

“Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity”: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Literary Criticism in the *Analytical Review* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

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In the summer of 1791, Mary Wollstonecraft was hard at work on *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792).¹ Both the book and the woman were something new in the world. *Rights of Woman* is arguably the founding text of feminism and Wollstonecraft was among the few women in Britain to earn a living from regular literary and journalistic work.² In 1787, at the age of 28, Mary Wollstonecraft relocated to London and began working for the publisher Joseph Johnson. Her professional duties expanded quickly. She was one of the first and most frequent contributors to Johnson’s new periodical, the *Analytical Review*. Within a year, she was writing as many as thirty reviews a month and also worked as editor, anthologist, and translator for Johnson’s enterprise. By the time *Rights of Woman* was published, Wollstonecraft had written approximately 350 reviews and short

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1989), hereafter referred to respectively as *Rights of Woman*, *Rights of Men*, and *Works*.

² See Todd, “Contributions to the *Analytical Review*,” in *Works*, 7:14–18; Caroline Franklin, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 65–69.

notices.³ Further along in her collaboration with Johnson, she commissioned new reviews and was a mentor to younger writers, most famously Mary Hays.⁴ Wollstonecraft's published works prior to *Rights of Woman* include a novel, *Mary: A Fiction* (1788); book-length translations in two languages (which she had taught herself); two conduct books, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788). She also assisted in the editing of the anthology *The Female Reader* (1789). In addition, Wollstonecraft's first overtly political work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, In a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1790), was among the earliest serious responses to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), his defense of traditional social hierarchies and the constitutional monarchy. Burke himself was the founder of and contributor to the *Annual Register*, one of the major periodicals of the late eighteenth century, and thus Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* was both a political statement and a commentary on the literary features of Burke's work.⁵ Wollstonecraft's reviews and letters around the time of *Rights of Men* make clear her concern with the public role of the literary and political commentator.⁶ Thus, Wollstonecraft's posture in *Rights of Woman* as an assertive and erudite analyst of texts and of contemporary print culture can be seen in the light of an intensive and wide-ranging literary life. Accordingly, this essay traces the critical methods and theories that Wollstonecraft had been developing in her reviews and other published work and argues that a major portion of *Rights of Woman* is structured by a set of strategically placed literary critiques.⁷

³ Todd, "Contributions," *Analytical Review*, 7:14.

⁴ See Mary Waters, *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789–1832* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 86–120; Susan Oliver, "Silencing Joseph Johnson and the *Analytical Review*," *The Wordsworth Circle* 40, no. 2/3 (2009); Butler, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 1:12.

⁵ See Jane Hodson, *Language and Revolution in Burke, Wollstonecraft, Paine, and Godwin* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007). For the pioneering study of *Rights of Men* as politicized literary criticism, see Virginia Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 196–7.

⁶ See Siv Goril Brandtzaeg, "Aversion to Imitation: The Rise of Literary Hierarchies in Eighteenth-Century Novel Reviews," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 51, no. 2 (2015): 171–85.

⁷ See Mitzi Myers, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Literary Reviews," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82–98. On the connections between the reviews and *Rights of Woman*, see Daniel O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 109–23; and Susan Wolfson, *Romantic Interactions: Social Being and the Turns of Literary Action* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 68–77.

Wollstonecraft politicizes her literary criticism in explicit ways. One of her most useful hypotheses is that while a particular text might be a reflection of an author's passions and weaknesses, these passions and weaknesses are in turn symptoms of cultural influences, which include *other* texts. In the reviews Wollstonecraft was concerned with how weaker authors imitated literary forms and fashions. In *Rights of Woman* she examines how notions of gender and identity are reproduced in literature, in scripture, and in law, influencing even the most accomplished of writers. To prove this, Wollstonecraft organized a large amount of material, which she calls "illustrations."⁸ Upon a broad canvas of over 452 pages in the corrected second edition of early 1792, Wollstonecraft closely reads and compares passages within and between books, inserts text of various lengths, places supporting material in footnotes, and creates lengthy parodies of well-known works. These techniques allow her to sustain debates with a number of authors simultaneously over the course of many pages, which was not possible within the constraints of the typical review for the *Analytical Review*.

The majority of Wollstonecraft's textual engagements are found in chapters 2 through 6, which constitute sixty percent of the total page count. In this section of the book, many writers are addressed, beginning with John Milton, followed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Gregory, the author of the widely read conduct book, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774). In Gregory's aptly titled book, the dying father bequeaths a patrimony of advice to his two young daughters. His thoughts on religion, education, friendship, and public behavior are all apparently aimed at making the young women more desirable to the proper suitors. The treatment of Milton at the start of chapter 2 of *Rights of Woman* is the template for Wollstonecraft's critical procedures. Rousseau and Gregory reappear more frequently than any other writers and are almost always associated with each other. These three writers represent different generations, different nations, and a wide range of genres (from epic poetry to the educational treatise/novel to the conduct book). In this way, Wollstonecraft can demonstrate the ubiquity of the patriarchal elements she aims to tease out and analyze, and their effect upon the socialization of women and the construction of gender. The chapter titles reflect this project. Chapter 2 is titled "The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed"; chapter 3 is "The Same Subject Continued"; chapter 4 is "The State of Degradation to which Woman is Reduced"; and chapter 5, which provides five incisive review-length sections, is titled "Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of

⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:70.

Pity.” In chapter 6, “The Effect which an Early Association of Ideas Has upon the Character,” Wollstonecraft argues that sense impressions left by texts, images, and spoken language are irresistibly grouped together in the mind, which helps to form dispositions and to some degree, a sense of identity. This is drawn from the writings of Robert Hartley, who builds upon Lockean theories of sensation. Hartley was discussed among Joseph Johnson’s circle. In 1790, Johnson republished Joseph Priestley’s edition of *Hartley’s Theory of the Human Mind on the Principle of the Association of Ideas*, and Wollstonecraft had known Priestley from the time she founded a girls’ school in the Dissenting community of Newington Green.⁹ In *Rights of Woman*, a theory of association explains the effect of texts upon young women, a common enough concern in the eighteenth century, but also explains how writers themselves are subject to the same powerful forces. This undergirds a theory of literary reproduction of cultural norms and gender identities. To sum up, chapters 2 through 5 contain a disproportionate amount of literary commentary, quotation, and allusion, while chapter 6 is the theoretical underpinning for Wollstonecraft’s procedures. Thus chapters 2 through 6 constitute a unified section within the book as a whole.

