

Wollstonecraft's Ghost:

The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period

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### **Abstract**

Mary Wollstonecraft's ghost haunts women's writing of the Romantic period. After her untimely death in 1797, and the publication of William Godwin's candid biography in 1798, Wollstonecraft's reputation was besmirched by the reactionary press in an attack on radical support for revolutionary ideals. Wollstonecraft's campaign for women's rights was conflated with a representation of her as sexually promiscuous, politically dangerous and religiously unorthodox. For women writing after Wollstonecraft's death, an engagement with her political ideals risked identification with her lifestyle, deemed both improper and impious. My thesis explores how women writers negotiated Wollstonecraft's scandalous reputation in order to discuss her influential feminist arguments and develop their own positions on these pressing issues in post-revolutionary Britain.

In the early nineteenth century, Wollstonecraft's life and work gets elided with the figure of the female philosopher, already popular in both pro- and counter-revolutionary writing of the 1790s. After Wollstonecraft's death, fictional female philosophers echo elements of her biography whilst voicing an often caricatured version of her arguments. By rejecting these satirically overblown feminist positions, women writers could adopt a more moderate form of feminism, often closer to Wollstonecraft's original polemic, to critique cultural restrictions on women, revealing how these warp female behaviour. My project modifies our understanding of the origins of modern feminism by focussing on Wollstonecraft's reception across a range of socially and politically diverse texts, and the ways in which the process of reading itself is treated as potentially revolutionary.

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## Introduction: The Female Philosopher: Reading Mary Wollstonecraft

In the early nineteenth century, women writers sought to engage with Mary Wollstonecraft's radical writing on women's rights whilst avoiding the reactionary opprobrium piled on to her after her death, following the candid revelations about her private life in William Godwin's Memoirs of the Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Women writers needed to draw on Wollstonecraft's positions on the necessity for improved female education and an extension of women's roles both within the private sphere and in public to develop their own arguments relating to these pressing issues. This engagement with Wollstonecraft as a precursor figure was perforce indirect, elliptical and circumlocutory: women writers otherwise risked attacks on their reputation, sexual history and private selves. Critical distance to Wollstonecraft's life and work was achieved through the inclusion in their writing of a figure who fused together earlier eighteenth-century traditions of the female philosopher and the female reader, with elements taken from Wollstonecraft's own texts and biography, alongside other feminist thinkers, in particular Mary Hays. This hybrid female philosopher, split between an earlier eighteenth-century figure, the female reader, and Wollstonecraft herself, allowed women writers to disavow a relationship between their arguments about women's rights and Wollstonecraft's, by making the figure one of hermeneutic suspicion in their texts. At the same time, she enabled women writers to appropriate Wollstonecraft's radical analysis of the deficiencies of a woman's education to develop their own exploration of the forces which shape an individual woman's personality in her cultural context: a post-revolutionary Britain suspicious of foreign, libertarian influences and demanding unquestioning patriotism from its citizens as the crisis of the Napoleonic wars

worsened. The slippages between satire of and sympathy for the figure of the female philosopher, between othering and identification, mean that Wollstonecraft's ghost haunts women's fiction of the early nineteenth century, neither wholly exorcised from their novels nor completely incorporated within a political and aesthetic framework. I describe the ways in which women writers develop rhetorical manoeuvres for coping with Wollstonecraft's influence as Post-Jacobin, belonging to neither the English Jacobin fiction sympathetic to French revolutionary ideals nor the Anti-Jacobin novel which sought to discredit it.

Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period analyses the intersections between Wollstonecraft's reception, the overlapping development of the female philosopher figure, and the importance of reading and readers in nineteenth-century women's writing. This introduction begins with a prehistory of the female philosopher figure in the eighteenth century, before examining the ways in which she developed in both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary discourse throughout the 1790s, and her status as a literary archetype, connected to yet importantly distinct from Wollstonecraft herself, in Romantic period women's writing. My second section explores how discourse on the female philosopher fused with an overlapping set of conventions on the female reader in the 1790s. Because both figures can be used to either celebrate a narrative of social and spiritual improvement or to castigate expressions of female desire, they become key terms in revolutionary and counter-revolutionary debate in the 1790s, intertwining together by the end of the decade. The second section also explains my use of reception studies as the methodological perspective informing my thesis. The third section of my introduction interprets the ways in which Wollstonecraft engages with philosophy in her writing, particularly A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,

analysing how her self-representation as a philosopher impacted upon the changing reception of her work from the 1790s into the early nineteenth century. I conclude with a chapter by chapter outline of the evolution of the female philosopher figure, haunted by the ghost of Wollstonecraft, from the early 1790s to the 1830s.

### **1) The Female Philosopher**

The female philosopher has a scattered presence throughout eighteenth-century writing, making appearances in novels, poems, and plays, as well as biographical, historical and political texts, including educational pamphlets and religious debate. In my thesis, I use the term 'female philosopher' as a rhetorical figure, representing an ideal (or nightmare) of the thinking woman. Real, historical figures, such as Wollstonecraft herself, her friend Hays, and earlier women such as Elizabeths Montagu and Carter, get identified, or self-identify, as female philosophers. However, the figure achieves an existence independent of actual women as she accrues a set of literary conventions available to both pro- and counter-revolutionary writers throughout the 1790s, and in post-revolutionary works in the early nineteenth century. Throughout the eighteenth century, this figure was both celebrated as an avatar of Enlightenment ideals, as a signifier of the progress of the intellect, rationality, and educational development, especially the expansion of women's literacy, and satirised or attacked as a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron.

By the middle of the century, British philosophers such as David Hume and French philosophes such as Voltaire and Diderot were arguing that women deserved access to improved education in order to take on a vital role in the improvement of

civic society.<sup>1</sup> The English term ‘female philosopher’ has its roots in the French Enlightenment’s ‘femme philosophe’ – a phrase which itself spans connotations from facilitator of rational discourse as a Parisian salonnière to the philosopher whore of French pornography.<sup>2</sup> From the 1750s to the 1780s, salons run by women in both countries encouraged the pursuit of learning through conversation.<sup>3</sup> The Bluestocking circle surrounding Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800) developed a ‘bluestocking philosophy’ which Elizabeth Eger describes as ‘the social expression of an Enlightenment belief in freedom of enquiry... concentrat[ing] on a Christian attention to practical virtue and social benevolence, which emphasised the importance of friendship and a rational adherence to duty’.<sup>4</sup> Montagu’s bluestocking philosophy created ‘a public identity for the female intellectual and socially useful individual’ (Bluestockings, 13), aligning her with the female philosopher figure I describe in this introduction. In Britain, Elizabeth Montagu’s salon fostered work by Elizabeth Carter, Catherine Macaulay, Hannah More, and Frances Burney. Elizabeth Carter represented the virtues of the female philosopher figure, ‘considered “the

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<sup>1</sup> See Katherine B. Clinton, ‘Femme et Philosophe: Enlightenment Origins of Feminism’ Eighteenth-Century Studies 8.3 (Spring 1975), 283-99, for a discussion of the transnational development of these early feminist ideas from France to England, describing the ways in which ‘the woman question’ was used to attack patriarchal structures in France and England by Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, Diderot and Hume.

<sup>2</sup> See Adriana Craciun, Citizens of the World for an analysis of the pornographic representations of female philosophers in French satire, used by counter-revolutionary writers in Britain to besmirch the reputation of early feminists such as Wollstonecraft and Hays.

<sup>3</sup> See Dena Goodman, ‘Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions’ Eighteenth-Century Studies 22.3 (Spring 1989), 329-50, for an analysis of women’s role in refashioning French salons as centres of Enlightenment philosophy, and Deborah Heller, ‘Bluestocking Salons and the Public Sphere’ Eighteenth-Century Life 22.2 (1998), 59-82, for a discussion of the Bluestockings’ impact on the public sphere by encouraging diversity through conversation.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Eger, Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13. The term ‘Bluestocking’ to describe first Montagu’s visitors, then particularly the group of learned women associated with her, originated in the scholar Benjamin Stillingfleet’s appearance at one of Montagu’s assemblies in blue worsted stockings, normally associated with the working classes (12-14).

most learned lady” in the eighteenth century’.<sup>5</sup> Carter’s greatest achievement was her translation of Epictetus, a stoic philosopher, prompting Samuel Johnson to declare her ‘the best Greek scholar in England’.<sup>6</sup> This, and Carter’s other work, including her ‘Ode to Wisdom’ published in Richardson’s Clarissa, established her as a female philosopher.

In her discussion of Bluestocking feminism, Moyra Haslett argues that later satires of the bluestocking splits the historical Bluestocking from the figurative bluestocking who acted as a caricature of learned, literary hostesses.<sup>7</sup> I find Haslett’s splitting of the historical Bluestocking from the satirical figure of the bluestocking useful in thinking about the literary nature of the female philosopher, as she is always already partly figurative, thriving in fictional form, and often in non-fiction a term cast back onto heterogeneous historical figures. She also draws on a similar tradition as the bluestocking satires: anxieties about the status of the learned lady and woman writer. Haslett concludes that whereas the Bluestockings themselves were often conservative in their social and political positions, the satirical bluestockings voice much more radical beliefs. She argues that ‘Paradoxically, then, the satires make feminists of the Bluestockings’ as ‘radicalism is bequeathed to them by the indignation and passion which they inspired’ (‘Bluestocking Feminism Revisited’, 444). Early feminists such as Wollstonecraft and Hays articulated political arguments already much more radical than either the historical Bluestockings or the satirical bluestockings. Nevertheless, a similar movement takes place in the depiction of the figurative female philosopher: the attacks on the female philosopher

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<sup>5</sup> Priscilla Dorr, ‘Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806)’ Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature 5.1 (Spring 1986), 138-140, 138. Quotation unidentified.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Dorr, 138.

<sup>7</sup> Moyra Haslett, ‘Bluestocking Feminism Revisited: The Satirical Figure of the Bluestocking’, Women’s Writing, 17:3, (Dec, 2010), 432-51.

which gather force as the 1790s progress also reveal the radicalism which accrues to the figure as she becomes closely connected to revolutionary feminists like Wollstonecraft and Hays, instead of being read as part of an existing Enlightenment tradition.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the positive iteration of the female philosopher often represented a stoic idea of composure amidst disappointment, especially resignation to the status quo, rather than the radical critique of it offered by Wollstonecraft. For example, Lady Woodville, a character in Elizabeth Griffith's The Delicate Distress, asks her friend 'is not the great use and end of that exalted study [philosophy], to render us happy, by perfectly acquiescing in our own lot, and wisely contemning all those advantages that are denied us?'.<sup>8</sup> In negative depictions, she was usually linked to sexual transgression, especially in religious discourse. In Deism Revealed, Philip Skelton gasps that 'Crates, and the female philosopher Hipparchia, made a practice of strolling from place to place, and lying together publicly before multitudes of people'.<sup>9</sup> Two apothegms in The Koran, variously attributed to Laurence Sterne and Richard Griffith, who included it in his edition of Sterne's works, also deal pruriently with female philosophers: Diotama is described as 'the person that initiated Socrates into the philosophia amatoria, which the Platonists afterwards extolled so highly' and Theano as 'another female philosopher,

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Griffith, The Delicate Distress, A Novel in Letters, vol. 1 of 2. (Dublin: Brett Smith, 1787), 85-6. Other examples include Agnes Maria Bennett, Anna; or, Memoirs of a Welch Heiress (London: William Lane, 1785) which includes a chapter entitled 'Female Philosophy', 206-24 depicting stoic resignation in the face of disappointment as exemplary moral behaviour, and Maria Smyth, The Woman of Letters; or, The History of Miss Fanny Belton (London: Francis Noble, 1783), in which the eponymous heroine's principles, as written in her poem 'The Female Philosopher', 211, are tested by her early marriage to a debtor.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Skelton, Opiomaches; or, Deism Revealed, vol. 1 of 2. (London: A. Miller, 1751), 114. Emphasis in original.

