Henry; and she attempts more cerebral escapes through reading and writing. Sensibility plays a big part in all of these escape attempts.

Early in the novel, Maria asks herself, "what was to be her employment in her dreary cell? Was it not to effect her escape?" (76). To this effect she asks Jemima to visit her

often; she might eventually be able to convince Jemima that she is not mad. Jemima will not be won over right away, but she does have some compassion for Maria and so Maria is able to convince Jemima "to bring her some books and implements for writing" (80). Like Mary, Maria attempts to escape reflection on her situation by reading, but this is not entirely successful at first: "Earnestly as Maria endeavoured to soothe, by reading, the anguish of her wounded mind, her thoughts would often wander from the subject she was led to discuss, and tears of maternal tenderness obscured the reasoning page" (81). Some of the sentimental stories she reads come too close to home; they make her think about her daughter. Other sentimental novels have the desired effect. Jemima brings Maria Henry's copy of Rousseau's Heloïse: "She had read this work long since; but now it seemed to open a new world to her -- the only one worth inhabiting" (88). She can inhabit this world only in her mind, so this constitutes an ineffective escape.

Maria's memoir also gives her temporary relief from her present grief. As she wrote, "She lived again in the revived emotions of youth, and forgot her present in the retrospect of sorrows that had assumed an unalterable character" (82). Maria's own sentimental narrative helps her to "escape" her present situation. That is not the primary reason for her narrative. She writes her memoirs so that she may warn her daughter against the pitfalls that she

herself fell into, culminating in her incarceration. Her memoirs are meant to help her daughter escape Maria's fate. In a broader sense, the memoirs are meant to help her daughter escape the madhouse, then, which represents patriarchal structures and their potential to oppress women. Maria's sentimental narrative has at least a glimmer of emancipatory potential.

Maria comes to recognize how useless her memoir is in effectively liberating her from the literal madhouse. After having been there for six weeks, Maria starts to regret having spent so much time on a pursuit that will not bring her any closer to her objective: "She was, earnestly as she had sought for employment, now angry with herself for having been amused by writing her narrative; and grieved to think that she had for an instant thought of any thing, but contriving to escape" (85). Perhaps Wollstonecraft is demonstrating that anything she writes now is primarily for the benefit of future generations (as Maria's memoir is likely to be of more use to her daughter than to herself).

The whole time that she is occupied with her memoirs, Maria is working toward escape; she is gradually befriending Jemima. She initially reaches Jemima with emotion rather than reason: "Though she failed immediately to rouse a lively sense of injustice in the mind of her guard, because it had been sophisticated into misanthropy, she touched her heart" (79). Whenever Maria tries to convince Jemima that

she has been unjustly imprisoned, Jemima is able to argue to herself that Maria is just having one of her lucid intervals. What does work on Jemima is an appeal to her feelings: "when told that [Maria's] child, only four months old, had been torn from her even while she was discharging the tenderest maternal office, the woman awoke in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions..." (80). Note that Jemima is not swayed by just any sentimental sob story; she responds to Maria's situation as a mother separated from her child. We find out later, when Jemima recounts her life story, that this is a scenario that Jemima has experienced, too, both as a mother (potentially, at least: she aborts her baby) and as a daughter.

Jemima's newly revived emotions spur her resolve, but that resolve is limited by reason: "Jemima determined to alleviate all in her power, without hazarding the loss of her place, the suffering of a wretched mother" (80). Jemima will not do anything to jeopardize her job, "her only chance for independence" (80), presumably by helping Maria escape. At this point, however, she does agree to bring Maria some books.

The books come from Henry Darnford, and the book exchange facilitates a friendship among Jemima, Mary, and Henry (which sparks a romance between the latter two). Early on Maria thinks of Henry in terms of an escape attempt: "Could he aid me to escape, who is himself more



closely watched? -- Still I should like to see him" (87). Henry's and Maria's relationship starts with shared reading (often of the sentimental variety), and continues as a sentimental relationship in itself, as facilitated by Jemima.

When Jemima tells her story, which Mary Poovey describes as "decidedly unsentimental" because, among other things, it "begins not with romantic expectations but with sexual violation" (103), Maria and Henry once again share in the reading of a narrative and exchange reactions to it. Although the narrative itself is unsentimental, Maria and Henry treat it much as they would a sentimental novel (and much as Yorick originally treats his bird): they start thinking about broader political problems (especially poverty) that neither of them is in a position to rectify. It is as though they consider Jemima's story only as a story, and not as her story. Maria does not take Jemima under her wing as Mary would have done, probably because Jemima does not exhibit any particular need for a surrogate mother.

Eventually both Henry and Jemima help to free Maria. Henry's part in Maria's liberation from the madhouse is complicated, because it involves, in an indirect way, Maria's having been incarcerated in the first place. As Mary Poovey points out, there is a remarkable similarity between Maria's relationship with George Venables and her

relationship with Henry Darnford. Maria originally falls for Venables because her imagination, as fostered by romantic novels, paints Venables as the ideal sentimental hero. Venables, by remaining silent, does nothing to shatter this image (Poovey 98-9). The image is shattered after the wedding, when Maria finds out that Venables married her for her money and is not at all the man whom she constructed in her imagination. She is in the madhouse because he wants to control her money without her interference. Her relationship with Henry starts in a similar way. Her sentimental turn allows her to imagine, from his book collection and the scribblings therein, that Henry is just the man for her. As it turns out in many of the projected endings of the novel, Henry is not her perfect mate.

She is imprisoned by one man and freed by another, both of whom she got involved with because of her sensibility. Both men disappoint her sensibility. If Wrongs is an extended metaphor in which the madhouse represents patriarchal structure's restrictive power over women, then Wollstonecraft is also saying that marriage puts women in the madhouse, and sexual relationships with men outside of marriage can free women from the madhouse: unfortunately, Maria is not outside of marriage. Once Maria is out of the madhouse her husband uses her relationship with Henry to newly restrict her (Venables sues Henry for adultery). Once

free Maria is a lot less excited about Henry, and in most of the projected endings to the novel, Maria kills herself.