Apart from Wollstonecraft’s three primary targets, many other authors appear in *Rights of Woman*, such as Alexander Pope, Catharine Macaulay, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Madame de Staël, and a number of conduct book writers. Most of these writers had been discussed in Wollstonecraft’s reviews and appeared in the anthologies she edited as well. In *Rights of Woman*, however, they become “illustrations” of how gender norms are sustained through literary performance and reproduction. Wollstonecraft’s target texts are engaged explicitly, through her comparative analyses of quotations, and implicitly, by means of allusions that her audience would have easily recognized. In section 1 of chapter 5, excerpts from Rousseau’s *Emile* run to as many as 2,000 words and are interspersed with Wollstonecraft’s comments. This follows the pattern of the *Analytical Review*, whose proportion of commentary to quoted text was 1:4.¹⁰ In *Rights of Woman*, books are also placed in various types of groupings, itself a process which

⁹ John Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (London, 1749). For a discussion of the importance of Hartley, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 18. For Wollstonecraft at Newington, see Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Harper Collins), 40.

¹⁰ See Derek Roper, *Reviewing Before the “Edinburgh,” 1788–1802* (London: Methuen, 1978), 43.

could either indicate the highly associative nature of Wollstonecraft's mind or an intentional attempt to trace how readers would have associated texts with each other. For instance, works by Madame Genlis, Madame de Staël, and Hester Thrale Piozzi had been discussed in separate reviews, but in *Rights of Woman* they are brought together to show the influence of patriarchal writing upon even the most accomplished women.¹¹ Wollstonecraft's synthesis of disparate materials was not simply a *tour de force* by a female intellectual, but a demonstration of how a critical reading practice could contribute to political self-realization for women.

William Godwin pronounced that *Rights of Woman* was a book "deficient" in style and organization. His justification, that Mary Wollstonecraft wrote it in "six weeks," has been echoed throughout the more than two centuries since its publication in 1792, as have speculations on the author's state of mind. In the 1975 Penguin edition of *Rights of Woman*, the "apparent disorganization" of the book was attributed to the "surface rumblings of the author's repression of feeling."¹² Charges of haste and emotionality have now become less frequent. Considering the large number of thinkers, texts, and quotations coordinated by Wollstonecraft, not to mention her informed disquisitions on theology, culture, and politics, the preparation for *Rights of Woman* cannot be tallied in weeks or even months, but in years of intensive reading, writing, thinking, and producing reviews for pay.

WOLLSTONECRAFT'S LITERARY WORK FROM 1788 TO 1791

The *Analytical Review* was launched in 1788 by Joseph Johnson and Thomas Christie. Christie, a Scottish medical student and Unitarian, had been planning a periodical which would further the encyclopedic enterprise of reviewing a broad range of texts, while Johnson, already a major publisher, was seeking a vehicle for the political and social platforms of the urban "Rational Dissenters."¹³ At first, Wollstonecraft was tasked with

¹¹ Barbara Taylor explains Wollstonecraft's views on female role models in "Mother-Haters and Other Rebels," *London Review of Books* 24, no. 1 (2002): 6–10.

¹² See Miriam Brody, "Introduction," in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Brody (New York: Penguin, 1975), 70.

¹³ Joseph Johnson and Thomas Christie, *Prospectus of the Analytical Review, or a new literary journal, on an enlarged plan; containing scientific abstracts of important and interesting works* (London: J. Johnson, 1788); Gerald P. Tyson, *Joseph Johnson, a Liberal Publisher* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979), 97.

reviews of novels and conduct books. As literary historians have noted, women who were active in eighteenth-century print culture were frequently employed in the areas of advice and education literature. With Joseph Johnson's encouragement, Wollstonecraft gradually began reviewing other genres, including history, botany, theology, and politics, leaving a body of work that has not been sufficiently studied.¹⁴ When modern scholarly attention has turned to Wollstonecraft's reviews, most of the treatments have to do with her reviews of novels, but of all the reviews Wollstonecraft wrote before 1792, at most thirty percent are of fictional narrative works, including works for the theater.¹⁵ In *Rights of Woman*, to be sure, novels are implicated as a part of a gendered and debilitating regime of reading: "Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed during the time they are acquiring accomplishments."¹⁶ However, no novel of the ephemeral type she criticized in the *Analytical Review* is addressed at length, nor mentioned by name.

In eighteenth-century print culture, there was much talk of impressionable female readers and flocks of young female writers who imitated literary fads. Mitzi Myers says of the reviews, "Wollstonecraft criticizes her subjects for . . . serving as passive channels through which linguistic and cultural codes flow without resistance."¹⁷ A crucial shift occurs when we move on to *Rights of Woman*. There, it is primarily *male* authors who are susceptible to the fumes of their own passions, to the cultural contexts they were brought up in, and to the authors *they* have read. None of the hapless female writers in Wollstonecraft's reviews reappear in *Rights of Woman*, unless they are influential women. In June and July of 1789, Wollstonecraft reviewed *Observations and Reflections, made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789) by Hester Piozzi, also the author of *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (1786). Wollstonecraft opens by commenting that Piozzi's "travels are very desultory." Piozzi's travelogue is characterized by a "lax freedom" with no binding theme or uniformity of style.¹⁸ Wollstonecraft was frequently concerned with poor organization, and in Piozzi's case this is not due to mere sloppiness or haste, but to sycophancy: "The shade of Dr Johnson frequently flitted before us,

¹⁴ See Franklin, *A Literary Life*, 63–65.

¹⁵ This count is based on Janet Todd, "Contributions to the *Analytical Review*," *Works*, vol. 7, 100–101.