[who] used to advise married women to lay aside shame with their cloaths'.<sup>10</sup> Sexual transgression was also linked to male anxieties over the development of women's literacy through the figure of the female philosopher. Commenting on Jonathan Swift's relationship with Esther Vanhomrigh in the poem Cadeneus and Vanessa, John Boyle, Earl of Orrery, describes Vanessa first as 'a great reader, and violent lover of poetry' and then as 'a female philosopher [who] made a surprising progress in the philosophic doctrines [of Swift]. He taught her that vice, as soon as it defied shame, was immediately changed into virtue'.<sup>11</sup> Positive representations of the female philosopher often read like defence formations. In an article from 1713, later much anthologised, the periodical essayist Joseph Addison proposes that 'Learning and knowledge are perfections in us, not as we are men, but as we are reasonable creatures, in which order of beings the female world is upon the same level as the male', adding the nervous encomium: 'At least, I believe everyone will allow me, that a female philosopher is not so absurd a character and so opposite to the sex, as a female gamester'.<sup>12</sup> Addison's appeal to include men and women in the same category of 'reasonable creatures' chimes with Wollstonecraft's later desire to see women as such. His comparison of the female philosopher with the female gamester hints that the former, if neither 'so absurd' nor 'so opposite to the sex' as the latter, is perceived as such by some of his readers. David Fordyce, brother of the James whose Sermons for Young Women Wollstonecraft deconstructs in Vindication of the Rights of Woman, exhorts: 'Pray Madam... do not be ashamed that you have

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Griffith, The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased, vol. 2 of 2. (London: W. and J. Robinson et al, 1770), 144. Emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> John Boyle, Earl of Orrery, Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1752), 108, 112.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Addison, The Guardian, 155 (Tuesday, September 8 1713) anthologised in The Works of the Late Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq. Vol. 4 of 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1730), 231-3, 232.

appeared in the Figure of a female philosopher, nor affect to hide the Veneration you have for the Muses'.<sup>13</sup> Fordyce's exhortation hints at the social awkwardness of inhabiting the persona of a female philosopher. In her Memoirs, Laetitia Pilkington describes her pleasure in the company of the female philosopher Constantia Grierson, whom she praises as 'Mistress of Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French, [who] understood the Mathematicks as well as most Men', but stresses that these talents appeared 'like the intuitive knowledge of Angels', depicting them as miraculous gifts rather than hard-won achievements.<sup>14</sup>

In 1735, True Taste; or, Female Philosophy was published in response to The Female Rake: or, Modern Fine Lady: an exchange of poetic epistles between Libertina, a female rake or libertine, and Sylvia, an older, wiser woman, presented self-consciously as a new kind of character, a female philosopher. Libertina's letter defends her indulgence in sensual pleasures by citing male and female examples, arguing irreligiously for living in the moment, and pre-emptively attacking Sylvia's disapproval by presenting the older woman as aged and infirm. Sylvia's response bristles with indignation against these personal slurs, particularly that her love of books is merely an affectation, 'If with Desire for Knowledge I am fir'd, / How know'st thou it is but to be admir'd?'<sup>15</sup> She then attacks Libertina's lack of devotion as a 'new-fangled System... / To blind your Judgment, and debauch your soul' (True Taste, 8), countering it by counselling religious resignation and repentance. Sylvia also engages with political concerns, giving 'thanks to Heav'n all Virtue's not yet fled, / Tho W-----'s at the Helm, and Patriotism dead' (11). Her attack on Walpole, the

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<sup>13</sup> David Fordyce, Dialogues Concerning Education, vol. 2 of 2. (London, [s.n.] 1745), 106.

<sup>14</sup> Laetitia Pilkington, The Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington, Wife to the Rev. Mr. Matth. Pilkington, Written by Herself (Dublin, 1748), 23. Emphasis in original.

<sup>15</sup> [Anon.], True Taste: or, Female Philosophy. Being an Epistle from Sylvia to Libertina (London: Nutt et al., 1735), 6. Subsequent references in-text.

leader of the ruling Whig party, aligns her with opposition politics, along with writers from Henry Fielding to Samuel Johnson who also attacked Walpole, representing herself as virtuous and patriotic, and implicitly connecting Libertina's rakish demeanour with the corrupt policies of the Walpole administration.

A positive early depiction of the female philosopher, Sylvia already combines several key traits which will become defining characteristics of the figure throughout the eighteenth century: first and foremost, a love of learning and a desire for knowledge; secondly, a complex relationship towards sexual desire; thirdly, an engagement in religious controversy; and finally, political activism, explicitly connected to notions of personal and civic virtue, particularly patriotism. Although all of these traits become open to contention in later representations of the female philosopher, the second point relating to sexual desire is always particularly fraught, already troubling Sylvia's self-representation as chaste. She anxiously returns to the question of her relationship to sensuality throughout the poem, stressing that she has not grown virtuous with age, but was always so: 'Had I been in my Youth so loosely giv'n, / How came I now to abandon all for Heav'n?' (9). Sylvia's following question, directed at Libertina, 'Won't once a Whore still always be a Whore?' (9), will haunt later iterations of the female philosopher herself, leading to the Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine infamously indexing Wollstonecraft under Prostitute in their first issue of 1798.

Before the 1790s, the female philosopher figure represented, at her best, a stoic resignation in the face of suffering and disappointment, at worst, an affectation of this, disguising literary pretensions or sexual profligacy. In the 1790s, the female philosopher was radicalised by the French Revolution debate, both through the connection with the French term 'femme philosophe' and because several important

early feminists such as Wollstonecraft herself and her friend Mary Hays self-consciously identified as philosophers.<sup>16</sup> These women extended the remit of the figure to include more radical ideas: equality in male and female education, political engagement in the public sphere, heterodox religious beliefs, usually underpinned by relationships with Dissenting communities, and honest, often candid, expressions of female desire. From the mid- to late 1790s, counter-revolutionary writers slurred this radical interpretation of female philosophy, presenting the female philosopher as sexually profligate, irreligious to the point of profanity, and a force for social instability. These slurs aimed both to defend against the promulgation of revolutionary sympathy at home and to restrict women's sphere of movement to the home. The female philosopher's engagement with philosophy itself was also depicted as pedantic, confused and derivative, a representation which sought to decouple the term, questioning the ability of a female to be a philosopher. Women writers seeking to engage with Wollstonecraft's life and work also had to negotiate a way through these competing representations of the female philosopher figure, from avatar of Enlightenment to reactionary bogeywoman, through her more radical iterations. For example, William Enfield, a Rational Dissenter, published an article, 'Are Literary and Scientific Pursuits suited to the Female Character?', in the Monthly Magazine of June 1796 which presented three female characters and their relationships to female philosophy. In her biography of Mary Hays, Gina Luria Walker

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<sup>16</sup> The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s, ed. Pamela Clemit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) offers an excellent, lucid introduction to the French Revolution debate in Britain over the course of the 1790s. Particularly useful chapters are H.T. Dickinson, 'The political context', 1-15; Jane Rendall, 'Wollstonecraft, Vindications and Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution', 71-85; Pamela Clemit, 'Godwin, Political Justice', 86-100; and Nancy E. Johnson, 'Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Dialogues', 101-116. Dickinson states: 'The Revolutionary debate of the 1790s in Britain had a profound influence on the political, religious and cultural life of the country, while the French war produced almost unprecedented economic and social strains, and forced Britain to make a huge military, naval and financial effort to counter French ambitions', 1.

links Enfield's Margaretta to Anna Laetitia Barbauld, his Sophia to Amelia Alderson, and Eliza to Hays, characterising 'Margaretta [as] wise and moderate, Sophia... popular and flirtatious, and Eliza... humorless and ideological'.<sup>17</sup> Even in a broadly sympathetic account of female philosophy, such as Enfield's, women are presented with a choice between the attractive and essentially unlearned Sophia and the intellectual yet dull Eliza. In order to negotiate the conflicting representations of the female philosopher, women writers developed a range of strategies including caricature and satire, the doubling of the female philosopher figure within their texts, and implicit or explicit allusions to radical literature, especially Wollstonecraft and Godwin's texts. These strategies either serve to distance their own work from radical writing or, more daringly, create a space for a renewed, more sympathetic interpretation of it. All of these strategies crucially depend on women writers' treatment of reading and readers in their novels, as they sought to influence the reception of their own work through their response to Wollstonecraft and the related debates around the female philosopher.

Throughout the 1790s, the figure of the female philosopher, increasingly in her negative iteration as the decade progressed, became interlinked with the life and writing of Mary Wollstonecraft. In an extended response to the second Vindication, Benjamin Heath Malkin, writing in 1795, stressed that Wollstonecraft 'has been successful in setting those prejudices in a strong point of view, adding that he

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<sup>17</sup> Gina Luria Walker, Mary Hays (1759-1843): The Growth of a Woman's Mind (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 167. Barbauld (1743-1825) was a writer and poet from an important dissenting family. She is quoted disparagingly in Wollstonecraft's Vindication and replied in a poem entitled 'The Rights of Woman', criticising Wollstonecraft's conclusions in that work. Alderson, later Opie, wrote the novel Adeline Mowbray, which analyses Wollstonecraft and Godwin's relationship in fictional form, which is discussed in my third chapter. Hays' life and work, and her personal and professional relationship with Wollstonecraft, is the focus of my first chapter.

'subscribe[s] most cordially to the truth of her philosophy'.<sup>18</sup> However, he concludes that 'abstruse philosophy' is not a suitable subject for women as it 'would carry them too far from the sphere of domestic concerns' (Essays, 278). Malkin equivocally supports Wollstonecraft's arguments, although he is concerned that female philosophy as such will disrupt women's position within the private sphere. Published two years later, Sophia, Lady Burrell's anonymous novel Adeline de Courcy shares similar concerns, although she is less equivocal in positioning herself against the female philosopher:

From a female politician I always turn with disgust... I admire sensible intelligent beings, whatever their sex may be; but I abhor affectation, and would have women confined to their own province, exercising the mild virtues that belong to domestic life. If they have genius let them cultivate it, let them improve their minds by reading; but a female philosopher, a disputant in petticoats, is a conceited masculine character that does not suit my taste.<sup>19</sup>

Even within Adeline's repudiation of the figure, there remains a respect for her Enlightenment ideals: she admires 'sensible intelligent beings' and licences women to cultivate genius and 'improve their minds by reading'. In 1799, Hannah More launched a much more straightforward attack on the female philosopher in her Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, in which she argued that 'A female Polemic wanders almost as much from the limits prescribed to her sex, as a female Machiavel or warlike Thalestris'.<sup>20</sup> She later attacked Wollstonecraft

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Heath Malkin, Essays on Subjects Connected with Civilization (London: E. Hodson, 1795), 257, 260. Subsequent references, in-text as Essays.

<sup>19</sup> [Sophia, Lady Burrell], Adeline de Courcy, vol. 1 of 2. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1797), 184. The image of a 'disputant in petticoats' is repeated in Horace Walpole's gibe at Wollstonecraft as a 'hyena in petticoats', and also finds an echo in an earlier novel, Maria Susanna Cooper, The Exemplary Mother; or, Letters between Mrs Villars and Her Family, vol. 1 of 2 (London: T. Becket, 1784), in which a character exclaims: 'A female philosopher! Defend us from petticoat innovators!', 98.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah More, Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, vol. 1 of 2. (London: T. Cadell, jun., and W. Davies, 1799), 7. Subsequent references, in-text as Strictures.

personally for offering a 'direct vindication of adultery' in her posthumous novel, Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman (Strictures, 48).