Is this to say that there is no escape? I don't think so. I think Wollstonecraft sees no immediate escape through sensibility, although it appears she envisions a better life for women in the future, in which sensibility would play a part. Both Mary and Maria are faulted, by their respective narrators, for excessive sensibility. Perhaps Wollstonecraft is saying that the balance between sensibility and reason which is necessary to free women from patriarchal tyranny is very difficult to achieve within existing structures. After all, Mary is stuck, at the end of Mary, in a marriage that her sensibilities render loathsome to her. Her only hope for escape lies in some vague notion of a better world. Is that world supposed to be heaven, or does Mary allude to a distant future in which societal structures, such as marriage, do not confine women? Maria is also confined by her marriage: even after her escape from the madhouse her husband can still harass her with legal action. There may be hope for the future, however. The most developed of Wollstonecraft's prospective endings has Maria's daughter alive, Henry out of the picture, and Jemima at Maria's side (significantly, as her servant). This ending seems to posit a bourgeois maternal all-woman utopia (complete with a female maid) as the only hope for women's freedom from patriarchy. Sensibility is

safe, as long as it is practised within a community of women (although it is not entirely safe for the female servant, whose position of inferiority seems to be naturalized). This seems to suggest that it is men (or at least the patriarchal structure of marriage that invests men with so much power) who make sensibility dangerous for women. At any rate, Maria was not finished and we have no way of knowing how serious Wollstonecraft was about that particular ending. All we can safely say about that ending is that it indicates that Wollstonecraft did have some hope for (middle-class) women's escape from the madhouse. If Wrongs is an extended metaphor, then its message may be "I can't get out -- yet." It is up to Wollstonecraft's readers to listen to the bird and to let it out.

Readers, I think, are Wollstonecraft's key to social change. (This is not so apparent in Mary as it is in Maria, I think, because social change does not become part of Wollstonecraft's agenda until after the storming of the Bastille.) A lot rides on how Maria's daughter, if she is alive, will respond to her mother's memoir. Maria's one chance at institutionally sanctioned freedom, her letter to the judge presiding over Henry's adultery trial, hinges on how the judge reads. Unfortunately for Maria, the judge is not swayed by sentimental arguments, though he does have a very Burkean way of looking at the world. He says that:

he had always determined to oppose all innovation, and

the new-fangled notions which incroached on the good old rules of conduct ... [I]f 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.

(198-99)

The judge seems to deny women both feelings and reason. Women are not capable of picking their own proper mates, and they cannot get out of their marriages just because they feel badly about their husbands. The judge goes on to say that he could read the law in her favour, but he prefers not to, because he thinks that she has so brazenly subverted the institution of marriage. A notable difference between Wollstonecraft's two novels is that Mary does not actively subvert the institution of marriage: she does not have sex with Henry and she does not attempt to divorce her husband.

The power of the law is really the power of the reader, not of the text. Wollstonecraft also makes this clear in her review of A View of England towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century, in which she praises the author for noticing "The theoretical excellencies which exalt, and the flaws in practice that disgrace, our respectable

constitution..." (Wollstonecraft 1989 7:339). The constitution, which forms the basis of Burke's argument for the maintenance of the status quo, is not oppressive in itself, it is merely misused; that is to say, the constitution is misread.

Some readers are very powerful: the judge and the interpreters of the constitution, for example. These men shape people's lives by the ways in which they read texts that other men wrote. A very large part of Wollstonecraft's project was, I think, to empower a group of readers whom she perceived as relatively powerless: the young women who were being influenced by sentimental novels.

## CHAPTER THREE

## Peeps Behind the Curtain: Wollstonecraft's Reviews

Imagine a school gymnasium with plastic chairs arranged in rows, and a long table and podium set up at the front of the gym, facing the chairs. Occupying the chairs are the concerned parents of the adolescents who attend the school which houses the gym. At the front sit the teachers whose responsibility it is to keep those adolescents productively occupied during weekdays. A woman stands up at the back of the room. She loudly and clearly (with just a hint of emotion) proclaims, regarding the novel which her daughter came home with last week:

it may be made a question, whether such lively pictures are not more calculated to render those romantic or vicious, who have not sufficient strength of mind, or greatness of soul, to acquire a governing passion for virtue, than to excite that delicacy to sentiment, which, in sanguine minds, serves as a substitute for principles. (From Wollstonecraft's review of Laura; or original Letters. In two Volumes. A Sequel to the Eloisa of J.J. Rousseau, reviewed in August, 1790

[7:283])

This is how I imagine the persona that Wollstonecraft creates in her articles in the Analytical Review. It is as if her forum is a PTA meeting in which she engages with

fellow parents and educators on the topic of the education of adolescents, particularly what they are reading.

Wollstonecraft's persona speaks very much like a mother who is concerned with what and how her adolescent children (especially her daughters) are reading, and how their reading will eventually affect their operations in the world.

Wollstonecraft's concerns with women's reading are intertwined with her concerns with education. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman contains one chapter entitled "On National Education"; and observations and recommendations regarding the education of young women appear throughout the rest of the book. Wollstonecraft also wrote a book entitled Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787), in which she outlined a pedagogical practice specifically designed for young women. The subtitle of Thoughts is "With Reflections on Female Conduct, In The more important Duties of Life," and the book contains a chapter on reading. The books that young women read compose a portion of their education; Wollstonecraft's concern with what and how women read is at least partly pedagogical.