¹⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:130.

¹⁷ Myers, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Literary Reviews," 85.

¹⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:109.

when we perceived a reflection of his narrow superstitious notions distorted by a new medium; but Mrs P. evidently did not catch his growling petulance or propensity to contradict.”¹⁹ Piozzi is not only a “medium” for the cranky spirit of Dr Johnson; she is a particularly transparent one, either uncritical of his defects or simply ignorant of them. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft’s assessment remains essentially the same, but now set in a different context: “Mrs Piozzi who often repeated by rote what she did not understand, comes forward with Johnsonian periods.”²⁰ This is followed by an illustrative quotation from Piozzi’s *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson* (1788), as would have been the method in the reviews.

An even more substantial target is Germaine de Staël, the literary commentator, novelist, and educational writer. Wollstonecraft’s review of her *Letters on the Works and Character of JJ Rousseau* (1788) appeared in July 1789. Wollstonecraft faults de Staël for “the blind homage of ignorance to a great name,” and, as in her treatment of Piozzi, the female writer is seen as a weak and transparent medium for the thoughts of a prominent male author. She finds that de Staël merely reflects Rousseau’s great light; she is an “officious twinkler,” and Rousseau the blazing sun. Wollstonecraft embraces a contemporary theory of reader receptivity, telling us that de Staël “describes the effect his various writing produced on her own mind.” Against this allegedly passive model, Wollstonecraft presents herself as a reader capable of rational distance from the text, even when the writer is the nearly irresistible Rousseau, who exhibits “profound sagacity and paradoxical caprice, . . . fascinating eloquence and specious errors.”²¹ Wollstonecraft does not deny Rousseau’s high “literary station,” but insists that his personal faults, rather than being euphemized, ought to be frankly described, just as he himself does in the *Confessions* (1782, 1789). Even as she employs an early form of psychological criticism, Wollstonecraft maintains a distinction between the author-in-the text and the writer himself. She notes that de Staël starts off doing this, examining Rousseau’s published works as well as “the private character of their parent, deduced from his confessions and accidental information.” In other words, de Staël did some independent biographical work. The problem, apparently, is her intellectual timidity and self-consciousness, as de Staël ultimately avoids a hearty critique of both the man and his books. She desires to “steer clear of censure, while contending for a literary wreath,” in itself a biting *ad feminam* that demonstrates the boldness that de Staël ought to practice.

¹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:110.

²⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:171.

²¹ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:136.

In *Rights of Woman*, de Staël reappears as a naïve reader, “a young encomiast,” whose intelligence is clouded by Rousseau’s gallant and sensual address to women.²² Even if Wollstonecraft’s literary judgments of Piozzi and de Stael are essentially unchanged from the reviews, their *placement* in *Rights of Woman* reveals a vastly expanded social agenda. Wollstonecraft places her commentary on Piozzi, de Staël and other female writers in a late section of chapter 5, a significant placement. These women, among others in the section, are addressed only after male writers such as Milton, Rousseau, and John Gregory have been singled out for their lack of consistency, their susceptibility to emotional impulses, and their semi-conscious adherence to cultural norms. As for being a weak vessel, by this point in *Rights of Woman*, we have seen dozens of critiques of male writers who have been shown to be “followers” of earlier authors. The premier case is Gregory’s rehearsal of Rousseau’s patriarchal thinking, as we will see below.

The reviews of 1790 and 1791 show a particular concern with anthologies. This is relevant to the principles of organization in the highly intertextual *Rights of Woman*. An exemplary review is of *Woman, Sketches of the History, Genius, Disposition, Accomplishments, Employments, Customs, and Importance of the Fair Sex* (1790), by the historian John Adams. This anthology is organized chronologically and geographically, beginning with “The First Woman and her antediluvian descendants,” moving on to the women of China, Persia, and so on, followed by a number of chapters that recall contemporary conduct literature, such as “Female Friendship” and “Betrothing and Marriage.” Wollstonecraft begins with a comment about the generic category of the work: “In the strictest sense of the word, it ought to be called a compilation.”²³ The material is “thrown together” without “judgment.” Even some of the more laudable selections are not clearly identified, nor are quotations properly indicated with “inverted commas.”²⁴ Wollstonecraft concludes that Adams’s work is unsuitable for educative purposes: “Upon the whole we think it very far from being a book calculated to improve women, on the contrary, it will tend in common with novels, to render women more weak and affected;—this censure extends to the spirit of the selection.”²⁵ Wollstonecraft contends that a poor arrangement of materials is as detrimental for female readers as superficial novels. Similar comments appear in a review of *Sketches of Female Education*

²² Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:173.

²³ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:290.

²⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:291.

²⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:291.

(1791): "The selector of these sketches has not always pointed out the authors from whom he has most copiously borrowed, either by name or inverted commas."²⁶ Wollstonecraft's attention to the mechanics of compilation reflects her growing experience as writer and editor.²⁷ By this point, Wollstonecraft had edited and most likely assembled the *Female Reader* (1789), an anthology of conduct and educational literature for women patterned on William Enfield's highly successful *Speaker* (1774). In Wollstonecraft's preface to the *Female Reader*, her concern with "arrangement" is clear: "Before the publication of Dr. ENFIELD'S SPEAKER, a methodical order in the arrangement of pieces selected was not attempted, or even thought of, though it is evidently the only way to render a book of this kind extensively useful; as whatever tends to impress habits of order on the expanding mind may be reckoned the most beneficial part of education."²⁸ A loyal member of Johnson's publishing enterprise, Wollstonecraft may have been tendentious in her comments, but not mistaken about the nature of many contemporary anthologies. Barbara Benedict has pointed out that in fact, for commercial purposes, many collections were thrown together from "bales" of texts and in many cases "assembled by chance."²⁹ Wollstonecraft's ideas about the order of materials and their effect on young minds were established early on and remained consistent in her writing before the publication of *Rights of Woman*.