Negative representations of the female philosopher, particularly towards the end of the eighteenth century, reveal an underlying anxiety that the figure disturbs these 'limits prescribed to her sex'. In other words, the female philosopher shifted women from the private sphere of domesticity, increasingly viewed as their proper sphere, into the public sphere of political action. That these concerns, aired as often by women as men, were made in print, in the public sphere of literary production, shows the extent to which the female philosopher reveals the ideological investments in the divides between private sphere and public spheres of literary production and political action. Responding to Wollstonecraft's death, Mary Robinson, describing herself as 'avowedly of the same school [as Wollstonecraft]', categorised the female philosopher as 'that literary bugbear': an insight which highlights the figure's representational position within early feminist attacks on the public sphere.<sup>21</sup>

Critics such as Adriana Craciun, Claudia Johnson, Gary Kelly, Barbara Taylor, among others,<sup>22</sup> have situated the female philosopher as an important, and contested, figure within early feminism, radical writing and the French Revolution debate in Britain, tending to elide the figure with representations of Mary Wollstonecraft herself. For example, Taylor entitles her first chapter on

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Robinson, A Letter to the Women of England (1799), with The Natural Daughter (1799), ed. Sharon M. Setzer (Peterborough: Broadview, 2003), 41, 58.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Eleanor Ty and Deborah Weiss both use the female philosopher to introduce their discussions of women's writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ty uses the term in her introduction to Unsex'd Revolutionaries (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 20-22, and Weiss builds upon the work of these scholars to position Maria Edgeworth's eponymous heroine Belinda as a 'good' female philosopher and Harriet Freke as a 'bad' example in 'The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda: Maria Edgeworth's Female Philosopher' Eighteenth-Century Fiction 19.4, 441-61. I discuss Weiss' article in chapter 3 below, arguing that her dichotomy between Belinda and Freke is complicated by Lady Delacour's role in the novel.

Wollstonecraft 'The Female Philosopher', connecting the history of the learned lady from the seventeenth to the late eighteenth century with Wollstonecraft's career, reputation and reception.<sup>23</sup> Craciun also describes Wollstonecraft as the 'Empress of Female Philosophers', focussing her discussion on counter-revolutionary strategies against female philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Although I agree that Wollstonecraft's posthumous reputation and reception was often entangled with representations of the female philosopher, my thesis counters this elision by analysing first, Wollstonecraft's own suspicion of the term, and then, the way in which the figure is used by women writers to separate considerations of Wollstonecraft's life and work from the female philosopher as literary construct. My thesis begins by analysing how Mary Hays uses a model of the female philosopher figure drawing on Enlightenment and pro-revolutionary ideals to shape both her self-representation as a writer and her idealisation of Mary Wollstonecraft, examining the ways in which this model comes under stress as the 1790s progress. I then explore nineteenth-century depictions of the female philosopher which critiqued Hays' model in order to split the figure into positive and negative iterations, sometimes shifting focus from these contrasting figures to new models for female behaviour. Kelly positions female philosophers at the centre of a cultural revolution, reshaping British society from the 1790s into the early nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> I build on Kelly's representation of the female philosopher as cultural revolutionary to focus on how women writers used the figure to articulate

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<sup>23</sup> See Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25-57, for her account of the reactions to female philosophy throughout Wollstonecraft's writing career, tracking the scale of the changes in the connotations of the term female philosopher over the course of the 1790s.

<sup>24</sup> See Adriana Craciun, *Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 28-52, for her discussion of the importance of female philosophy both in Wollstonecraft's self-representation and in the counter-revolutionary attacks on her life and work in the late 1790s.

<sup>25</sup> See Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) for his discussion of women's place in the cultural revolution which takes place simultaneously with, and then outstrips, the French Revolution debate in Britain.

feminist positions in a post-revolutionary context, a rhetorical manoeuvre which enabled both a broadening concept of women's role in private and public spheres and a critique of existing structures limiting this role which I have labelled Post-Jacobin (discussed further below). Johnson traces the development of the female philosopher through the eighteenth century, argues for her centrality in the debates of the 1790s, and suggests that she faded from English Literature around 1815.<sup>26</sup> I trace the life of the female philosopher from the 1790s to 1814, when Frances Burney and Jane Austen engaged with the figure as a political and aesthetic representation of the intellectual possibilities open to women in post-revolutionary Britain (discussed below, in chapter 4), and, contra Johnson, show how the figure develops into the 1820s and 30s through my analysis of Mary Shelley's engagement with the term in her textual relationship with her mother, Wollstonecraft (see below, chapter 5).

## 2) Reading

Reading, its role in the development of private and public spheres in the eighteenth century, and women's role within these developments, are crucial elements in my thesis. Jürgen Habermas theorises these developments in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, arguing that the practice of reading in the private sphere extends into a public sphere of literary production, leading to the creation of a public sphere of political action. Habermas's theory has been challenged and developed by feminist critics, concerned that his public sphere

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<sup>26</sup> See Claudia Johnson, Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 19-21, for her discussion of the female philosopher.

excludes women, the working class, slaves and other marginalised groups.<sup>27</sup>

Habermas addresses these concerns within his Structural Transformation, however, already problematising the terms of the debate. He grounds his analysis in the developments in reading throughout the century. Habermas's conception of the public sphere as 'a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion'<sup>28</sup> is 'guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of the audience-oriented... subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain' (Structural Transformation, 28). Moreover, he unites the public with the private sphere through the practice of reading. Habermas's 'stratum of "bourgeois"' including jurists, doctors, pastors, officers, professors, scholars, school teachers and scribes – professionals forming the abstract idea of 'people', was, he argues, 'the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public' (23). The reading material of this bourgeois public sphere – letters, diaries and first person narratives, leading up to the eighteenth-century genre, the novel – 'were experiments in subjectivity discovered in the close relationships of the conjugal family' (49). Further, this experimental subjectivity, 'as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented to an audience' (49). In other words, the self-conscious subjectivity of the private individual forms itself with reference to others: family members, readers, the

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<sup>27</sup> The critical corpus attacking, emending and reworking Habermas's seminal work on the eighteenth-century public sphere is immense. Eger et al, Women, Writing and the Public Sphere (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) offer a perceptive introduction to these debates followed by a series of essays engaging with this fraught arena. Women, Gender and Enlightenment, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) offers another series of interventions into the analysis of Habermas's ideas, particularly the two concluding essays, John Robertson, 'Women and Enlightenment: A Historiographical Conclusion', 692-704, and Kate Soper, 'Feminism and Enlightenment Legacies', 705-715. Both argue that Habermas's original thesis has been developed almost beyond recognition by its expansion to include women, slaves and working-class society.

<sup>28</sup> Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, trans. Thomas Burger (1989) (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 25-6. Subsequent references in-text.

literary public sphere. This literary public sphere then develops into Habermas's public sphere of political action.

However, Habermas goes on to problematise each of these terms. The 'private autonomy' of market capitalism is transformed into patriarchal authority in the conjugal family, making 'any pretended freedom of individuals illusory' (47). Habermas singles out eighteenth-century marital law as particularly troublesome, characterising the marriage contract as 'largely a fiction'; a fiction, moreover, which drove novelistic representations of marriage as a site of conflict between reason and passion. Another problem with the Habermasian family's liminal position between private and public spheres was 'the conjugal family's self-image of its intimate sphere' which 'collided even within the consciousness of the bourgeoisie itself with the real functions of the bourgeois family': the reproduction of capital through inheritance. Habermas sees the origins of capitalist ideology in eighteenth-century equations of 'property owner' with 'human being as such', and literary with political public sphere, 'and also in public opinion itself, in which the interest of the class, via critical public debate, could assume the appearance of the general interest, that is, in the identification of domination with its dissolution into pure reason' (88). Adding 'gender' to 'class' in the preceding passage further illuminates the reasons Habermas has been both appropriated and criticised by feminist historians and literary critics.<sup>29</sup> Often accused of excluding women from his conception of the eighteenth-century public sphere, Habermas actually argues that women were debarred from the public sphere of political action whilst given access to the public

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1993), especially Joan B. Landes, 'The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration', 91-116, which both seeks to feminise Habermas's public sphere and probe the model's resistance to such activity.

sphere of literary production. Further, by an ideological trompe-l'oeil, 'in the self-understanding of public opinion the public sphere appeared as one and indivisible' (56).

Women writers, in particular, therefore found themselves in a Habermasian double bind during the eighteenth century. Allowed access to the public sphere of literary production, especially novels, women were denied access to the public sphere of political action. Female interjections in political, social and religious arguments in print therefore lead to growing male anxiety over women's access to the public sphere of political action. As these separate spheres were viewed as unitary, women's writing on political issues threatened to reveal the ideological investments in this faultline between the literary and political. Combining Habermas's focus on 'class' with a feminist concern for 'gender', then, reveals the eighteenth-century male bourgeoisie's occupation of neutrality and rationality which comes under attack in the 1790s by revolutionary feminists like Hays and Robinson, and most spectacularly by Wollstonecraft. I argue that women writers, inspired by Wollstonecraft, created a space for themselves on the faultline between literary production and political action, exploiting this position to broaden the scope of women's role in the private sphere – already an implicitly political act as the conservative press sought to narrow conceptions of women's domestic role.

Wollstonecraft both criticised stereotypical representations of the female reader in literature and contemporary criticism and challenged the related divisions between public and private spheres, particularly women's role within them. Women writers responding to Wollstonecraft also negotiated these conflicting representations and divisions. Moreover, I argue that their response often took place on a metatextual level, including in their narrative figures of female readers reading texts

by Wollstonecraft, other female philosophers and radical writers. For example, Wollstonecraft inveighs against ‘the reveries of the stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up strange tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties’.<sup>30</sup> Jane Austen seems to respond directly to Wollstonecraft’s condemnation of stupid novelists in her defence of novel writing and reading in Northanger Abbey, published posthumously in 1818 but first conceived in the late 1790s. Imagining a conventional novelistic heroine, ‘who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust’, dismissing her reading as ‘only a novel!’,<sup>31</sup> Austen retorts:

‘It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;’ or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. (Northanger Abbey, 31)

Austen replaces Wollstonecraft’s condemnation of ‘the reveries of the stupid novelists’ with a celebration of the novel as a vehicle for displaying ‘the greatest powers of the mind’. Wollstonecraft’s assertion that novelists know ‘little of human nature’ is contradicted by Austen’s claim that novels show ‘the most thorough knowledge of human nature’. Finally, Wollstonecraft’s accusation of ‘sentimental jargon’ is challenged by Austen’s ‘best chosen language’. If Austen is deliberately echoing Wollstonecraft here, then her silence on the novel’s effect on the performance of women’s ‘daily duties’ hints at Austen’s more confident portrayal of

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman [1792]. The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 5, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 256.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey [1818], eds. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen, vol. 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30. Subsequent references, in text.

reading as symbolic of women's position between private and public sphere, analysed in further detail in my discussion of Mansfield Park (see chapter 5, below).

Critics such as Eve Tavor Bannet, Elizabeth Eger, Patricia McKee, and many others,<sup>32</sup> have focussed on women's situation between private and public sphere in the eighteenth century, with more or less focus on female readers and reading. Pearson and Fergus both discuss anxieties surrounding the figure of the female reader. Fergus postulates that 'Implicit here [in these anxieties] is a fear of female fantasy or sexual stimulation, crystallising in the prevalent male fantasy that women who read novels will reject ordinary men who love them, cherishing instead a romantic daydream' ('Women Readers', 173). Pearson argues that 'Female reading figures both solitary and selfish pleasure and rationality and self-suppression; as such it reveals the contradictions in contemporary gender-ideologies' (Women's Reading in Britain, 16). Building on these important insights, I aim to show that female readers play an important role in the novels I study because they both confront male anxieties about the impact of reading on women's desires and seek to challenge the gender ideologies at work within the figure of the female reader by prompting their actual female readers to consider the behaviour of female characters who read within their novels.