Wollstonecraft's persona promotes, and is defined by, her agenda. The concerns that Wollstonecraft explicitly states in her novels and her two vindications also appear in her reviews of novels in the Analytical Review. At least one Wollstonecraft critic, Ralph M. Wardle, does not



recognize a political significance in Wollstonecraft's reviews. In his "Mary Wollstonecraft, Analytical Reviewer" (written in 1947), he says that in her early days as a reviewer, "she held her peace on controversial topics and went about her dreary job of berating the nonsense and affectation of the new novels and verse" (1006). He asserts that her political engagement increases as she writes more reviews. He later comments, in a footnote, that "Mary's deepening of critical perception seems hardly to have affected her reviews of novels" and that "she was content with common sense criticism, lamenting the possible effect of novels on young lady readers..." (1008 n). Wardle's comments seem to imply that the reading and reviewing of novels cannot be an overtly political act or translate into one. At the very least he does not recognize anything political in Wollstonecraft's reviews of novels, even in her concern for how novels affect young women.

I vehemently disagree: Wollstonecraft's reviews of novels are at least as powerful as political statements as many of her comments on political treatises or educational tracts. Wollstonecraft, in her reviews of novels, very clearly positions herself in relation to what she is reading, who is reading both the novels and the reviews, and her society as a whole. That is, Wollstonecraft positions herself as a maternal educator, offering herself up as an example for young women readers, and attempting to influence

those who decide what those readers will have access to. For Wollstonecraft this is a political act, as it is precisely the dominant culture's active positioning of the reader (the female reader of the sentimental novel) that she sees as the political issue at stake. As a female reader, writer, and critic of (among many other genres) sentimental novels, Wollstonecraft resists the position offered to women readers, and offers as an ideal or model her own self-construction as a confident maternal reader and critic. Mitzi Myers refers to Wollstonecraft's writing persona, in the Analytical Review and elsewhere, as maternal, and asserts that Wollstonecraft's maternal persona is meant as an example for young women to follow: "Wollstonecraft as critic assumes a maternal stance toward the imagined girl readers of the fictions she considers, her textual self-construction offering an educative example of the integration she desires" (Myers, "Sensibility" 121).

Unfortunately, it is not likely that many female readers of sentimental novels actually read the Analytical Review, so that if Wollstonecraft intended to offer herself up as a model to young female readers, she would not reach very many members of her intended audience. The reviews were most likely read by the people (parents, teachers) who were in control of what young women were reading.<sup>9</sup> Also, the writers of the books that she reviewed would undoubtedly take an interest in what was said about their productions.

Often Wollstonecraft's matronly persona overtly confronts these writers, as I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

To start with I should acknowledge that Wollstonecraft does not ever identify herself positively as a woman in her reviews (in fact, it has not yet been proven which reviews are hers),<sup>10</sup> although she does identify herself as a strong advocate for reform in women's education and in women's role in British society. In other words, Wollstonecraft does identify herself as a feminist (in so far as she consistently articulates the opinion that women should be allowed a more useful education and a more active role in society. I am not suggesting that Wollstonecraft ever referred to herself as a feminist; according to the OED the word "feminist" did not enter the English lexicon until 1895). Wollstonecraft could not, I suspect, identify herself overtly at all, working in the genre of the review in the late eighteenth century. The vogue for explicitly defining one's subject position is, I believe, only a recent phenomenon. The kind of self-positioning that I am discussing here is that which occurs just beneath the level of explicit declaration. I am going to draw inferences about the position of the writer of the reviews that have been attributed to Mary Wollstonecraft based on what that writer says about the books she's reviewing, their intended audience, their intended effect on that audience, and their

effect on her.

First, to address the issues that Ralph M. Wardle sees as the "gist" of Wollstonecraft's reviews of novels. He says that earlier on her reviewing role was that of "berating the nonsense and affectation of the new novels and verse" (1006). This suggests that Wollstonecraft was dismissive of novels. He also says that later Wollstonecraft does nothing more than lament "the possible effect of novels on young lady readers..." (1008). Given Wollstonecraft's well articulated views on the negative effect of novels on women (as in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 116), I would hardly characterize Wollstonecraft's laments concerning the female readership of novels as dismissive. Nor would it be possible to argue that Wollstonecraft progressed from dismissing novels to being wary of them, as the first review that is attributed to her says a great deal about the effect of novels on young women. At any rate, even if we assume that Wardle's assessment of Wollstonecraft's reviews of novels is sound, we should also recognize that her apparent dismissal and wariness of novels both position her in particular ways. First, it is evident that Wollstonecraft does not enjoy reading sentimental novels. She is not a typical novel reader and she is very careful to point this out to the readers of the Analytical Review. Second, her willingness to display concern over what young women read, what else they could be reading, and

what else they could be doing with their time, positions Wollstonecraft as a kind of cultural guard or matron. Wollstonecraft positions her reviewing persona as a person with authority (no mere reader of novels) and as a person who has an interest in what people with less authority are reading.

Wollstonecraft makes her opinion of novels very clear on several occasions. At one point she refers to novels as "those mis-shapen monsters" (7: 20) and later she complains of having "lately perused so many bad novels" (7: 154). She says of Clarentine. A Novel (written by Sarah Harriet Burney, Frances Burney's half sister; reviewed in October, 1796),

The good sense and humour scattered through these volumes made to lament their prolixity; yet we recommend them to the perusal of our young female readers, whose patience is not as often put to the proof, in this way, as that of poor reviewers, condemned to read through dulness, perched on their eyelids, invites to sleep or forgetfulness. (7: 475)

Here Wollstonecraft doubly distances herself from the young female readers of novels. She claims that this novel is too boring for her, but it will do fine for young female readers. By naming "young female readers," and by doing so in opposition to her taste, she positions herself as anything but a young female reader.

Later in the review of Clarentine, she says that this novel "will afford harmless amusement" (7: 475). She often comments on the harm or lack thereof that a novel may inflict on young readers in general or on young women in particular. In the first review that is attributed to her, that of Edward and Harriet, or the Happy Recovery (reviewed in June, 1788), Wollstonecraft lists some of the harmful effects that sentimental novels may have on women. She says

ridicule should direct its shafts against this fair game, and, if possible, deter the thoughtless from imbibing the wildest notions, the most pernicious prejudices; prejudices which influence the conduct, and spread insipidity over social converse. (7: 19)

Wollstonecraft positions herself as one who does not "imbibe" and also as one who wishes to shield the thoughtless sponges from absorbing. The harm that Wollstonecraft recognizes here will affect individuals and then society as a whole; it will affect the ways in which people interact with each other, because it will cause "the thoughtless," i.e., those lacking in reason, to ingest prejudices and then apply them to everyday interactions. Wollstonecraft recognizes a ripple effect here. The reading situation involves not only the reader and the writer, but also everyone who has contact with the reader (and there are many readers).