Wollstonecraft's ideas on the organizational principles of texts and her self-consciousness as a contemporary critic can be traced directly to the *Prospectus* of the *Analytical Review, or New Literary Journal on an Enlarged Plan* (1788), in which Johnson and Christie claim to be reviving a golden age of reviewing. The ideal commentators of the past, "while they gave their own opinions of books, did not lose sight of the necessity of enabling their readers to judge for themselves, by such accounts and extracts, as were sufficient for that purpose."³⁰ Wollstonecraft's reviews of Rousseau's *Confessions* in 1790 and 1791 are examples of this approach. In April 1790, Wollstonecraft exhorts her fellow critics to stand aside and allow the text to speak for itself: "To speak of the literary character of a man, whose works have long since received the sanction of fame, would be impertinent in a review, that rather wishes to enable the public to form its

²⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:397.

²⁷ See Franklin, *A Literary Life*, 68–69.

²⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Female Reader*, in *Works*, 4:55.

²⁹ Barbara Benedict, "The Paradox of Anthology: Collecting and *Différence* in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *New Literary History* 34, no. 2 (2003): 231–56.

³⁰ Johnson and Christie, *Prospectus*, i.

own opinion of a production, than, in a dictatorial style, to say, which is good or bad.”³¹ After a flourish of objectivity, Wollstonecraft goes on to highlight particular stylistic and organizational elements in Rousseau’s work that have eluded her contemporaries. This again follows the pattern set out in Johnson and Christie’s *Prospectus*. Her self-representation is that of an independent thinker: “People who have but one criterion of excellence, whose minds have a confined range, will ever be intolerant, equally so in religion and morality: each original must be measured by their insipid standard; and drawn into their focus, the volatile spirit, which united the mass, evaporates.”³² By “volatile spirit,” Wollstonecraft suggests that Rousseau’s narrative is organized around a series of emotional impressions. Wollstonecraft had also used this term in her review of the anthology by John Adams, in which, however, the “spirit of the selection” was seen as haphazard. In Rousseau’s *Confessions* the emotional narrative is frank and consistent throughout the text, imparting a principle of cohesion that has escaped her earnest, moralizing peers: “Without considering whether Rousseau was right or wrong, in thus exposing his weaknesses, and shewing himself just as he was, with all his imperfections on his head, to his frail fellow-creatures, it is only necessary to observe, that a description of what has actually passed in a human mind must ever be useful; yet, men who have not the power of centering seeming contradictions, will rudely laugh at inconsistencies as if they were absurdities.”³³ As a criterion for judging literary value, at least in the case of autobiography, the unvarnished representation of human flaws was not something new. Considering her frequent mentions of Samuel Johnson in the letters, reviews, and *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft must have been familiar with *Rambler* No. 60, where he writes, “I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful; . . . every man has, in the mighty mass of the world, great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate and apparent use.”³⁴ On this point, even Wollstonecraft’s friends among the Rational Dissenters, who were normally opponents of Dr. Johnson, could agree. Rousseau’s willingness to show “himself just as he was” supports the principle of self-development through

³¹ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:228.

³² Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:228.

³³ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:228.

³⁴ Samuel Johnson, “Rambler 60,” *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 7 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964): 3:320.

sincere reflection—that is, the eighteenth-century concept of “candor.” Alan Saunders has demonstrated the centrality of this concept among Rational Dissenters such as Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, who had a strong influence upon Wollstonecraft’s thinking.³⁵ Rousseau’s utter vulnerability imparts a thematic unity to the work that eludes her counterparts writing for other periodicals. To “concenter . . . seeming contradictions,” which Wollstonecraft implies she does, is to consider alternative principles of organization and literary value. Wollstonecraft’s quarrel with her peers goes beyond a difference of opinion on a particular book. She is arguing that received moral and literary standards erode intellectual alertness, and pressure other writers to follow suit. In this review, she coins a term for this kind of consensus, “the reviewer’s *phalanx*.”³⁶ However, Wollstonecraft’s complaints about imitative critical writing were not unique, as Siv Goril Brandtzaeg illustrates in a study of debates among eighteenth-century reviewers.³⁷

Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Men* shows a further evolution of her theories of literature and the public sphere, and demonstrates her extensive reading of eighteenth-century criticism and philosophy. Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was in part an attack on Richard Price’s *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789), a transcribed speech given in support of the French Revolution. Price had been a mentor for Wollstonecraft and a trusted figure among her cohort of reformists. When Burke’s *Reflections* appeared in the fall of 1790, Joseph Johnson turned to Wollstonecraft, who wrote *Rights of Men* within weeks. This pointed response to Burke was one of the earliest entries in the “Revolution Controversy,” a flurry of writings for and against the French Revolution.³⁸ Jon Klancher notes in his analysis of Thomas Paine’s own response to Burke, *Rights of Man* (1790), that the political controversy was often debated in literary terms: “Authorized by history, Burke’s book turns the Revolution into a text so that he may outstrip it as a text, overwriting the revolutionaries’ work in a superior act of authorship. Thomas Paine’s reply . . . will found radical discourse upon a radical critique of such authorship

³⁵ Alan Saunders, “The State as Highwayman: From Candour to Rights,” *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 241–71.

³⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7:228.

³⁷ Brandtzaeg, “Aversion to Imitation: The Rise of Literary Hierarchies in Eighteenth-Century Novel Reviews,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 51, no. 2 (2015): 171–86.