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<sup>32</sup> See Eve Tavor Bannet, The Domestic Revolution (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) for her account of the role of women writers in shaping the discourses of domesticity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; although I would argue that her division of women into 'Egalitarians' and 'Matriarchs', 3-4, perpetuates rather than challenges existing categorisations of women into revolutionary and counter-revolutionary camps. Women, Writing and the Public Sphere is an excellent collection detailing the intersections between public and private through the eighteenth century; especially relevant to my thesis are Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Most Public Sphere of All: The Family', 239-56, which analyses Wollstonecraft's arguments projecting the family into the public sphere of political action, and Mary Jacobus, 'Intimate Connections: Scandalous Memoirs and Epistolary Indiscretion', 274-89, analysing Godwin's representation of Wollstonecraft in his Memoirs and the editing of her Posthumous Works. Patricia McKee, Public & Private: Gender, Class and the British Novel (1764-1878) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) explores the dichotomy between private life and public knowledge from the mid-eighteenth to the late-nineteenth century.

The female reader shared a similar trajectory to the female philosopher through the eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries. She began as an equivocal celebration of the development of female literacy over the course of the century, leavened with anxieties over the effects of reading on the imagination, particularly the autonomous expression of female desire. These concerns about the female reader clustered around her reading of the novel, often figured as a particularly feminine genre. In 1752, Charlotte Lennox published The Female Quixote, the heroine of which misreads novels and romances as reality, as the Spanish Don had interpreted the world through outdated works of chivalry. Throughout the eighteenth century, and in the 1790s in particular, female reading was represented as a dangerous activity, both for female readers themselves and for their wider social situation. The term 'female quixote', which Lennox applies to her heroine, offers a connection between the figures of the female reader and the female philosopher, expressing concerns that women's reading will lead them astray, socially and sexually. In the 1790s, as women's reading increasingly included works of radical philosophy, the female quixote became submerged within the female philosopher figure, particularly her counter-revolutionary caricature. Gary Kelly situates the transgressive characters of Bridgetina Botherim and Julia Delmond in Elizabeth Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, discussed in chapter 3 below, as female quixotes, although I argue that it is Bridgetina and Julia's reading of philosophical tracts which leads them astray rather than novels alone, linking them with the more current term female philosopher above female quixote.<sup>33</sup> Joe Bray further questions the applicability of the term 'female quixote' to female readers in

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<sup>33</sup> See Gary Kelly, Women, Writing and Revolution, 144-49, for his analysis of Hamilton's novel and her use of the female reader in it.

women's writing of the Romantic period, arguing that the female reader in the early nineteenth century was often more active and self-correcting than the image of the passive, unquestioning, thoughtless female reader in earlier works and later criticism.<sup>34</sup> Bray's repositioning of the female reader as a textual role model within women's writing engages with the more positive representations of the female philosopher figure in her Enlightenment or radical iterations. I argue that the female reader, like the female philosopher, and indeed representations of Wollstonecraft herself, was split between contested iterations in women's writing of the period. It is through the process of working through these divided representations, sometimes by favouring one over the other, sometimes by creating a new female character who transcends these divisions, that women writers of the Romantic period forged new understandings of women's role in private and public spheres.

In the 1790s, the discourse surrounding female reading and readers became radicalised by the debate about the effects of the French Revolution in Britain, often combining with the parallel representation of the female philosopher. Reading was figured as both a potentially revolutionary act, liberating female expression and underscored by anxieties about female sexuality and desire, and as a patriotic activity, inculcating domestic duties and civic responsiveness. Jon P. Klancher situates the 1790s as a turning point in the history of reading as an explicitly political activity, although his landmark The Making of English Reading Audiences does not focus on the role of female readers in the new public spheres of the early nineteenth

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<sup>34</sup> See Joe Bray, The Female Reader in the English Novel (New York: Routledge, 2009) for his analysis of the role of the intradiegetic reader, or the reader within the narrative, in women's writing of the Romantic period.

century.<sup>35</sup> Female reading was a key term, however, within the radical, middle class and coterie groups Klancher studies, and Wollstonecraft functioned as a nucleus around which responses to female readers cluster, combined with her reception as a female philosopher.

Reception studies form a starting point for the methodological focus of my thesis. Each chapter explores how an author or group of authors read Wollstonecraft's life and work; how this is figured within the text through the inclusion of female readers, often conflated with the figure of the female philosopher; and how readers, especially the burgeoning audience of professional critics and reviewers, respond to the writers who engage with Wollstonecraft's posthumous legacy in the early nineteenth century. Several critics have studied the developments in the reception of key literary figures through the eighteenth century, including Michael Dobson on Shakespeare, Dustin Griffin on Milton, Claudia Thomas on Pope and Jane Spencer on Behn.<sup>36</sup> My thesis builds on these reception studies by exploring women writers' relationships to Wollstonecraft's life and work in the early nineteenth century. My work on Wollstonecraft builds on Spencer's on Behn, particularly her insight that 'Women proved their respectability by showing how greatly they differed

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<sup>35</sup> Jon P. Klancher focuses on the interrelated and overlapping developments of radical, middle class and coterie readers in The Making of English Reading Audiences (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Michael Dobson, The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) explores the reception of and revisions made to Shakespeare's plays from the Restoration into the eighteenth century, analysing the cultural factors which combined to cement Shakespeare's reputation as the British national poet. Dustin Griffin, Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) argues against the anxiety of influence model of literary inheritance to position Milton's oeuvre as a rich resource for eighteenth-century poets. Claudia Thomas, Alexander Pope and His Eighteenth-Century Women Readers (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994) uses reader-response criticism to analyse both how Pope addresses a female audience and how women writers responded to Pope, often surprisingly sympathetically, to develop their own perspectives on female education and women's role in society. Jane Spencer, Aphra Behn's Afterlife (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) explores Behn's reception throughout the eighteenth century, analysing her influence on its literature.

from Behn<sup>37</sup> – a strikingly similar rhetorical strategy was used by several writers in their engagement with Wollstonecraft.

### 3) Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft's reception shifted from the early 1790s' celebration of her as a proponent of female education in an established Enlightenment tradition to notoriety after her death in 1797, especially after the publication of Godwin's Memoirs in 1798, when his candid revelations were used by a reactionary press to depict her as sexually promiscuous, religiously heterodox, and politically dangerous. Her changing reputation intertwined with the evolving representations of the female philosopher throughout the 1790s, and both influenced the other, so that as attitudes hardened towards the female philosopher, Wollstonecraft's reputation also worsened, and details of her private life were exaggerated in order to further attack the figure of the female philosopher. Additionally, Wollstonecraft's reputation influenced the shifting reception of her most famous work, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, so that upon publication the text could be celebrated as a treatise on female education drawing on an established tradition, but after her death, it was vilified as 'a scripture, archly framed, for propagating w----s'.<sup>38</sup>

Scholars of Wollstonecraft have traced the changing reception of her life and works from the 1790s into the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>39</sup> The consensus

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<sup>37</sup> See Jane Spencer, Aphra Behn's Afterlife, 12.

<sup>38</sup> See 'The Vision of Liberty', published in the Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine 9 (1801). The poem satirises various radical writers, focussing on Godwin's relationship with Wollstonecraft, attacking his Memoirs, and using them to savage Wollstonecraft's life and writing.

<sup>39</sup> Ty and Johnson begin their studies of radical writers of the 1790s and early nineteenth century by outlining these shifts in Wollstonecraft's reception. See Eleanor Ty, Unsex'd Revolutionaries and Claudia Johnson, Equivocal Beings (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9-12, for their similar descriptions. Harriet Jump also introduces her anthology of material on Wollstonecraft's

throughout much of the twentieth century was that the publication of Godwin's Memoirs eclipsed Wollstonecraft's reception for at least the first half of the nineteenth century, her scandalous reputation making it difficult, if not impossible, for women writers to engage with her life and work directly. In the later nineteenth century, precursors to and then the suffragette movement itself began to salvage Wollstonecraft's reputation, paving the way for renewed interest in and innovative scholarship on Wollstonecraft in the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s. Recent scholarship has complicated this historical narrative by re-examining early nineteenth-century responses to Wollstonecraft and uncovering more sympathetic engagement with her life and work amongst women writers of the 1800s and 1810s.<sup>40</sup> Wollstonecraft's Ghost builds on this work by re-examining Wollstonecraft's early reception and reputation amongst women writers of the early

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biographies by detailing her posthumous reputation, Lives of the Great Romantics III: Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley by Their Contemporaries, Vol. 2: Wollstonecraft (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999). Barbara Taylor concludes Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination with her own telling of Wollstonecraft's reception in the nineteenth century, 246-53.

<sup>40</sup> Focussing only on the women writers I discuss in the chapters which follow, Amelia Opie's engagement with Wollstonecraft has been reread as more complex than simple repudiation by Eleanor Ty, Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Roxanne Eberle, Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress (New York: Palgrave, 2002); and Anne Mellor, "'Am I Not a Woman, and a Sister?": Slavery, Romanticism and Gender' in Romanticism, Race and Imperial Culture, 1780-1834, eds. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, 311-29; Maria Edgeworth has been repositioned from conservative apologist for patriarchy to a much more subversive, challenging writer, whose work draws on and develops Wollstonecraft's, by Cliona Ó Gallchoir, Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005); Susan B. Egenolf, The Art of Political Fiction in Hamilton, Edgeworth and Owenson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); and Julia Nash, ed. New Essays on Maria Edgeworth (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Frances Burney's complex engagement with Wollstonecraft in The Wanderer has been explored by Margaret Doody, Frances Burney: The Life in the Works (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and reread by Claudia Johnson, Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Austen's sympathetic, if obfuscated, engagement with Wollstonecraft is discussed, for example, by Claudia Johnson, Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990); Margaret Kirkham, Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), and Peter Knox-Shaw, Jane Austen and the Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Although Elizabeth Hamilton is often still discussed as a straightforwardly Anti-Jacobin writer, Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, in spite of its explicit counter-revolutionary politics, includes a forthright defence of Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments. Mary Shelley's writing everywhere abounds with allusions to and engagement with Wollstonecraft's life and work.

nineteenth century, exploring the ways in which these novelists drew on competing representations of Wollstonecraft herself, and the interconnected figures of the female philosopher and the female reader, in order to develop their own reading of her textual legacy. I situate this strategy as Post-Jacobin, distinct from both the English Jacobin fiction of the early 1790s, sympathetic to the ideals of the French Revolution, and the Anti-Jacobin writing against these ideals from the late 1790s onwards, as it engages sympathetically with elements of Wollstonecraft's life and work, whilst reorienting it for a post-revolutionary reading audience.

In the 'Advertisement' to her first, semi-autobiographical novel, Mary, A Fiction (1788), Wollstonecraft describes the work as 'an artless tale, without episodes, [in which] the mind of a woman, who has thinking powers is displayed'.<sup>41</sup> Although she avoids using the term 'female philosopher' here, Wollstonecraft's aim to display 'the mind of a woman, who has thinking powers' accesses the Enlightenment tradition of the figure, described above. The 'Advertisement' also expresses Wollstonecraft's concerns about the figure, continuing 'The female organs have been thought too weak for this arduous employment; and experience seems to justify the assertion' (Mary, 5). Although this statement is double-edged, questioning the proposition it seems to agree with, it also shows Wollstonecraft's painful awareness of the prejudices obstructing women at the end of the eighteenth century. She concludes by situating her novel's 'Mary', based on many of her own experiences, as a fictional being, in order to explore its 'grandeur... derived from the operation of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion; but drawn by the individual from the original source' (Mary, 5). In this 'Advertisement', Wollstonecraft transmutes the female

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary, A Fiction [1788] in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 1, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 5.

philosopher figure into fiction, in order to explore her reasoning powers, stressing the religious underpinnings of her thought by linking them to a divine 'source'. Her desire to be 'not subjugated to opinion' will become a point of contention in representations of the female philosopher figure in the revolutionary tumult of the 1790s.