Wollstonecraft also shows a concern, in this review,

for how the novel prescribes behaviour. She speaks of "romantic" women who "boast of being tremblingly alive all o'er, and faint and sigh as the novelist informs them they should" (7: 19); then

the moderate enjoyments of life are despised, and its duties neglected; the imagination, suffered to stray beyond the utmost verge of probability, where no vestige of nature appears, soon shuts out reason, and the dormant faculties languish for want of cultivation; as rational books are neglected, because they do not throw the mind into an exquisite tumult. The mischief does not stop here; the heart is deprived when it is supposed to be refined, and it is a great chance but false sentiment leads to sensuality, and vague fabricated feelings supply the place of principles.

(7: 19)

Wollstonecraft is concerned that as a result of novel reading "duties" will be "neglected," the imagination will get the better of reason, women who read novels will not read "rational books," and women's hearts will be artificially constructed, displacing real feelings and "principles." This, having been written in June, 1788, falls just short of Wollstonecraft's main concerns in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in which she adds that once women gain reason through a proper education they will be able to contribute to the world in the same productive

ways that men do.

Wollstonecraft positions herself as someone with something to gain by the intellectual emancipation of British women, and simultaneously represents herself, in her reviews, as already emancipated. This complicated situation arises out of her particular concerns and her position as reviewer. As a reviewer her opinion carries a certain amount of weight; she has authority that she would not have if she were the ideal woman of sensibility, panting after the latest novel. Her authority comes from the genre she is writing in and all that is implied by it: knowledge, wisdom, objectivity, etc., the last of which is supposedly enforced by the anonymity of the review. If Wollstonecraft expects her reviews to have any effect in the reading community (and presumably she wrote them to have some effect), then she has to assume that she writes with the authority of one presumed to have reason, on behalf of those presumed not to have adequate reason. Wollstonecraft's reviews assume and reinforce an unequal power relationship working in the interests of an egalitarian system. This is not as paradoxical as I have made it sound.

Timothy J. Reiss argues that Wollstonecraft "always emphasized the desire for equality [with men], not power" (45). Wollstonecraft did not want to stage a coup; she wanted to see women and men acting as equals in the existing system. If Wollstonecraft herself professes to be seeking



equality, not power, the equality that she seeks will only be achieved by a shift in power. Since women do not yet have the power, Wollstonecraft's aim was to convince those with power to give some of that up. Reiss argues,

Wollstonecraft was asserting women's right to catch up with men, in the same manner as Tom Paine (for example) argued that the enfranchisement of the dispossessed--whether colonials, the poor, or the aged--must catch up with that of the proprietors. It was, always, a matter of the right to participate in the system, not of the need to change it. (21)

As the matronly reviewer, Wollstonecraft assumed a position within the system (acquired by right of her "genderless" anonymity and her proclivity for rational argument). I think that her project may have been to change the system, contrary to what Reiss asserts, and that she intended to do so from within, in such a way that those who wielded power would participate freely and reasonably in a redistribution of that power. This gets much more complicated if we recall Foucault's argument (see page 17) about how even the dominated have some power, which they unwittingly use to perpetuate their own domination.

I believe that Wollstonecraft would agree with Foucault. In A Vindication of the Rights of Woman she shows an understanding of how, when offered power, women can be made to participate in their own domination:

the regal homage which [women] receive is so intoxicating, that until the manners of the times are changed, and formed on more reasonable principles, it may be impossible to convince them that the illegitimate power which they obtain by degrading themselves is a curse, and that they must return to nature and equality if they wish to secure the placid satisfaction that unsophisticated affections impart.

(103)

Wollstonecraft makes it very clear here that the system ("the manners of the times") must change before women may realize the natural equality with men that is their due. On the other hand, she also recognizes women's role in perpetuating the system which oppresses them. Women seek the "regal homage" and the "illegitimate power" which they may gain only "by degrading themselves." What is implied here, I think, is that women do have the power to alter their own roles within the system. However, they have to "return to nature and equality"; that is, women must stop gleefully participating in that which is artificial, "the manners of the times" (presumably including sentimental novels) which are imposed by forces that do not operate in the interests of women.

It is not difficult to see, in Wollstonecraft's reviews, an awareness of the ways in which women, in their relationships to each other within the literary system, act

as agents of misogyny. Wollstonecraft frequently admonishes the female writers of the novels that she reviews. In her review of Juliet: or, The Cottager (reviewed in March, 1789), she laments that so many female writers imitate Frances Burney's novels: "A varied combination of the same events has been adopted, and like timid sheep, the lady authors jump over the hedge one after the other, and do not dream of deviating either to the right or the left" (7: 92). Of course, since Wollstonecraft has such an aversion to novels and to imitation, she hates imitations of novels. The writer of Juliet also had to be a reader of Burney's novels, if she was consciously to have imitated them. Burney, then, is herself somewhat of a mentor, though only a surface one. In this scenario, Burney's novels have not taught their female readers/writers enough that they would be able to deviate from the stock characters and situations therein; rather, they only blindly imitate. This is consistent with Wollstonecraft's fears about how novels will affect readers generally, except now the danger has a broader scope. Some of Burney's readers go on to write their own sentimental, Burney-esque novels, whose readers write their own novels, etc. We are no longer discussing a comfortably contained situation in which one woman writes and a few more read; we are now talking about a situation with a nation-wide (at least in literate circles) scope.