³⁸ See Butler, ed., *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 72.

itself.”³⁹ It is not insignificant that Paine frequented Joseph Johnson’s home, where he interacted with Wollstonecraft, nor that the books have an almost identical title. In any event, Klancher’s insight into the deployment of authorial personae is a rewarding approach to these texts, and Wollstonecraft indulged heartily in the battle of authority.⁴⁰ While the reviews for the *Analytical Review* were published with cryptic initials in place of the author’s name, Wollstonecraft had been developing a bold public persona in explicit contrast to the authors she discussed. Unlike the hapless Piozzi or the star-struck de Staël, Wollstonecraft presented herself as able to manage major authors such as Samuel Johnson and Rousseau, drawing out those elements in their work that were useful and criticizing where necessary. At the start of Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Men*, we see a stout herald of natural rights versus Burke’s affected and hyperbolic defense of privilege and rank, so stout in fact that reviewers believed the author of the first edition, which was published anonymously, was a man.⁴¹ Wollstonecraft characterizes Burke as an impressionable and effeminized reader of the “text” of the unfolding events in France, a victim of his own overheated veneration for royalty and episcopacy: “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.”⁴² We will see a similar rhetorical gesture with the three primary male authors in *Rights of Woman* whose works are deauthorized in much the same way as were female readers and writers in the eighteenth century, that is, by accusations of hyper-emotionality. At this point in her evolution as a reviewer and critic, Wollstonecraft was beginning to shift from critiques of female readers to the male writers of seminal books. It is significant that Wollstonecraft most likely began drafting *Rights of Woman* in the spring of 1791, only a few months after the publication of *Rights of Men*, which was composed in November of 1790.

Toward the end of *Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft makes it clear that

³⁹ Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 105.

⁴⁰ See Fiore Sireci, “‘Defects of Temper’: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Strategies of Self-Representation,” in *Called to Civil Existence: Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Enit Karafili Steiner (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi Press, 2013), 71–92.

⁴¹ See for instance the *Critical Review* 70 (1790): 694–96. See also Harriet Devine Jump, “Introduction,” in *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Critics 1788–2001*, ed. Jump, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 2003), 1:1–20.

⁴² Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men*, 37.

she has been conscious of the modalities of criticism she has employed: "Taking a retrospective view of my hasty answer, and casting a cursory glance over your *Reflections*, I perceive that I have not alluded to several reprehensible passages, in your elaborate work; which I marked for censure when I first perused with a steady eye. And now I find it almost impossible candidly to refute your sophisms, without quoting your own words, and putting the numerous contradictions I observed in opposition to each other."⁴³ In short, she has employed a more narrative style rather than the extensive excerpting that was typical of the reviews. Wollstonecraft, in this period of intensive political and literary work, pondered other methods of textual criticism as she planned her second treatise soon after, or perhaps as, these lines were written. In *Rights of Woman*, Milton, Rousseau, and a number of "the male writers who have followed in his steps" were subjected to the "effectual refutation" that was Burke's due.⁴⁴ As Wollstonecraft planned a work that necessarily dealt with many writers rather than one, she employed principles of organization that she discussed in her reviews of anthologies, including careful editing, an organizing "spirit" of candor and moral consistency, and strategic and comparative quotation. One year after she wrote the words above, *Rights of Woman* would be nearly complete, and in Wollstonecraft's first literary engagement, with John Milton at the start of chapter 2, these parameters would be fully in play.

JOHN MILTON IN *RIGHTS OF WOMAN*

In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's intense engagement with John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a template for the many commentaries that follow, exemplifying Wollstonecraft's use of allusion, comparative quotation, and her working assumption that a text reflects the state of mind of the author: "When he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation."⁴⁵ In attacking the patriarch of English literature and the political idol

⁴³ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Men*, 96.

⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:96.

⁴⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:88.

of her allies, Wollstonecraft once again paraphrases the Dissenters' well-known antagonist, Samuel Johnson. In *Lives of the Most Eminent Poets*, published in 1779–1781, Johnson alleged Milton's "Turkish contempt of females, as subordinate and inferior beings." This was one of many *ad hominem* attacks in Johnson's piece, which set off a literary quarrel with Francis Blackburne, a Dissenting publisher and friend of Joseph Johnson, who then wrote *Remarks on Johnson's Life of Milton, to which are added Milton's tractate of education and Areopagitica* (1780), in the hybrid form of commentary and anthology. Due to her closeness with the luminaries of Dissent such as Richard Price and Hannah Burgh, and of course Joseph Johnson, Wollstonecraft was familiar with their attitudes toward Samuel Johnson. As we have seen, at different moments in her career, she was found defending Samuel Johnson, and it would be difficult to find a clearer declaration of her intellectual independence than her comment above. The ensuing critique is more technically nuanced than most of her reviews up to this point.⁴⁶

In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft does not hesitate to criticize writers who had been and were still being published by Joseph Johnson, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld and John Gregory. The freedom with which she comments on these writers was likely due to her primacy amongst Johnson's reviewers, already a cohort with an unusual level of autonomy. Susan Oliver argues that Johnson's later prosecution and imprisonment by the Pitt administration was due to the threatening nature of an enterprise, "where the representation of literary texts resembles a *republic* of publishers, reviewers, and readers" (emphasis mine).⁴⁷ If this was the case, then Wollstonecraft's creative interrogation of a hero of Rational Dissent was not strangled in its cradle, to slightly misquote Harold Bloom. Wollstonecraft's access to the editorial apparatus of a major publisher gave her a greater freedom with format and presentation than many of her counterparts. When Wollstonecraft inserts typographical emphases over the sacred lines of *Paradise Lost*, or snips away bits of text and juxtaposes them against others, or inserts footnotes that could range from a single sentence to several pages, *Rights of Woman* becomes a visual manifestation of what a woman can do with and to books. As we have seen, Wollstonecraft writes

⁴⁶ For a survey of scholarly work on the connection between Mary Wollstonecraft and Samuel Johnson, see Kirstin Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft, Pedagogy, and the Practice of Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 162n.