In her first explicitly polemical work, A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790), Wollstonecraft contrasts her style of argument, which she characterises as direct, rational and masculine, with Burke's, which she satirises throughout as effeminate, emotive and irrational.<sup>42</sup> In responding to Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), Wollstonecraft deliberately contrasts her cool, philosophical stance as a writer with Burke's impassioned, and therefore, for Wollstonecraft, unreasonable polemic. In this polemic, first published anonymously, Wollstonecraft adopts a neutral, implicitly masculine voice, again avoiding the use of the term 'female philosopher'. Later novels by Mary Hays, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen, which I explore in the following chapters of my thesis, replay this confrontation between Wollstonecraft and Burke in their depictions of young women, explicitly or implicitly drawing on the female philosopher figure, in conflict with older men.

In her most famous work, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft again avoids representing herself as a 'female philosopher'. Instead, she describes herself as a gender-neutral 'philosopher'. For example, she writes: 'As a philosopher, I read with indignation the plausible epithets which men use to soften their insults; and, as a moralist, I ask what is meant by such heterogeneous associations, as fair defects, amiable weaknesses, etc?' (Vindication, 103).

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<sup>42</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Men [1790] in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 5, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

Wollstonecraft dissociates herself from the epithet ‘female philosopher’ here, opting for the neutral, or even masculine, appellations of ‘philosopher’ and ‘moralist’. She was perhaps aware of the complex literary legacy of the term ‘female philosopher’, although, ironically, she will come to be inextricably associated with it, particularly after her death.

The complexity of Wollstonecraft’s legacy can be seen in the contentious reception of her most important and influential work, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Wollstonecraft’s feminist polemic was well received in 1792, catapulting her into celebrity status and being read generally as a sensible treatise on women’s education, related to other works of women’s writing explicitly referred to by Wollstonecraft such as Macaulay’s Letters on Education. Several reviewers, however, already anxiously commented upon the work’s radical politics – an anxiety which precipitated into active opprobrium in the late 1790s, particularly after Wollstonecraft’s death.<sup>43</sup> Enfield, in the liberal Monthly Review of June 1792, positioned Wollstonecraft as a philosopher, and, like Wollstonecraft herself, carefully avoided gendering the term: ‘In the class of philosophers, the author of this treatise – whom we will not offend by styling, authoress – has a right to a distinguished place’.<sup>44</sup> Enfield reviewed Wollstonecraft’s treatise sympathetically, stressing the virtues of her educational programme and emphasis on improving manners. However, he also voiced concern about Wollstonecraft’s radical politics: ‘We do not,

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<sup>43</sup> R.M. Janes, ‘On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’ Journal of the History of Ideas 39.2 (April-June 1978), 293-302, traces the history of reviews of this work from the early positive response through the reactionary opprobrium placed on it in the hindsight of Godwin’s Memoirs into early nineteenth century attempts to salvage the reputation of both the work and the author.

<sup>44</sup> [William Enfield], Rev. of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, by Mary Wollstonecraft, Monthly Review; or, Literary Examiner 8 (May-June, 1792), (London: Richard Griffiths, 1792), 198-209, 198. Subsequent references, in-text.

however, so zealously adopt Miss W's plan for a REVOLUTION in female education and manners, as not to perceive that several of her opinions are fanciful, and some of her projects are romantic' (Enfield, 208-9), arguing against women 'assuming an active part in civil government' and for keeping the 'distinction of sex' which Wollstonecraft seeks to confound (209).

If Enfield, generally sympathetic to Wollstonecraft's aims, expressed some hesitation about the more radical ideas underpinning her polemic, especially her arguments that women should take on a more active role in the public sphere of political action, the anonymous review published in the conservative Critical Review combined ridicule and condescension, covering up a certain amount of anxiety, to attack Wollstonecraft's radical prospectus:

It may be fancy, prejudice, or obstinacy, we contend not for the name, but we are infinitely better pleased with the present system; and, in truth, dear young lady, for by the appellation sometimes prefixed to your name we must suppose you to be young, endeavour to attain 'the weak elegancy of mind', the 'sweet docility of manners', 'the exquisite sensibility', the former ornaments of your sex; we are certain you will be more pleasing, and we dare to pronounce that you will be infinitely happier.<sup>45</sup>

The Critical Review attacked Wollstonecraft's arguments for improved education, suggesting that superior intellectual and physical capabilities would lead to women refusing to nurse their children, instead competing with their potential husbands for 'superiority of mind' ('Review', 390), reversing her arguments against pleasing men by patronisingly suggesting she labour to please and be happy. The review chauvinistically concludes by arguing that rather than the rational, scientific and independent education posited by Wollstonecraft, 'the conversation of a sensible

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<sup>45</sup> Rev. of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, by Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Critical Review; or, Annals of Literature* 4 (1792) (London: A. Hamilton, 1792), 389-98, 390. Subsequent references, in-text.

man... will teach better than books' (392). Both Enfield's review and this from the Critical Review lay stress on women's role in the private sphere instead of the public, arguing against Wollstonecraft's extension of the remit of women's activities. Women writers of the early nineteenth century used Wollstonecraft's writing to position themselves in the public sphere of literary production, able to comment on and critique the male-dominated public sphere of political action.

After the publication of Godwin's Memoirs, the Anti-Jacobin Review could savage Wollstonecraft's Vindication as a work:

which the superficial fancied to be profound, and the profound knew to be superficial: it indeed had very little title to the character of ingenuity... Her doctrines are almost all obvious corollaries from the theorems of Paine. If we admit his principle, that all men have an equal right to be governors and statesmen, without any regard to their virtues and talents, there can be no reason for excluding women or even children.<sup>46</sup>

This brief sally against the Vindication forms part of a longer review attacking Godwin's Memoirs and Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel Maria, edited by Godwin, which sought to denigrate the couple's radical politics and revolutionary philosophies. The Anti-Jacobin subordinates Wollstonecraft's distinct ideas to Godwin's, and also to Paine's, as in the above passage, rather than treating them seriously in their own right. The review also focuses much more on her sexual history rather than on her writing as such, showing its writer to be both titillated and disgusted by Godwin's candid revelations.

Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period analyses the ways in which Wollstonecraft's reception amongst women writers combined with representations of the female philosopher and female reader

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<sup>46</sup> Rev. of Memoirs of the Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, by William Godwin, and Posthumous Works, ed. Godwin, The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine; or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor 1 (July 1798) London: J. Plymsell et al., 1799, 95.

in order to allow for the discussion and development of her ideas in the context of the early nineteenth century. Throughout my thesis, I deploy Peter Knox-Shaw's concept of the Post-Jacobin novel, in order to explore the tensions which threaten the Habermasian public sphere from the late eighteenth century onwards: the complex social pressures ranging from the economic, military and cultural fallout of Britain's long wars with post-revolutionary then Napoleonic France, the rise of radical working-class consciousness, and the balancing act of British imperial expansion with the development of national identity in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.<sup>47</sup> Knox-Shaw connects Godwin's 1799 novel St. Leon with Austen's first novel Sense and Sensibility (published 1811, but first drafted in the 1790s), arguing that both novels '– which took shape more or less concurrently – need to be treated... as Post-Jacobin', rather than English Jacobin or Anti-Jacobin texts, as they share twin concerns over the development of the individual in relation to society and for social stability in the post-revolutionary era.<sup>48</sup> Knox-Shaw strives to distance Austen from Marilyn Butler's influential representation of her as Anti-Jacobin, arguing that she is much more influenced by the sceptical tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment. He uses the term Post-Jacobin to realign the perspective on Austen's more conservative politics towards Godwin's, read as dangerously radical at the time, in order to 'point

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<sup>47</sup> Many critics have studied the pressures on Britain in the period after the early sympathy for the ideals of the French Revolution had been eroded by the bloodshed and chaos of the Terror and the military, economic and social costs of war with Revolutionary France had taken its toll. This post-revolutionary era is a crucial concept for my thesis. The impact of the Napoleonic wars on both British society and literature is explored by Mary Favret, War At a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern War Time (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). Ian Haywood analyses the development of early nineteenth-century radical literature amongst the working class in The Revolution in Popular Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Questions of national identity and the expansion of empire are discussed in, for example, Nigel Leask, British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Katie Trumpener, Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>48</sup> Peter Knox-Shaw, Jane Austen and the Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131, emphasis in original. Subsequent references, in-text.

to the moderate, even liberal character of Jane Austen's stance among her contemporaries' (Jane Austen, 130). In my view, Post-Jacobinism is more conservative than the earlier radicalism of the English Jacobin novel, although it remains wary of the patriotic dogmatism proscribed by Anti-Jacobin ideology. The Post-Jacobin novel balances between the conservative need for increased social stability and an awareness of the individual costs of increasing conservatism in society. In this sense, I agree with Knox-Shaw's description of Austen and Godwin sharing a liberal perspective, but emphasise the equivocal nature of liberalism in the period, balanced between competing radical and conservative positions. Analysing the later political models across post-Napoleonic Europe, Michael Broers argues that a well-defined liberal ideology takes shape over the period between 1830 and 1848. He defines liberalism as 'against Right and Left', arguing that 'Liberals were deeply conscious of the need to accommodate reform with the particular circumstances of their societies, and fearful that any resurgence of revolutionary extremism would undo all their plans, however practical or limited'.<sup>49</sup> I argue that, as the political definition of liberalism was shifting in the post-revolutionary period between 1799 and 1815, so too were the literary, liberal positions which I describe as Post-Jacobin, moving between what Broers labels a progressive stance, aligned with radicalism against reaction, and a moderate one, defining itself more conservatively against radicalism (Europe After Napoleon, 35).

This post-revolutionary period developed over two stages: the first, from 1799-1815, was dominated by Britain's war with Napoleonic France, over the course of which, loyalist propaganda dismantled the intellectual and political legitimacy of

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Broers, Europe After Napoleon: Revolution, Reaction and Romanticism, 1814-1848 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 38, 37. Subsequent references, in-text.

1790s revolutionary thought; the second, from 1815-48, witnessed the reestablishment of autocratic regimes across post-Napoleonic Europe.<sup>50</sup> Post-revolutionary Britain was characterised by increasing government repression of radical activity, the development of loyalist propaganda, and the promulgation of the doctrine of separate spheres, restricting women to a narrowly defined domestic sphere. Focussing on responses to the increasing prominence of women writers in the period, Gary Kelly argues that, in post-revolutionary Britain, 'resistance to feminization of politics, culture and writing was... expressed through remasculinization of topics, genres, tropes, and schemata developed by women writers in recent decades' (Women, Writing and Revolution, 177). The women writers I analyse in my thesis react to this post-revolutionary masculinist strategy by drawing on Wollstonecraft's work in order to broaden the conception of women's role in private and public spheres.

Knox-Shaw's 'Post-Jacobin' concept signifies a new literary strategy to cope with the post-revolutionary demands on writers in the early nineteenth century. I extend Knox-Shaw's mention of Post-Jacobinism throughout the rest of my thesis, developing his original linkage between Godwin and Austen to discuss the work of writers as diverse as Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Hamilton, Maria Edgeworth, Frances Burney and Mary Shelley, to mean a shared concern for social stability grounded in an analysis of the complex political, cultural and spiritual forces shaping individual characters in the period after the French Revolution. There is a danger that the Post-Jacobin label could flatten distinctions between the political, social and cultural affiliations of different writers; however, I use Post-Jacobinism as a lens, rather than

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<sup>50</sup> See Jonathan Sperber, Revolutionary Europe, 1780-1850 (Harlow: Longman, 2000) and Michael Broers, Europe After Napoleon for their analyses of the return of autocratic regimes across Europe in the post-Napoleonic era.

a distinct category, through which to view texts which share, in spite of their writers' divergent political allegiances, a set of similar concerns about the post-revolutionary landscapes of Britain, Europe and the wider world. These political, social and cultural landscapes were riven by the effects of war, clashes in class-consciousness, and increasingly polarised conceptions of gender. As such, Post-Jacobinism is a useful term to distinguish texts which do not fit easily into existing categories of Jacobin or Anti-Jacobin writing, particularly in relation to women's writing engaging with Wollstonecraft's life and work.