Wollstonecraft certainly believes that novels written

by women are more dangerous to female readers than those written by men. In her review of The Bastile: or History of Charles Townly (reviewed in June, 1789), she writes:

It may sound like high treason to our fair readers, yet truth compels us to declare that we open a novel with a degree of pleasure, when written by a lady, is not inserted in the title page; it is almost needless to premise, that we allude to the flock of novelists who ... mislead the ignorant whom they have not abilities to improve, and catch the wandering eye that is seldom employed; nay, scarcely able to discriminate. (7: 121)

What is most interesting about this statement is that it is made about a novel that does not have "written by a lady" inscribed on its title page. This review follows two reviews of books that do follow this description.

Apparently Wollstonecraft is still so steamed from writing those previous reviews that her reflections carry over into this one. The rest of the review of Charles Townly is mainly positive, and shows that what she says about novels that declare they were "written by a lady" does not apply to The Bastile. Wollstonecraft, then, believes so strongly that women's novels are generally more dangerous than men's that this opinion pops up out of context.

Another interesting attribute of the above quotation is the responsibility that Wollstonecraft places squarely on the shoulders of the writer (female in the context of the

passage). Women of letters "mislead the ignorant whom they have not abilities to improve." In other words, female novelists are capable of creating harm, but do not possess the ability to do any good for their readers. This all assumes that relative harm or good caused by a novel to a set of readers is the author's responsibility. It shows that Wollstonecraft believes that women are doing a great deal of damage to one another. When considered in conjunction with other passages studied in this chapter, it shows that such damage is rooted in a system in which women write trash for other women who either write more trash or at least are affected profoundly in their social interactions. The reason women write trash is that they read nothing but trash; therefore they do not develop their reason and they are incapable of producing works that help their readers to develop reason. It seems like a vicious cycle. That is probably why Wollstonecraft did so much to protest it publicly in her reviews and elsewhere.

In other reviews Wollstonecraft makes her concern for the responsibility of female novelists even more explicit. In her review of Charlotte Smith's Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake (reviewed in December, 1789), Wollstonecraft says: "we cannot help wishing that Mrs. S. had considered how many females might probably read her pleasing production, whose minds are in a ductile state; she would not then have cherished their delicacy, or, more properly

speaking, weakness..." (7: 189). Here she specifically targets Smith, accusing her of not considering her audience. One may ask, why should Charlotte Smith care who reads her books? Of course Wollstonecraft would answer, "because she is a woman who is doing harm to women." It was fairly common in the late eighteenth century to be concerned about the effects of novels on their readers, but what makes Wollstonecraft's concerns distinct is the gendered context of her concern, and how she reads a systemic agenda behind this influence.

In her review of Elizabeth Inchbald's A Simple Story (reviewed in May, 1791), she presents a more generalized critique of women writers, and in doing so, shows a recognition of a systemic agenda in which women participate. She asks:

Why do all female writers, even when they display their abilities, always give a sanction to the libertine reveries of men? Why do they poison the minds of their own sex, by strengthening a male prejudice that makes women systematically weak? (7: 370)

Wollstonecraft really gets to the heart of the matter here. These questions are rhetorical; no answer is offered. They assert more than they question. Sentimental novels are an important part of the system which restricts the achievements of women, and women are participating in that system. Whether or not Wollstonecraft really wants to know

why this is the case, it is apparent that she wants to change it. We do not have to read her Vindication of the Rights of Woman to figure this out; it is right there in Wollstonecraft's reviews.

At any rate, Wollstonecraft alerts her Analytical readers to a very interesting and perplexing problem: women's participation in their own oppression. This is a puzzle that continues to bewilder theorists in the twentieth century. Why is it that disenfranchised groups will act (collectively and as individual members) against the interests of their own groups by facilitating the perpetuation of their own oppression?

Wollstonecraft offers a tentative answer in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in a passage that I have already quoted: "the regal homage which [women] receive is so intoxicating" that women are unwilling to give it up (103). That is not to say that women are solely responsible for their own subjugation; to the above passage Wollstonecraft adds:

But for this epoch [when women no longer have to please men] we must wait--wait perhaps till kings and nobles, enlightened by reason, and, preferring the real dignity of man to childish state, throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings; and if then women do not resign the arbitrary power of beauty--they will prove that they have less mind than men. (103)

Women receive "regal homage" by conforming to men's ideas of female beauty (weakness, frailty, etc.). The power that they gain from beauty is arbitrary because it depends upon the male beholders; men may refrain from bestowing the power of beauty on women. This passage seems to suggest that women will have to wait until men decide that they would like women to be intelligent and reasonable. On the other hand, that very suggestion seems to be a bit of a jest, something like a dare: if men will deign to appreciate women as rational beings with dignity, then women should follow suit and become those beings. If women do not follow through, then men have been right all along. The serious side to this jest is that Wollstonecraft seems to be daring women to take responsibility for changes in their own social conditions. Perhaps women have hereditary trappings that they, too, could cast off. If this is the case, then one of the trappings that must go is the overworked overimitated discourse of the sentimental novel.

Some of Wollstonecraft's concerns about the dangers of novels are expressed in aesthetic terms. She finds well-written, interesting novels to be more dangerous than poorly written boring ones. In her review of Laura; or original Letters (a sequel to Rousseau's Eloisa; reviewed in August, 1790), Wollstonecraft says "neither poetry nor painting, music or eloquence, have much power over the passions, to move them to virtuous or vicious exertions, if they are not



natural and excellent"; because this novel is "sheltered under a great name [Rousseau], it may be read by young people, who will be hurt by the perusal, if they are not disgusted" (7: 283, 284). It seems that Wollstonecraft is saying once again that unless the reader can secure a critical distance from what s/he is reading (characterized in this instance as "disgust") then that reader will be harmed.