⁴⁷ Oliver, "Silencing Joseph Johnson," 96; see also Anne Chandler, "The 'Seeds of Order and Taste': Wollstonecraft, the *Analytical Review*, and Critical Idiom," *European Romantic Review* 16, no. 1 (2005): 6.

in the conclusion of *Rights of Men*, that she “marked” Burke’s *Reflections* “for censure,” while she perused the text “with a steady eye,” thereby providing a clue to her working methods. In terms of textual analysis, Wollstonecraft reads Milton much more closely than did Johnson in *Lives of the Poets*, that is, down to the word. The phrase “sweet attractive grace” is a quotation from book four of *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan sees the human pair for the first time:

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valour formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him⁴⁸

Wollstonecraft is interested in the mechanism of mediation, which she appropriates from Dissenting thought and transforms into a social *and* literary criterion. Wollstonecraft’s exegetical reading is fitting for a poem that re-inscribes Scripture. For women, knowledge and political identity are usually accessed second-hand. They are forced to see through a glass darkly, but Milton apparently makes woman complicit, and self-diminishing. The typography in the original editions guides the reader’s eye to those lines in *Paradise Lost* which best demonstrate Milton’s ventriloquism:

To whom thus Eve with *perfect beauty* adorn’d.
My author and disposer, what thou bid’st
Unargued I obey; so God ordains;
God is *thy law, thou mine*: to know no more
Is woman’s *happiest* knowledge and her *praise*.⁴⁹

Modeling a *physical* interaction with books, Wollstonecraft’s emphases model the physical action of a reader underlining or circling words, in this case a female reader marking up a page. Daniel O’Neill’s comparative study of Wollstonecraft and the second US president John Adams features Adams marking up *her* text, ultimately leaving 12,000 words of commentary on his edition of *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect It Has Produced in Europe* (1794).⁵⁰

⁴⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey, Norton Critical Editions (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 4:296–99.

⁴⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:89; Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4:634–8. (Wollstonecraft’s emphases.)

⁵⁰ Daniel I. O’Neill, “John Adams Versus Mary Wollstonecraft on the French Revolution and Democracy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 3 (July 2007): 451–76.

Susan Wolfson has provided an eloquent interpretation of Milton's mediating strategies: "Eve speaks the script of Adam's text, disposed by and obedient to its Author's intention."⁵¹ Eve is doubly mediated, first through Adam, and secondly through Milton's supposedly inspired report. It is "with perfect beauty" that Eve recognizes Adam's natural authority, and to be beautiful is to be silent, or "unargued." Moreover, Eve is made to recognize her intellectual inferiority and concedes that Adam is her "law." Wollstonecraft's response appears some pages later in unequivocal language. In order for women to have unimpeded access to God, writes Wollstonecraft, "they must be permitted to turn to the fountain of light, and not [be] forced to shape their course by the twinkling of a mere satellite."⁵² Barbara Taylor points out that Wollstonecraft "invokes the Protestant imperative for direct dealing with one's Maker. If no priest may stand between creature and Creator, why should a mere man stand between a woman and her God?"⁵³ Therefore, Milton's description of Eve is "derogatory" to God, but from a literary point of view also happens to be inconsistent with other passages in the poem. Wollstonecraft is explicit about her procedure: "It would be difficult to render two passages which I now mean to contrast, consistent."⁵⁴ The first passage has characterized Eve as blithely complicit with her inferior state; in the second quoted passage, however, Milton imagines her as a rational companion to Adam. Again the reader's eye is guided by the editor's pencil:

Hast Thou not made me here Thy substitute,
 And these inferior* far beneath me set?
 Among *unequals* what society
 Can sort, what harmony or true delight?
 Which must be mutual, in proportion due
 Given and received; but in *disparity*
 The one intense, the other still remiss
 Cannot well suit with either, but soon prove
 Tedious alike; of *fellowship* I speak
 Such as I seek, fit to participate
 All rational delight—⁵⁵

⁵¹ Susan J. Wolfson, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Poets" in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 160–88, at 170.

⁵² Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:89.

⁵³ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, 105.

⁵⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:90; Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 8:381–91 (Wollstonecraft's emphases). With "these inferior," Wollstonecraft is referring to animals.

Adam is lonely among creatures who cannot reason, and it is on that basis that they are “inferior.” He asks for “fellowship.” Here Eve is conceived as an equal to Adam, a being who can participate in rational conversation, not one who obeys without argument.

In the lead up to the quotation above, Wollstonecraft declares that, “in the following lines Milton seems to coincide with me,” visualizing a debate between the enlightened female reader and the male writer. Tillotama Rajan has described such dramatized encounters in eighteenth-century commentary and fiction as “scenes of reading.”⁵⁶ In *this* scene, Wollstonecraft places herself on equal footing with the great man; she also presents him as only barely conscious of the contradictions in his own text. Wollstonecraft's staged dialogue with Milton recalls another scene of reading, Clara Reeve's *Progress of Romance* (1785), a comparative study of the novel and the romance, a frequent topic of debate in British print culture. In the *Progress of Romance*, Euphrasia, the stand-in for Reeve herself, assumes the Socratic role as she instructs and outwits the defenseless Hortensius. In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft pursues a much more substantial quarry than the salon-dwelling dilettante. Her targets are the literary patriarchs and taste-makers themselves, who are as vulnerable to powerful impressions and unbridled emotional states as the young female readers who were so often the subjects of moral sermonizing in periodicals, novels, and conduct books. To be sure, Wollstonecraft herself participated in the interrogation of young women's reading (and writing) habits as many studies of her reviews have made clear. However, when the reviews are read in the light of *Rights of Woman*, and vice versa, Wollstonecraft leaves us with a crucial insight. Like the young women targeted in eighteenth-century print culture, Milton, Rousseau, John Gregory, and a host of other writers can also be swayed by impulse and emotion, and sometimes by powerful forebears, but unlike the naïve young female characters appearing everywhere, they have the power to impose their thinking upon others. They are weak vessels. As Wollstonecraft says in her critique of Rousseau, which extends for many more pages than that of Milton, “For men of the greatest abilities have seldom had sufficient strength to rise above the surrounding atmosphere” or “the prejudices of the age.”⁵⁷ As Wollstonecraft moves on from Milton to Rousseau and ultimately to John Gregory in the densely literary passages which follow, it is clear she aims to organize the book around this

⁵⁶ Tillotama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 11.

⁵⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:111.

position—that is, that cultural criticism is most effectively undertaken by literary analysis of categories and stylistic features of writing that transcend the foibles of individual writers.