Post-Jacobin novels, such as Edgeworth's Belinda (1801), Burney's The Wanderer (1814), Austen's Mansfield Park (1814) and Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), are concerned with the impact of a network of cultural concerns on individuals and the concomitant way in which individuals unite, or fail to unite, to form communities on local to national and international levels. They are also profoundly interested in the aesthetics of representing individual consciousness within these larger communities. I see the Post-Jacobin novel as differing from both Gary Kelly's English Jacobin novel, examples of which include Thomas Holcroft's Anna St. Ives (1792), Godwin's Caleb Williams (1794) and Robert Bage's Hermesprong (1796), as it includes writers from across the political spectrum and allows for shifts in political allegiance within the oeuvre of individual writers, particularly Godwin. It is also distinct from Matthew Grenby's Anti-Jacobin novel, examples of which include Charles Lloyd's Edmund Oliver (1798), Jane West's A Tale of the Times (1799) and Charles Lucas' The Infernal Quixote (1801), as it loses the antagonistic, necessarily reactionary, connotations of such a work.

As a concept, 'Post-Jacobinism', like 'feminism' or 'Romanticism', was obviously not in use at the time. However, it usefully distinguishes a distinct set of

concerns running through early nineteenth-century writing different from the optimistic radicalism of the early 1790s, designated 'Jacobin' by their opponents, and the later violently reactionary attacks on radical writers organised by self-proclaimed Anti-Jacobins. Grenby distils three rhetorical strategies shared by Anti-Jacobin writing from his overview of conservative fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: firstly, to 'display the Revolution in France in all its horror'; secondly, 'to caricature the "new philosophy" of the British radicals, to show their utopian schemes as, first, chimerical and second, productive only of evil'; and thirdly, to 'appeal directly to the fears of their overwhelmingly middle- and upper-class readers, possessive of their property and jealous of their social standing, by exposing Jacobinism as a ruthless assault on hierarchy, status and wealth'.<sup>51</sup> Post-Jacobinism, developing concurrently with Anti-Jacobinism, diverges from it in several important respects: firstly, what I am calling the Post-Jacobin novel is much more suspicious, and critical, of British social, political and economic institutions than the unquestioning loyalty and patriotism of Anti-Jacobinism allows; secondly, particularly in women's writing, caricature functions as a double-edged sword, mocking 'new philosophy' at the same time as adopting some of its precepts and using them to critique establishment ideas; and thirdly, the Post-Jacobin novel interrogates the moral weaknesses of the propertied classes, subjecting 'hierarchy, status and wealth' to a subtler but no less ruthless assault than in the radical novels of the revolutionary decade. For example, the novels I analyse in-depth in my third chapter, Opie's Adeline Mowbray, Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, and Edgeworth's Belinda can be described as Post-Jacobin because, whilst striving to

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<sup>51</sup> Matthew Grenby, The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11-12.

distance themselves from the revolutionary philosophy of the 1790s, they each draw on this, particularly Wollstonecraft's intellectual legacy, in order to critique modern morals and manners.

My first chapter explores Mary Hays' personal, professional and posthumous engagement with Wollstonecraft over the course of the decade from 1793 to 1803, her representation of her friend and mentor as the foremost female philosopher of the age before and after Wollstonecraft's death, and how she uses this to develop her own self-representation as a feminist. This self-representation is at its most successful in Hays' 1803 work, Female Biography, an anthology of women's historiography which neglected to include Wollstonecraft, which nevertheless sublimates her influence in order to make a series of feminist arguments. As such, much of Hays' career in the 1790s predates the Post-Jacobin moment discussed above, although her 1799 novel The Victim of Prejudice and Female Biography share the nuanced political and philosophical perspectives of Godwin and Austen's novels. My Hays chapter uses her work to explore the increasingly contentious debates surrounding the female philosopher figure throughout the 1790s, leading later women writers to eschew either English Jacobin or Anti-Jacobin approaches to the arguments around women's rights, access to education and potential in society, which have Wollstonecraft as their central focus. Hays' work is integral in defining Wollstonecraft as the foremost female philosopher of the decade, and Hays as her disciple. Both images came under increasing attack as the decade drew to a close with Britain at war with Revolutionary France and increasingly suspicious of radical sympathisers. Later women writers, particularly Elizabeth Hamilton, whose Bridgetina Botherim in Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800) is recognisably based on Hays, use a caricatured version of Hays in order to create a negative

female philosopher figure – ugly, abrasive and pedantic – in order to rescue Wollstonecraft from reactionary opprobrium and use her feminist arguments to develop a more positive female role model.

My second chapter explores Godwin's radical, Romantic reading of Wollstonecraft's life and works in his Memoirs of the Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and his reinscription of her into domestic discourse with his fictional paragon Marguerite de Damville in his 1799 novel St. Leon. This chapter explores the connections between Godwin and Wollstonecraft's discussions about the importance of philosophy in private and public life, expressed passionately in their private correspondence, in order to develop firstly, a radical, Romanticised representation of his wife in biography and fiction; secondly, an evaluation of the links between Wollstonecraft's private personality and her public writing; and thirdly, a revised account of the importance of private relationships, what he terms the 'domestic affections', in his public philosophy of political justice. The reactionary attacks on Godwin's biography use his candid revelations about Wollstonecraft's romantic entanglements to rewrite the connections between her private life and public works as tending towards sexual and social transgression. St. Leon responds to these attacks by collapsing the character of the Wollstonecraftian-inspired Marguerite into a discourse of domesticity; her sometimes radical conversation, always at odds with her submissive behaviour, represents nostalgia for a lost revolutionary moment.

My third chapter traces the fate of the female philosopher through Opie's Adeline Mowbray, Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers and Edgeworth's Belinda. Both Opie and Hamilton are implicitly sympathetic to Wollstonecraft's feminist polemic, whilst harbouring doubts about the ability of her brand of radical

politics to ameliorate the condition of women in society. I argue that, in succumbing to the standard trope of seduction followed by death in their representations of the female philosopher, Opie and Hamilton compromise their Wollstonecraftian social critique. In refusing to kill off Lady Delacour at the conclusion of Belinda, Edgeworth escapes from this cliché, opening out the possibility for at least a textual revolution in novel form. Each writer is engaged with a liberal weighing up of radical and conservative models of female behaviour, suggesting different ways out of what seems to be a personal and political deadlock.

My fourth chapter analyses the position of the female philosopher in two works of 1814, Burney's The Wanderer and Austen's Mansfield Park. Both works are anchored in debates from the 1790s, particularly on female education and the politics of the marriage market, but written and published in a post-revolutionary era unsympathetic to earlier radical arguments. I situate both novels as Post-Jacobin: concerned with the need to resolve the urgent debates of the 1790s but painfully aware of the insufficiency of the counter-revolutionary solution of nationalist domesticity at an individual level. Whereas Burney's novel looks backwards to the 1790s, with the action of the novel set during Robespierre's Terror and including a pseudo-Wollstonecraftian caricature, Austen sublimates these arguments in her novel, divesting even her most Jacobinical characters, the Crawfords, of any overtly political content. Instead, I argue that Austen appropriates the radical analysis of the way in which women's subordination to men warps their personalities, popularised by Wollstonecraft, in her exploration of Fanny Price's character. Austen's engagement with Wollstonecraft is markedly less direct than those of the other writers I discuss, marking the farthest point away from Wollstonecraft's influence, although I argue that Mansfield Park is still haunted by the spectres of competing

representations of the female philosopher in the contrasting figures of Fanny Price and Mary Crawford. My fifth and final chapter, on the other hand, returns to the personal engagement with Wollstonecraft's legacy in Mary Shelley's writing.

In this concluding chapter, I trace the ways in which Mary Shelley takes the figure of the female philosopher from earlier writing and shapes her into new generic parameters popular in the literature of the 1820s and 30s. Mary Shelley moves from a profound anxiety over her ability to bear the burden of her mother's literary and intellectual legacy in her early novels, especially apparent in the tragic trajectories of her female heroines in Frankenstein, Valperga and The Last Man, to an increasing confidence in both her own writing abilities and her personal and textual relationship with Wollstonecraft, figured in her later novels, Perkin Warbeck, Lodore and Falkner. From the 1790s to the 1830s, the female philosopher has evolved from an epithet of approbation to a reactionary bogeywomen, haunting women writers' self-representations and the development of their female characters. The female philosopher's influence on later representations of both the woman writer and her heroines can be glimpsed as a subtext running through the later nineteenth century, from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* into the Victorian period and beyond. Haunting both these later representations and the novels I discuss in my thesis is the ghost of Wollstonecraft herself.



## I: Haunted by Wollstonecraft: Representations of the Female Philosopher in the Works of Mary Hays

### 1) Introduction: Cursory Remarks

In this chapter, I focus on the way in which Hays's personal and professional relationship with Wollstonecraft fuels her self-representation as a female philosopher, her corresponding depiction of her friend and mentor in print, and the contemporary reception and counter-representation of Hays and Wollstonecraft over the decade from the publication of Letters and Essays in 1793 to Female Biography in 1803.<sup>1</sup> Although I argue that it is this relationship which catalyses Hays's self-representation as a female philosopher, and her corresponding representation of her friend and mentor in print, Hays's first publication predates this relationship and offers a perspective on how her later work differs from her Wollstonecraft's through her individual emphasis on faith, women's access to education, the connections between private and public worship, and their relationship to private and public spheres. In 1792, Hays published Cursory Remarks on An Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship, possibly the first response to Gilbert Wakefield's attack on the Dissenting community's practice of inclusive preaching.<sup>2</sup> Wakefield argued against public worship, citing scriptural examples of

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<sup>1</sup> This focus excludes from my discussion Hays's later works of historiography, children's fiction and the 1820 publication of Memoirs of Queens, which drew mostly on the royal biographies Hays had included in Female Biography, adding a sympathetic portrait of Queen Caroline at the height of the scandal surrounding this figure. Hays connects 1790s debates on women to this later royal crisis. I focus solely on the first decade of Hays's writing career as these works see her working through Wollstonecraft's influence, and this is also the oeuvre from which later women writers draw their versions of Hays and her characters.

<sup>2</sup> Gina Luria Walker, Mary Hays (1759-1843): The Growth of a Woman's Mind (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) argues that 'the first published response [to Wakefield's Enquiry] seems to have come from

Christ praying alone, but also widening this particular point to criticise the values and mores of his former colleagues at the Dissenting New College, Hackney. Hays, writing under the pseudonym Eusebia, rebutted Wakefield's arguments by stressing the communal nature of Dissenting practice, citing alternative examples from scripture of collective prayer and stressing the need for public worship to create a community of the faithful.<sup>3</sup> This was a crucial argument for Hays, as the Dissenting community formed an important part of her education. An incidental consequence of Wakefield's arguments restricting prayer to the private sphere, had they been successful, would have also limited women's access to Dissenting teaching, adding implicit urgency to Hays's reply.

By defending Dissenting women's access to public worship, Hays also connects her arguments to a nonconformist ideal of the public sphere, in which women can act as cultural arbiters. According to Daniel E. White, the Dissenting public sphere forms 'a subcategory of the classical public sphere, a fragment that exerted critical pressure from within'.<sup>4</sup> Anna M. Acosta similarly situates the Dissenting community of suburban London as a phantom public sphere, 'the ghost presence of the eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere, the phantom reminder

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Hays's, 45, and offers a lucid account of the background to the controversy and Hays's involvement in it. Subsequent references, in-text as Growth of a Woman's Mind.