As far as Wollstonecraft's ongoing concern about young female readers goes, she demonstrates an apprehension regarding their taste for sentimental discourse (a discourse that carries with it its own aesthetic). She says that Mount Pelham. A Novel (reviewed in February, 1789) employs "the varnish of sentiment to hide sensuality" (7: 83). Later, she says of Zelia in the Desert (reviewed in June, 1789),

we cannot recommend this book ... to the perusal of these [sic] who would otherwise have found it very amusing, as we do not wish our fair countrywomen to imbibe such overstrained notions of love; the two extremes too frequently meet, and the grossest sensuality often lies concealed under double refined sentiments. (7: 118)

The attractive, stylish, sentimental discourse acts as a veil for the presumed immoral sensuality. Young female readers are likely, Wollstonecraft assumes, to "imbibe" the

sensual along with the sentimental. Note that Wollstonecraft is in a position to see through or behind the veil, and that she assumes that most young women are not in such a position. Wollstonecraft reads the signifier (sentimental text) and recognizes an invisible yet elided signified (sensuality). Young women, on the other hand, read only the signifier and are unaware (supposedly) of anything dangerous lurking beneath the shimmering surface. It is as if sentimental novels of this type are allegories that Wollstonecraft has the key to and most young women do not. Young women, then, read sentimental discourse uncritically, causing their minds to absorb a lot of hidden baggage which can affect them physically (inducing sensuality). Thus sentimental text can have a damaging corporeal effect on women which, as we know from our study of Maria in the first chapter of this thesis, extends to women's particularly restrictive construction as social beings. The fact that Wollstonecraft presents herself as not being one of those affected women (in more than one sense, of course) carries enormous political significance, because she shows, just by writing about what she reads, that it is possible for a woman to escape the trap. Women do not have to imbibe sensuality: it is possible to resist. In addition, Wollstonecraft's reviews of sentimental novels offer an example of how this is to be done.

Wollstonecraft recognizes that even the untrained young

mind's aesthetic sense (expressed as a kind of preference, rather than as refined taste) may be used to shape that mind. She says, in her review of Le petit Sorcier; or, the little Wizard (reviewed in January, 1792), "The tricks designed to amuse youth, should always insinuate instruction and exercise the faculties, or the play is a mere waste of time..." (7: 415). The word "designed" strongly suggests a calculated purpose in the writing that Wollstonecraft is alluding to; writers may trick young readers into learning a particular set of values, if they wish. It is interesting that Wollstonecraft does not mention here any harm or danger as the other side of the amusing tricks; she only says that they could be a waste of time. The focus here, then, is in the potential to use that which may be damaging (the amusing tricks) in a constructive way: that is, use a fight-fire-with-fire approach.

If she recognizes any such writing (i.e., that which uses the master's tools to attempt to dismantle his house<sup>11</sup>) as actively resistant, she does not say so explicitly in her reviews. She does, however, recognize the social benefits of such efforts. She says that The Poor Soldier; an American Tale (reviewed in March, 1789)

particularly merits the attention of young people, as the tears, the perusal will scarcely fail to draw, are such as a human creature ought to shed, and not the pumped up effusions of false sensibility: every

production that tends to awaken the opening mind to a sense of real woe is a public benefit, as a feed [sic] of active virtue thus sown by chance, may extend its benign branches and shade many a wretch from misery.

(7: 95-6)

The potential benefits of this text are presented as accidental; they are "sown by chance," not deliberately cultivated. They are also "public benefits" because the sentiments in the text will spur a reader to pursue actively benevolent endeavours. The reader will not be aware, however, of this coercion: the virtue that is instilled in the reader will express itself benignly. The potential public good that can arise from sentimental literature, then, operates as insidiously as the potential corruption.

Good sentimental literature is not contrived to be morally appealing; it just naturally turns out that way if the author herself is on stable moral ground. In her review of Helen Maria Williams' Julia, A Novel, Wollstonecraft says of the author:

her mind does not seem to be debauched ... by reading novels; but every sentiment is uttered in an original way, which proves that it comes directly from her heart with the artless energy of feeling, that rather wishes to be understood than admired. Without any acquaintance with Miss W. only from the perusal of this production, we should venture to affirm, that sound

principles animate her conduct, and that the sentiments they dictate are the pillars instead of being the fanciful ornaments of her character. (7: 252)

I suspect that Wollstonecraft would not be one of Wimsatt's biggest fans, if she had been around to read his work. According to Wollstonecraft, here is a female author who has shuffled off the trappings of flashy sentiment and has depicted the real stuff: "it comes directly from her heart with the artless energy of feeling." Not only is Williams's novel morally acceptable, but it is also aesthetically pleasing to the critic who is tired of imitation: "every sentiment is uttered in an original way." Williams's novel is so well written that she herself must be a good person; she is a good person because she has not been "debauched" by reading novels.

Of course, when Wollstonecraft says "novels" here, she must be referring to "the generality of those mis-shapen monsters,"<sup>12</sup> of which Julia is not a member; Julia itself is a novel, and it is apparent that Wollstonecraft does not believe anyone would be debauched by reading it. It is the "artlessness" of this novel, the lack of "fanciful ornaments," that sets it apart from the "mis-shapen monsters." Julia is not just a bunch of words thrown together, designed to make its female readers work themselves up into a sentimental frenzy; rather, it is a "natural" representation (this is paradoxical, of course) of

the author's true sentiments.

Here we get a glimpse of Wollstonecraft the Romantic (as in the literary movement characterized by Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, et al.), who, in her posthumously published essay, "On Poetry," asserted that "The poet, the man of strong feelings, gives us only an image of his mind, when he was actually alone, conversing with himself, and marking the impression which nature had made on his own heart" (7: 8). Poetry is the reproduction of an inscription made upon the poet's heart by nature. Remember that, according to Wollstonecraft, Williams's sentiments come "directly from her heart with the artless energy of feeling." The pumped up discourse of the typical sentimental novel is discordant with the direct transfer of natural sentiments. In a passage regarding overworked language, Wollstonecraft says: "The silken wings of fancy are shrivelled by rules; and a desire of attaining elegance of diction, occasions an attention to words, incompatible with sublime, impassioned thoughts" (7: 9). The language of the typical sentimental novel, too, requires an inordinate "attention to words."