ROUSSEAU AND JOHN GREGORY IN *RIGHTS OF WOMAN*

Early in her career, Wollstonecraft wrote to Joseph Johnson about the role of the critic in society: “The voice of the people is only truth, when some man of abilities has had time to get fast hold of the GREAT NOSE of the monster.”⁵⁸ In this letter, written when she had recently “become a reviewer,” Wollstonecraft characterizes two major competitors, the *Critical Review* and the *Monthly Review*, as timid and adulatory rather than aggressively engaging with influential authors and texts. Essentially, the *Analytical Review* should challenge rather than confirm “established opinion” through a methodology of extensive quotation and incisive analytical commentary. By 1791, the “man of abilities” was Wollstonecraft herself. Her orchestration of quotations, allusions, and registers of argument in *Rights of Woman* is part of her strategy to “get fast hold of” the opinion of an educated and politically engaged audience. Three authors, Milton, Rousseau, and John Gregory, are benchmarks in this larger project, each representing a different nation, time period, and genre. By selecting these particular authors, and associating them with many others, Wollstonecraft demonstrates how literary traditions work to reproduce gender identities. Her approach was well suited to a time in which literary canons were still in formation, and a progressive model of history was valued. In *Rights of Woman*, the triumphalist march of great men is turned on its head. Wollstonecraft makes a distinction between an Enlightenment model of the progress of knowledge, and the regressive nature of literature about women. This is clear in the transition between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of *Rights of Woman*. The very last passage in chapter 1 is a footnote which rehearses an Enlightenment view of the progress of knowledge: “Men of abilities scatter seeds that grow up and have a great influence on the forming opinion; and when once the public opinion preponderates, through the exertion of reason, the overthrow of arbitrary power is not very distant.”⁵⁹ In the context of a chapter 1 with strong republican overtones, this could easily refer to Milton and other writers in the pantheon of English literary

⁵⁸ Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Todd (New York: Columbia University Press 2003), 158.

⁵⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:87

and political thought as it was constructed by Rational Dissenters such as Blackburne, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley. In the dystopic literary history that occupies chapters 2 through 6, Milton exemplifies repressive tradition, Rousseau beguiling but immoral notions, and Gregory proof that Rousseau's influence lives on. Gregory's case is the most relevant to Wollstonecraft's argument as he reproduces the stifling limitations of gender roles in her own generation and he does so in the attractive trappings of the sentimental epistle.

The dissection of Milton in chapter 2 is immediately followed by quotations of and allusions to Rousseau's *Emile* and Gregory's *Legacy*. Wollstonecraft's plan is to establish Rousseau as a baneful force in the education of women, then to use the same brush to paint Gregory, a benevolent figure in the public eye, and finally to pronounce final judgment upon each writer separately in two review-like sections in chapter 5. In the reviews, Rousseau as the author of the *Confessions* exemplifies sincerity, among the many positive features of this successful autobiography; in *Rights of Woman*, as the author of one of the most influential books on education, he is a dangerous pedagogue. These opinions were both written in 1791, illustrating that Wollstonecraft could subordinate literary evaluations to social concerns when necessary. As she writes right at the start of *Rights of Woman*, "books of instruction, written by men of genius, have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions."⁶⁰ Wollstonecraft is primarily concerned with how Rousseau constructs the ideal woman in book 5 of *Emile*, again because of its influence. *Emile* was published in English from the 1760s through the 1780s. There was such a strong interest in the education of Sophie that publishers began using the title *Emilius and Sophia; or, a New System of Education* for translations of *Emile* that were reprinted in 1762, '63, '67, '79, and '83.⁶¹ Wollstonecraft reads Rousseau's Sophia as utterly domestic; she speaks little, argues less, and her modesty arouses the sensual attentions of her husband, and apparently Rousseau himself. Being a composite of things useful and pleasing to men, Sophia is "grossly unnatural."⁶²

Rousseau and Gregory reappear throughout chapters 2, 3, and 4. This section of the book presents dozens of other authors as well, and many passages that are dense with literary allusions. The result is essentially an anthology of patriarchy, organized as a literary history of normative representations of woman. Wollstonecraft signals this early on: "I must declare

⁶⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:73.

⁶¹ Edward Duffy, *Rousseau in England: The Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979): 16, 17.

⁶² Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:93.

what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been.”⁶³ A few pages later, Wollstonecraft reiterates her conception of a literary tradition: “Rousseau, and most of the male writers who have followed his steps, have warmly indicated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point—to render them pleasing.” This criticism is soon applied to Gregory as well, who is chided for advising his daughters to tend to their dress, “because a fondness for dress, he asserts, is natural to them. I am unable to comprehend what either he or Rousseau mean when they frequently use this indefinite term.” Wollstonecraft argues that a concern for one’s appearance cannot possibly be natural: “If they told us that in a pre-existent state the soul was fond of dress, and brought this inclination with it into a new body, I should listen to them with a half-smile, as I often do when I hear a rant about innate elegance.”⁶⁴ In this context, Wollstonecraft returns to the theological arguments we have seen in the critique of Milton.

Section 1 of chapter 5 focuses exclusively on Rousseau’s *Emile*, in contrast to the heterogeneous organization of the previous chapters. This section might very well have been the draft of a review, but with a crucial improvement. The typical review for the *Analytical Review* would begin with a short commentary, and an excerpt from the text would then follow with no additional comments or footnotes. In her prefatory remarks to the section, Wollstonecraft states that the usual methods will not work with Rousseau; his persuasive power is such that interruptions are necessary: “The artificial structure has been raised with so much ingenuity, that it seems necessary to attack it in a more circumstantial manner, and make the application myself.”⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft’s “circumstantial manner” consists of interrupting the lengthy excerpts from *Emile* with commentary and tagging certain passages with footnotes. As we have seen above, Wollstonecraft had referred to her method of quotation, comparison, and commentary just months before, at the conclusion of *Rights of Men*. After the first long quoted passage, Wollstonecraft reminds us of her procedures in a statement that is reminiscent of the *Prospectus* of the *Analytical Review*: “I have quoted this passage lest my readers should suspect that I warped the author’s reasoning to support my own arguments.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:91.

⁶⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:96–7

⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:147.

⁶⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman* 5:148.