<sup>3</sup> Hays's contribution into the Wakefield controversy led to her own minor fracas, as Wakefield, in his second edition, accused 'Eusebia' of being a male pseudonym, a feminine nom-de-plume disguising a male writer's attack. Hays's male friends, aware of her identity as author of the pamphlet, leapt to her defence, including William Frend, the object of Hays's unrequited affection and inspiration for the character of Augustus Harley in Hays's first novel, Memoirs of Emma Courtney, discussed further below. Wakefield's confusion about the gender of one of his antagonists underlines the tangled gender politics of women publishing political pamphlets in the late eighteenth century. Walker argues that Wakefield's final response that 'if a woman entered the public arena she would be judged, at least by him, according to the same criteria as any man' expressed 'the pervasive, private view that since women were not educated equally with men, they should stay out of public debate for which there existed masculine precedents and procedures', (Growth of a Woman's Mind, 51). Hays's writing career sets out to contradict exactly this preconception.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel E. White, Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67. Subsequent references, in text as Religious Dissent.

of what it once offered and an ongoing repudiation of the ideological sameness to which it has since been reduced'<sup>5</sup>, situated as a corollary and corrective the mainstream public sphere described by Habermas and discussed in my introduction. White argues that women writers such as Hays (although he focuses on the Aikin family circle including Anna Laetitia Barbauld and her niece Lucy Aikin) 'could and did claim to speak with authority about what they perceived to be the proper relations between... the private realm, and from this position their work entered the "republic of letters", the literary public sphere, with a peculiar force.' (Religious Dissent, 68). Hays's public defence of communal worship is her first leap into this literary public sphere, and makes a political point about women's right to the educational opportunities of the Dissenting colleges.

Throughout her career, Hays connects religious faith, women's education, literary production and political action, a combination which is tentatively offered to the public in the anonymous publication of Cursory Remarks, which will be catalysed by her relationship with Wollstonecraft and by the vicissitudes of the French Revolution debate in Britain. Another woman writer, Anna Laetitia Barbauld makes an explicit connection between the Wakefield controversy, an argument which took place mostly within Dissenting circles, and the French Revolution debate in her Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship (1792). Barbauld declares 'Every time Social Worship is celebrated, it includes a virtual declaration of the rights of man', as public worship levels the distinctions between rich and poor.<sup>6</sup> As Hays and Barbauld both realised,

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<sup>5</sup> Anna M. Acosta, 'Spaces of Dissent and the Public Sphere in Hackney, Stoke Newington, and Newington Green' *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27.1 (Winter 2003), 1-27, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792), 46.

public worship also levelled the distinctions between the sexes, connecting their arguments to the debates about the role and remit of the female philosopher figure in Revolutionary discourse, which is the focus of my thesis.

Mary Hays's oeuvre is haunted by the ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft. After Wollstonecraft's death in 1797, Hays's brief but heartfelt obituary of her friend and mentor was the first to be published, setting the scene for William Godwin's Memoirs of the Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.<sup>7</sup> Hays claimed authorship of the obituary in a later edition of The Monthly Magazine, adding that she was 'not at liberty' to add more material on Wollstonecraft 'as they will probably, within a short period, be given to the public by a far abler hand', referring to Godwin's Memoirs.<sup>8</sup> Horrified by the demonisation of Wollstonecraft following the publication of Godwin's candid biography, Hays published a longer 'Memoir' of her own. In it, she used Godwin's publication of Wollstonecraft's letters to her former lover Gilbert Imlay to construct an image of an epistolary Wollstonecraft, which I argue draws on Hays's own fictional character, Emma Courtney, in order to represent her friend as a female philosopher combining reason and passion.<sup>9</sup> This chapter traces Wollstonecraft's influence on Hays's work, showing how she uses Wollstonecraft's teaching to develop her own feminist principles, which in turn combine into a representation of Wollstonecraft as the female philosopher of the age. I conclude my analysis of Hays's 1790s career with an account of the ambitious six volume Female Biography,

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<sup>7</sup> See Mary Hays, 'Obituary of Mary Wollstonecraft' in Lives of the Great Romantics III: Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley by Their Contemporaries, Vol. 2: Wollstonecraft, ed. Harriet Jump (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 7. Hays claimed authorship of the obituary in a later edition of The Monthly Magazine, adding that she was 'not at liberty' to add more material on Wollstonecraft 'as they will probably, within a short period, be given to the public by a far abler hand', referring to Godwin's Memoirs. Mary Hays, 'Letter to the Editor' The Monthly Magazine 4 (October 1797), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Hays, 'Letter to the Editor' The Monthly Magazine 4 (October 1797), 1.

<sup>9</sup> See Mary Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft' in Annual Necrology for 1797-98 (London: Phillips, 1800), 411-60.

which has been much criticised for neglecting to include Wollstonecraft in its roll call of ‘illustrious and celebrated’ women, even though Hays’s sympathetic pen portraits of hundreds of women, ranging from heads of state, to authors, concubines and domestic paragons, are everywhere inflected with Wollstonecraftian feminism.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the shifting definitions of female philosophy throughout the 1790s, from extension of the Enlightenment project to a reactionary term of abuse, troubled both the reception of Hays’s own work and her representation of herself and Wollstonecraft as female philosophers, as I show in the changing reception of Hays’s work throughout the decade, and in her responses to these changes. Hays’s representation of herself as a female philosopher, and the shifting reception of it, from approval to assault, plays an important part in my later chapters as women writers, especially Hamilton, but also Edgeworth and arguably Burney, drew on a caricatured version of Hays in order to separate her brand of revolutionary feminism from Wollstonecraft’s, thereby representing Wollstonecraft’s philosophical arguments sympathetically in a reactionary political climate.

Although Hays attracted some adverse criticism in the early stages of her career, her reception worsened rapidly at the end of the 1790s, with a scathing review of her 1796 novel Emma Courtney appearing in the newly formed Anti-Jacobin Review of 1798, setting the tone of later caricatures of both her writing and herself. In his 1798 poem The Unsex’d Females, Richard Polwhele mentions Hays in his mock Amazonian band of Wollstonecraft’s supporters: ‘And flippant Hays

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<sup>10</sup> See Mary Hays, Female Biography, or, Memoirs of illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries, Alphabetically arranged, 6 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1803). I discuss both contemporary and modern criticisms of this text below.

assumed a cynic leer'.<sup>11</sup> Polwhele's footnote focuses on Hays's Letters and Essays, stating that 'Mary Hays, I believe, is little known', but that this work of 1793 singled her out as 'evidently a Wollstonecraftian' (The Unsex'd Females, 25). Polwhele was obviously unable or unwilling, through ignorance or prudery, to comment on Hays's much more scandalous work of 1796, Memoirs of Emma Courtney – an omission, whether strategic or accidental, which amplifies his dismissal of Hays. In a letter to Southey of 1800, Coleridge lamented to his friend a meeting with Hays, describing her as 'a thing, ugly and petticoated' and complaining about having to listen to her religious arguments, to hear her 'ex-sylogize a God with cold-blooded precision, and attempt to run religion through the body like an icicle, an icicle from a Scotch Hog-trough!'.<sup>12</sup> Coleridge's unpleasant focus on Hays's physical appearance, apparently as an argument against taking her points seriously, echoes throughout the conservative backlash against Hays's life and works after the publication of her revolutionary novels, culminating in Elizabeth Hamilton's vicious caricature of Hays as the grotesquely loathsome Bridgetina Botherim in Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, discussed in more detail in chapter 3. Hamilton's satirical representation 'dominated the public perception of Hays for the next hundred and fifty years' (Growth of a Woman's Mind, 205).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Polwhele, The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of the Pursuits of Literature (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798), 25. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in M. Ray Adams, 'Mary Hays, Disciple of William Godwin' PMLA 55.2 (June 1940), 472-83, 473. Adams begins with the careful supposition that 'she perhaps deserves more attention than she has received' but quickly jumps to the conclusion that her 'blind discipleship' of Godwin's 'philosophical maxims' made her 'the laughing-stock' not only of mean-spirited conservatives but also of those in her own liberal social circle, (472). Critical attention to Hays's life and work gathered pace in the last few decades of the millennium.

<sup>13</sup> Twentieth-century criticism of Hays and her works begins to recuperate her as an important figure in 1790s debates on feminism, revolutionary politics and the private and public spheres, with critical attention to Hays's life and work gathered pace in the last few decades of the millennium. Gary Kelly, Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) devotes two chapters to Hays, the first offering a comprehensive account of her work up to 1800; the second

This cruel satire haunted Hays for the rest of her career, although it also allowed Hamilton to rescue Wollstonecraft's work from the excesses she ridicules in Hays's writing. Hays's response to her worsening reception from 1798 onwards partakes of strategies I describe as Post-Jacobin: from her second novel, The Victim of Prejudice, which contains a radical critique of the misuse and abuse of a woman's reputation within a more conservative narrative, through the anonymous Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of the Women, which garnered positive press from the Anti-Jacobin Review, to Female Biography, which successfully harnessed Wollstonecraft's influence through her very absence. Further, as a literary caricature, Hays plays an important role in Post-Jacobin engagements with the female philosopher, Wollstonecraftian feminism and revolutionary philosophy, discussed in more detail in chapters 3 and 4.

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focusing on the personal costs to Hays of her revolutionary publications in the reactionary atmosphere of the early nineteenth century, sometimes dismissing her biographical work on Wollstonecraft and other illustrious women too readily as 'hack work' (234, 246, 250, 257). Eleanor Ty, Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) focuses her critique on Hays's revolutionary novels, Emma Courtney and The Victim of Prejudice, discussed further below, with Tilottama Rajan's exemplary chapter 'Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney' in Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre, eds. Rajan and Julia Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213-39. Alongside these works came a steady stream of journal articles and conference papers including Vivien Jones, "'The Tyranny of the Passions": Feminism and Heterosexuality in the Fiction of Wollstonecraft and Hays's in Political Gender: Texts and Contexts, eds. Sally Ledger, Josephine McDonagh and Jane Spencer (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 173-188; and Scott Nowka, 'Materialism and Feminism in Mary Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney' European Romantic Review 18.4 (2007), 521-540. In the twenty-first century, new editions of her novels, an anthology, Gina Luria Walker, ed. The Idea of Being Free (Peterborough: Broadview, 2006), covering the full range of her published oeuvre interleaved with important intertexts; a critical biography, Gina Luria Walker, Mary Hays (1759-1843): The Growth of a Woman's Mind (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), and a comprehensive edition of her correspondence, Marilyn L. Brooks, The Correspondence of Mary Hays (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), have enabled a broader and deeper understanding of Hays's life and work. This has clarified both her relationship with Wollstonecraft and her role in shaping an image of her friend and mentor which has become, in turn, central to 'the self-image of western feminism', Barbara Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 103. My chapter engages with this range of scholarship to focus on the ways in which Hays represents Wollstonecraft in order to define both Wollstonecraft's importance as female philosopher and to make claims for a position of her own as an important feminist writer, alongside her struggles to adapt to changing audience conceptions of the female philosopher figure and the potential of women's writing to make an impact on the public sphere.

## 2) 'The Rights of Woman and the Name of Wollstonecraft': Letters and Essays

In August 1792, Hays began her correspondence with Wollstonecraft with what amounts to a fan letter, praising the latter's Vindication of the Rights of Woman and her 'spirited support of the just and natural rights of her sex'.<sup>14</sup> Kelly explains how Hays, after reading Wollstonecraft's second Vindication, 'felt it to be a personally revolutionary text' (Women, Writing and Revolution, 80). This not only explains Hays's gushing tone in her letter, but the way in which Hays would later interpret Wollstonecraft's life and thought throughout her own published oeuvre:

Wollstonecraft's revolution became Hays's personal passion. Involved in planning her trip to revolutionary France, Wollstonecraft replied that she was unable to meet with Hays but promised a rendezvous upon her return to London.