In her review of Elizabeth Norman's Child of Woe (reviewed in February, 1989), Wollstonecraft describes the typical sentimental novel in stylistic terms:

Unnatural 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, to adorn the celestial body, (these descriptions cannot be too minute) should never be forgotten in a book intended to amuse the fair. (7: 82)

Wollstonecraft's sarcastic tone masks fear, I think. She adds, "This account will be a just one of ninety-nine novels out of a hundred..." (7: 82); ie., of most novels written in imitation of this "affected" style, the purpose of which is to "amuse the fair." Once again, Wollstonecraft recognizes the scope of her project: most novels perpetuate values that Wollstonecraft finds dangerous to women. If Wollstonecraft had it her way, novelists would write more "naturally"; they would directly convey their own feelings to their readers in an unaffected language. The implication here is that if a novelist writes in an original unaffected way, as a good poet does, "he gives us only an image of his mind, when he was actually alone, conversing with himself"; that is, the author's "self" will be the distinguishing factor in the text. Because the text will emanate unmediated from an "individual self," the words in that text will convey original and natural sentiments, unadorned with rules and customs which restrict and reconstruct the "message" of the text.

This argument corresponds well to Wollstonecraft's broader revolutionary argument in A Vindication of the Rights of Men. In his Reflections, Burke refers to titles

and hereditary property as a kind of clothing over power: "All the pleasing illusions which made power gentle...are to be dissolved.... All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off" (87). Far from finding such drapery pleasing or necessary, Wollstonecraft sees it as something that reason must remove in order to expose virtue. In reference to the National Assembly that divested Louis XVI of his royal title, she says, "reason led them to respect the naked dignity of virtue" (Rights of Men 49). Like "the decent drapery of life," the affected language of sentiment obscures the lack of virtue underneath. Affectation and what Wollstonecraft describes in Rights of Men as "unnatural customs" (8) act as substitutes for what really should govern people's behaviour: virtue. Virtue is acquired through reason,<sup>13</sup> and reason is exactly what women are missing out on in the average sentimental novel.

Is sentiment to be discarded? Not necessarily. Wollstonecraft's reviews of Julia and The Poor Soldier indicate that she saw something redeeming in sentimental fiction. What she most despised was the affectation of sentimental discourse that somehow caused readers to internalize affectation, mistaking it (because their ability to reason is impaired by reading such nonsense) for reality. Mitzi Myers characterizes the discourse of sensibility as "overwrought language and [a] behavioral code of extreme emotional responsiveness--a submission to forces outside of



the self that romanticizes passivity" ("Sensibility" 121). Wollstonecraft wanted female novel readers to be able to actively resist such forces, as she did herself in her persona as reviewer. In Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, Wollstonecraft warns that "Those productions which give a wrong account of the human passions, and the various accidents of life, ought not to be read before the judgment is formed..." (4: 20). Wollstonecraft wanted young female readers to be capable of protecting themselves (their "selves") from the discursive forces which worked best upon passive recipients of sentimental rubbish.

This appeal to the self is a compelling argument, really (however easily it is deconstructed with the rhetoric of twentieth-century post-structuralist theory). If only novelists (particularly women) could shed their ornamental language (for that ornamental language carries with it baggage which acts only in the interests of patriarchy), then women readers would be encouraged to follow suit. If only readers could shed their taste for sentimental ornament, they would stop swallowing whole the dominant ideology which has been oppressing them and causing them to oppress themselves. The end result would be a large number of women who have been unaffected by sentimental ornament: they would be "natural"; therefore they would be capable of exercising reason and operating in the world on an equal level with men.

How does one convey such a message to the world without incurring the wrath of conservative authority figures (both men and women)? I propose that Wollstonecraft's rational mother persona was deliberately constructed in order to provide an acceptable voice from which these ideas could come. The forum of the Analytical Review would assist Wollstonecraft to reach authority figures (parents, teachers, writers) as a figure who is also invested with authority. She projects a perfectly reasonable, intelligent and active reader, who is "naturally" concerned with the ways in which young people (especially women) are being molded by the material that they read. Wollstonecraft naturalizes these concerns: she makes it appear very reasonable and natural that one should be worried about how young women are being constructed. After all, sentimental novels interfere with women's natural function, motherhood. When Wollstonecraft says (as she does often) that the perusal of most sentimental fiction causes "duties [to be] neglected,"<sup>14</sup> she is, more often than not, referring to the duties of a wife and mother. In her Rights of Woman she argues that "men are unwilling to place women in situations proper to enable them to acquire sufficient understanding to know how even to nurse their babes.... The weakness of the mother will be visited on the children" (297-98). The social implications of improperly educating women (which includes the reading of too many sentimental novels) cross

gender lines, here. Roughly half of the children who will be improperly brought up by badly educated women are boys who will be, one day, men.

Wollstonecraft's PTA persona aims, I think, to persuade parents, teachers, and writers that their actions (that is, the choice of materials that they endorse and or produce for young women) will have a profound effect not only on the young women who read, but on society as a whole.

Wollstonecraft's articles on novels in the Analytical Review are neither dismissive, nor are they to be dismissed.

Wollstonecraft may herself refer to her comments as "peeps behind the curtain,"<sup>15</sup> but her peeps are meant to expose and destroy the artifice that, as she sees it, renders one half of the human race useless.

Wollstonecraft's concern with cultural products and their effects on uncritical consumers did not die with her. Cultural Studies has become, in the last twenty years or so, an established area of analysis. We have also seen a fair amount of cultural revision, as in the Barbie Liberation Organization's efforts. I think that Wollstonecraft's articles in the Analytical Review prefigure the former mode of cultural critique, while her novels prefigure the latter. It is as if Wollstonecraft wished to cover all the bases: argue (to those in power) for a better education for women, and produce novels for those women who still have not had

access to such an education.

If Wollstonecraft was alive today, I suspect that she would be shocked. Women are being educated much more on a level with men now, but we are far from being treated equally in all areas of social interaction. The fact that affirmative action policies are still necessary and still disputed in the 1990's is one indicator that feminism still has a long way to go before we no longer have a use for the word.