Wollstonecraft had praised John Gregory in the preface to *The Female Reader*, in which many passages from *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* are included. However, Wollstonecraft had only partial control over the contents of the *Female Reader*, an anthology that was at first attributed to another editor, a Mr. Cresswick. Evidence of her editorship of this collection is based solely on a slip of paper given by Joseph Johnson to William Godwin in the days after her death, a slip of paper with factual inaccuracies.⁶⁷ Even assuming that Wollstonecraft's feminism evolved over time, it is difficult to believe that a passage such as the following, included in the *Female Reader*, would have been acceptable to her at any point in her career: "Modesty, which is so essential to your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one. People of sense and discernment will never mistake such silence for dullness. One may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable. The expression of the countenance shews it, and this never escapes an observing eye."⁶⁸ The *Female Reader* was conceived as the counterpart to a book of oration meant for boys, *The Speaker* (1774), by William Enfield, one of Johnson's most successful publications. The two titles immediately set up a binary of passive and active attributes for young women and men. The genesis of *The Female Reader* and the curious fact that Wollstonecraft's name does not appear on the title page is only made more mysterious with Godwin's cryptic comment: "she compiled a series of extracts in verse and prose, upon the model of Dr. Enfield's *Speaker*, which bears the title of *The Female Reader*; but which, from a cause not worth mentioning, has hitherto been printed with a different name in the title-page." The attribution of the *Female Reader* to Wollstonecraft was only made in 1978.⁶⁹

In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft explains that women must engage in the trial and error of public life, and thus *speaking* is essential. Unlike women, men can "wrangle in the senate to keep their faculties from rusting," one of many passages in which Wollstonecraft argues for a public presence for women.⁷⁰ Gregory's "legacy" leaves his female readers with an

⁶⁷ The sole piece of primary evidence is a note from Joseph Johnson to William Godwin, transcribed in William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1797), ed. Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Toronto: Broadview, 2001). 162.

⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft, *The Female Reader*, 4:175; John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (London, 1774), 161.

⁶⁹ Moira Ferguson, "The Discovery of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Female Reader*," *Signs* 3, no. 4 (1978): 945–49.

⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:216

cache of cynical precepts, the great majority of which place drastic restrictions on how women express themselves. This advice was typical of contemporary conduct books. Hester Chapone writes in *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1783) that women must not share secrets with even their closest friends. In a book which touts “sincerity” and “candour,” young women are encouraged to never show their emotions in any public setting, for “an enraged woman is one of the most disgusting sights in nature”⁷¹

Wollstonecraft asks whether Gregory is an advocate for his daughters, protecting them *from* social pressures, or joining *with* society to pressure them. In *A Father's Legacy*, Gregory exhibits a protective character, girding his daughters against the “falsehood, dissipation, and coldness” of “mankind.” However, he complains that certain public behaviors of women cause him, as a member of *his* sex, to disapprove of the members of *theirs*.⁷² In essence, then, Gregory is producing and justifying his own gendered public role. Wollstonecraft claims that Gregory’s persona wavers between a sincere father, who would simply transcribe his tenderness in the form of a last letter, and a sermonizing writer, meeting the expectations of the reading audience. Wollstonecraft’s critique demystifies Gregory’s representation as the benevolent father. Instead of the sympathetic figure the genre and title seem to promise, “We pop on the author.”⁷³ Once the doting father is set aside, Wollstonecraft turns to the serious social implications of the text itself. Wollstonecraft stoutly dismisses the notion that women ought to hide their intelligence in public. In fact they are gendered by subtracting what is most substantial in their humanity. In the ideal social world of *A Father's Legacy*, there is nothing left of women’s characters, claims Wollstonecraft, but the “very consciousness” of “the sex.” All the cautions in Gregory’s book, and any number of contemporary novels and conduct books, leave in place the male gaze, which Wollstonecraft depicts as “the applause of tasteless fools,” and the “personal intercourse of appetite.” Thus, Gregory reproduces a set of precepts that are as libidinous as Rousseau’s. “I have already noticed the narrow cautions with respect to duplicity, female softness, delicacy of constitution; for these are the changes which he rings around without ceasing—in a more decorous manner, it is true, than Rousseau; but it all comes home to the same point, and whoever is at the trouble to analyze these sentiments, will find the first principles *not quite so delicate*

⁷¹ Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (London, 1783), 73.

⁷² Gregory, *A Father's Legacy*, 26–35.

⁷³ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:166

as the superstructure” (my emphasis).⁷⁴ It has taken the greater part of Wollstonecraft's book to arrive at this declaration, which has been well prepared by the many associations between Rousseau and Gregory. Thus ends the long engagement with this writer. Gregory is mentioned only once more, in chapter 7, and even there, still linked with Rousseau, this time concerning the definition of modesty. This confirms the hypothesis that chapters 2 through 6 can be considered a unit with a specific methodology and organization.

Wollstonecraft's last review of Rousseau's *Confessions* was written in late 1791 as *Rights of Woman* was nearing completion. Wollstonecraft tells us, “Though we must allow that he had many faults which called for the forbearance of his friends, still what have his defects of temper to do with his writings?”⁷⁵ In *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft asks readers to shift their attention from Rousseau's person to the influence of his writing. In doing so, Wollstonecraft had gone beyond the author-centered, moralistic commentary of the typical literary review. In *Rights of Woman* her analyses of Milton, Rousseau, and Gregory were not the specialized criticism of later times, but Wollstonecraft adapted available procedures, crafting them into an acutely political and social literary criticism, with an enhanced set of techniques: close and comparative reading, analysis of authorial intention, and criteria by which to judge categories of writing such as anthologies, conduct and educational literature, and epic poetry. She enhanced her criticism with theories on child development, theology, a proto-psychological theory of association, republican politics, and Enlightenment historiography. With these tools and theories, Wollstonecraft forged a sustained and substantial argument, which was that generations of writers had contributed to prevailing norms of gender, in turn influencing other writers in every age, and in every nation.

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⁷⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 5:170

⁷⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 7:409.