Wollstonecraft's efforts did not more or less instantly make the world a better place for women. She did, however, help to pave the way for other feminists and cultural critics to analyze culture as more than a mere reflection of dominant ideology: culture also operates to reinforce ideology. When Barbie says she "can't do math," she repeats and reinscribes a particularly restrictive gender prejudice. She speaks for and to the next generation of women. Just as Wollstonecraft speaks back to the discourse of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel, the BLO speaks back to Barbie; just as Wollstonecraft offers an alternative sentimental discourse, the BLO offers Barbie a new voice. And the dialogue continues...

## Endnotes

1. Timothy J. Reiss points out, "By 1792, when Mary Wollstonecraft published what has been called the manifesto of modern feminism, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, most of its principal arguments had been aired for a good three centuries or more" (11).

2. "Feminism" is, of course, a very complicated word. I am aware of the multiplicities of feminism(s), and that it is not enough to say "I am a feminist." When I refer to Wollstonecraft as a feminist, I mean that she actively pursued the empowerment of women in her time. For her that meant working toward equality between men and women. Some feminists today would argue that equality between the sexes cannot be achieved until a fundamental change in the structure of society (politically, economically, socially, ideologically) takes place. Their feminist agenda is inextricably bound with other emancipatory agendas (anti-racism, socialism, anti-homophobia). Although I rank myself among these feminists, I also see a great deal of value in Wollstonecraft's feminist work. She perceived an imbalance of power and acted to change it.

3. For example, Mary Poovey says "the kind of feeling that was appropriate to this genre [the sentimental novel] was precisely the kind that aborted her political purpose. For the emotionalism that had so long crippled Wollstonecraft, along with the sentimental 'structure' developed to dramatize such 'finer sensations,' were deeply implicated in the values -- indeed, the very organization -- of bourgeois society" (96).

4. All references to Wollstonecraft's work will be from the Todd and Butler edition, except those made to Mary, Maria, and the two Vindications.

5. In his "The Structuralist Activity" Roland Barthes defines structuralism as an activity, then says "The goal of all structuralist activity ... is to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the 'functions') of this object. Structure is therefore actually a simulacrum of the object, but a directed, interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object" (Contemporary Literary Criticism 171). The simulacrum may operate to expose something which had been hidden. It also may operate as a means of resistance: "the simulacrum is intellect added to object, and this addition has an anthropological value, in that it is man himself, his history, his situation, his freedom and the very resistance which nature offers to his mind" (171). Barthes is discussing literature, art, and criticism here, but I think that the principle is easily applied to a Foucauldian analysis of the relationship between the society's megastructure and individuals within it. Our bodies, as simulacra of greater structures, expose qualities of those structures, thereby offering opportunities to resist their operations.

6. Burke's Reflections are a reaction to Price's A Discourse on the Love of our Country (a published speech to the Revolution Society), in which Price argues, among other things, that "a King is no more than the first servant of the public, created by it, maintained by it, and responsible to it..." (Price 28).

7. Here and throughout the thesis I use the word "nature" carefully and ironically. Raymond Williams says, in Keywords: "Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language" (219). Williams describes "nature" as having been conceptualized as "a set of laws--the constitution of the world, or an inherent, universal, primary but also recurrent force--evident in the 'beauties of nature' and in the 'hearts of men,' teaching a singular goodness" (223). Of course what makes us Post-Romantics nervous is the universalizing, prioritizing function of the word "nature": who defines the "natural," condemning those who transgress from it to being referred to as "unnatural?" Wollstonecraft often invokes "nature" in her arguments for the equality of women, stating that such equality is "natural." Of course, Wollstonecraft is no Post-Romantic.

8. Wollstonecraft seems to associate selflessness with motherhood. In Maria, Maria wonders about her daughter: "who would watch her with a mother's tenderness, a mother's self-denial?" (75)

9. Presumably many readers had independent access to books through lending libraries, but someone had to decide what materials these libraries would acquire. Also, many women would be given or lent books by their parents and/or governesses. I think that it is these people to whom Wollstonecraft addresses herself in her reviews.

10. For the purposes of my work, I am relying heavily on the judgement and scholarship of Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, who compiled a great number of articles from the Analytical Review in the 7th volume of their edition of Wollstonecraft's works. They explain, in their "Prefatory Note" to this

works. They explain, in their "Prefatory Note" to this compilation, that they have considered Wardle's assertion that all the reviews signed 'M,' 'W' and 'T' are Wollstonecraft's, as are the unsigned reviews that precede these initialled ones. They generally agree with Wardle, despite other critics' reservations. Todd and Butler have taken into consideration biographical and thematic evidence, such as the initials that Wollstonecraft used to sign letters, and the concerns that Wollstonecraft expressed in her other works. They also looked for similar discursive patterns or constructions, as "The reviews were probably written hurriedly and it seems probable that she would use phrases and ideas employed elsewhere" (Todd and Butler, 7:17). Todd and Butler admit that it is likely that their edition contains reviews that are not written by Wollstonecraft, and they identify which ones most likely fit this description. I was careful not to use these reviews in my thesis; however, I, too, must admit that some of the reviews that I have used are perhaps not Wollstonecraft's. The integrity of my project will not be fundamentally compromised by, at most, one or two articles written by someone whose writing and thoughts are so aligned with Wollstonecraft's own.

11. Audre Lorde asserts, in her essay entitled "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" that it is impossible to use the discourse of the ruling ideology to deconstruct that ideology.

12. From Wollstonecraft's review of Henrietta of Gertensfeld, reviewed in June, 1788.



13. Wollstonecraft says, in Rights of Woman, "every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason" (102-03).

14. From Wollstonecraft's article on Charlotte Smith's Emmeline, reviewed in July, 1788 (7:26).

15. Wollstonecraft says of her comments on Agnes de Courci (reviewed in January, 1790), "Our observations may be termed peeps behind the curtain" (7:204).

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