After meeting Hays at Joseph Johnson's house, Wollstonecraft's next letter contains a detailed critique of Hays's self-presentation in her manuscript of Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous. Hays recollected this breakfast meeting, describing Wollstonecraft as possessing 'the sort of genius which Lavater calls the one in ten million. Her conversation, like her writings, is brilliant, forcible, instructive and entertaining. She is a true disciple of her own system, and commands at once fear and reverence, admiration and esteem' (Collected Letters, 209, fn). Gina Luria Walker singles out Hays's representation of Wollstonecraft as a genius as a seminal moment in Hays's own self-presentation: from this point on, Hays would strive to occupy the role of Wollstonecraft's 'true disciple'. Hays's realisation of

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<sup>14</sup> The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, ed. Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 2004), 202, fn. Subsequent references, in-text.

Wollstonecraft's singular nature also had ramifications for how she later constructed an image of her friend and mentor for posterity. In contrast, however, to Hays's enthusiasm for Wollstonecraft's genius, conversation and writings, Wollstonecraft adopted a distinctly chilly demeanour towards Hays and her literary endeavours in her critique of the Wollstonecraftian Letters and Essays.

Wollstonecraft undertakes a detailed critique of Hays's presentation of herself in her preface. Mary A. Waters notes that Wollstonecraft eschews advising Hays on the content of her work but comments on exactly 'how she should present herself to the reading public – how, in other words, to market herself effectively as a new author'.<sup>15</sup> Wollstonecraft criticises Hays's obsequiousness, her false humility and her reliance on male mentors. She firstly pinpoints Hays's obsequiousness, overemphasising 'the honour of publishing' which is, in Wollstonecraft's view, 'the cant of both trade and sex' (Collected Letters, 209), instead stressing the need for equality over servility in relations between employer and employed. Wollstonecraft takes issue with a character trait here, which several of Hays's male mentors, including Robert Robinson and William Godwin, had also lamented.<sup>16</sup>

Next, Wollstonecraft warns Hays that she is 'going to treat you with still greater frankness – I do not approve of your preface and I will tell you why' (Collected Letters, 209). Wollstonecraft prepares Hays for harsh but useful criticism. She scolds Hays for pleading 'Disadvantages of education' telling her that 'if the writer has not sufficient strength of mind to overcome the common difficulties which

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<sup>15</sup> Mary A. Waters, "The First of a New Genus": Mary Wollstonecraft as a Literary Critic and Mentor to Mary Hays's Eighteenth-Century Studies 37.3 (2004), 415-434, 424. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>16</sup> Walker cites Robinson's refusal to accept Hays's excessive flattery in a letter of March 1785: 'First, give me leave to tell you, yea to threaten you, that if you do not leave off complimenting me, as soon as I can write, I will spoil a quire of paper, and stretch every power I have to try and out compliment you.' (Growth of a Woman's Mind, 39).

lie in his way, nature seems to command him, with a very audible voice, to leave the task of instructing others to those who can' (209). Waters comments briefly on the 'use of masculine pronouns' throughout this passage, which, she argues, highlights 'the assumption that ordinarily authors, especially authors of expository prose, were male' ('The First of a New Genus', 424). I contend that Wollstonecraft's use of masculine pronouns in a letter between two women writers both highlights Wollstonecraft's challenge to eighteenth-century gender norms and encourages Hays to have the 'sufficient strength' to publish, and stand, on her own merits.

Wollstonecraft's final paragraph criticises Hays for including in her preface private words of encouragement from her male friends, declaring that these friends will 'still treat you like a woman', that is, with condescending acclaim in private which 'they would be sorry openly to avow without some cooling explanatory ifs'. Wollstonecraft concludes her letter with both encouragement and warning: 'In short, it requires great resolution to try rather to be useful than to please... – Rest, on yourself – if your essays have merit they will stand alone, if not the shouldering up of Dr this or that will not long keep them from falling to the ground' (Collected Letters, 210). Wollstonecraft holds out the possibility of Hays's usefulness as a writer but demands that Hays stands on her own merit, without male support. Waters concludes her own analysis of Wollstonecraft's suggestive letter by returning to this issue of self-presentation:

Her advice to this new author concludes as it began with attention not to literary or even political issues, but with guidance on self-presentation: 'till a work strongly interests the public true modesty should keep the author in the background.' We need hardly remark that although her implied author started out male, it is an especially feminine virtue – modesty – that spurs a writer to place the work before the self. (424)

Resting on yourself, for Wollstonecraft, does not mean putting yourself forward, but presenting your material assertively, remaining authorially modest or neutral. In the Vindication, Wollstonecraft devotes a chapter to 'Modesty – Comprehensively Considered, and Not as a Sexual Virtue' in which she distinguishes between humility and modesty: 'Modesty... is that soberness of mind which teaches a man not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, and should be distinguished from humility, because humility is a kind of self-abasement'.<sup>17</sup> Wollstonecraft's distinction between humility and modesty, rather than revealing her confused gender constructions, as Waters seems to be suggesting, instead illuminates her attempt to co-opt the language of neutrality – understood as a male-dominated edifice – for women writers such as herself and Hays. Wollstonecraft claims modesty as an important attribute of the female philosopher, arguing that 'I have... philosophically pursued these reflections till I inferred that those women who have most improved their reason must have the most modesty' (Vindication, 193). Wollstonecraft's representation of the philosopher here clearly demarcates her from the reactionary iteration of the female philosopher, troped as dangerously wanton and profligate.

In response to Wollstonecraft's comments, Hays redrafted her original preface so that the published version quotes Wollstonecraft's argument that 'as society is at present constituted, the little knowledge, which even women of stronger minds attain, is of too desultory a nature, and pursued in too secondary a manner to give vigour to the faculties, or clearness to the judgement'.<sup>18</sup> Hays has ingeniously responded to Wollstonecraft's criticism of pleading 'Disadvantages of education' in her preface by

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman [1792]. The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 5, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 191. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Hays, Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous (London: Knott, 1793), vi. Subsequent references, in-text.

quoting from Wollstonecraft's own analysis of the disadvantages of women's education. Hays specifies that this will be the 'only apology' she will make to her 'critical reader', a reader who is assumed to be male, but also includes Wollstonecraft herself.

In her revised preface, Hays replaces her catalogue of approving male mentors, criticised by Wollstonecraft in her letter, with a single female mentor: Wollstonecraft. Hays first praises Wollstonecraft's arguments in her Vindication: women's rights are 'founded in nature, reason, and justice, though so long degraded and sunk in frivolity and voluptuous refinement'. She then turns to her own project in Letters and Essays, a collection of opinion pieces about women's position in society which seeks to inculcate 'genuine virtue' and 'purity of heart' by encouraging the pursuit of 'knowledge and reflection' in accordance with Wollstonecraft's own recommendations (Letters and Essays, vi). In this work Hays begins to employ Wollstonecraft's ideas to explore how reason and feeling could combine to formulate her own brand of feminist philosophy.

Letters and Essays encourages this pursuit of knowledge by discussing an intellectually ambitious range of philosophical, metaphysical and theological issues in a personal, epistolary style. Wollstonecraft returns throughout the text as a touchstone for Hays's own feminism – a starting point from which Hays develops her own idiosyncratic views on women's rights, their education, and potential for social relationships both in marriage and in the world of work. Rather than being a mere imitator of Wollstonecraft, then, Hays brings Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments to bear on her own independent ideas, creatively using her friend's writing to develop her own engagement with feminism, stressing the central role of the emotions in the maturation of the intellect. For example, in Letter VIII, Hays invents the romance of

Henrietta and Edwin to illustrate her defence of reading novels in the previous letter. Like Hays's later heroine Emma Courtney, Henrietta sighs 'to become the heroine of a romance, and vainly sought to find a lover, and a friend resembling the portraits coloured by her vivid imagination' (105). Having Henrietta fall in love at first sight with Edwin, Hays curiously deploys an extract from Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman to underscore the noble innocence of their love affair:

Suppose a young person in the first ardor of affection deifies the beloved object! What harm can arise from this mistaken enthusiastic attachment? Perhaps it is necessary for virtue first to appear in a human form, to impress youthful hearts; the ideal model, which a more matured and exalted mind looks up to, and shapes for itself, would elude their sight... (106)<sup>19</sup>

Hays uses Wollstonecraft, here as elsewhere, to defend her own argument that passion leads to a rational engagement with the divine. Hays stresses the fundamental importance of the passions throughout her writing much more than Wollstonecraft does in hers, but excerpts well-chosen passages from the Vindication to bolster her own views with those of her more famous counterpart.

Contemporary reviews noted the link between Hays's writing and Wollstonecraft's famous Vindication. Although Johnson chose not to publish Hays's miscellany, possibly because of Wollstonecraft's lukewarm response to it (discussed above), his periodical the Analytical Review commented favourably on it in 1793. The reviewer, identified by the initials D.M., commends Hays, connecting her work with Wollstonecraft's by arguing that 'The rights of woman, which have been of late so ably asserted by an enlightened female philosopher, have been very successfully exercised by the writer of these pages'.<sup>20</sup> Walker notes that this review 'was the first

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<sup>19</sup> Hays takes her quotation from chapter V of Wollstonecraft's Vindication, 177.

<sup>20</sup> D.M., Rev. of Letters and Essays, by Mary Hays, The Analytical Review; or, History of Literature, Domestic and Foreign 16 (May-August 1793) (London: Joseph Johnson, 1793), 464.

to identify [Letters and Essays] as a woman-centred work', (Growth of a Woman's Mind, 74). More conservative reviewers attacked Hays and her work for exactly the same reasons. In the English Review's venomous assessment, also 1793, Hays 'stands forward one of the boldest beneath the standard of Mary Wollstonecraft'.<sup>21</sup> With a foretaste of the malice meted out to Memoirs of Emma Courtney, the reviewer concludes: 'we have been sedulous to bring forward into full view every female politician and philosopher that meet us in the paths of literature; since to render these characters conspicuous, is, generally speaking, to expose them to the contempt and ridicule why they deserve, by detecting their affectations, their vanities, and their follies' (The English Review, 256). As I discuss in my introduction, by the early 1790s 'female philosopher' was already a contested term: a liberal reviewer could commend Hays's advancement of enlightened female philosophy at the same time as a conservative lambasted Hays for her affection, vanity and folly, for her hubris as a woman engaging in the 'masculine' discourses of philosophy, metaphysics and theology: 'We despise dogmas that originate in affected wisdom – we are disgusted by flippancy and frivolousness that betray all the conceit of an half-educated female' (The English Review, 255). The English Review questions the basis of Hays's ability to address her audience, her 'affected wisdom' leads to dogma rather than knowledge or understanding, and attacks her necessary autodidacticism, reducing her to a flippant and frivolous 'half-educated' woman. 'Female philosophy', in this reactionary view, is an oxymoron: a woman's wisdom can only ever be 'affected'. The polarisation of political approaches to the female philosopher, across liberal and conservative, revolutionary and counter-

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<sup>21</sup> Rev. of Letters and Essays, by Mary Hays, The English Review; or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature 22 (London: Murray, 1793), 253.

revolutionary, boundaries, always an undercurrent in eighteenth-century discourse on the figure, became explosive in the 1790s, making it a subset of the highly polarised political climate of 1790s debates generally. As John Barrell argues, there is a sense in the 1790s ‘that everything had suddenly been or could become politicised’ – in Barrell’s case, everything from hairdressing to coffee houses, representations of country cottages to King George III, and, more generally, conceptions of the public and private sphere.<sup>22</sup> It is in this last, broader sense, that my focus on the female philosopher segues with Barrell’s work: radical iterations of the female philosopher forced a reconsideration of women’s position in the private sphere and the potential to act in public; conservative representations sought to discredit this, reinscribing women into domestic discourse.

Letters and Essays shows both Wollstonecraft’s influence on Hays’s self-representation as a woman writer and that this connection was made by both her supporters in liberal, Dissenting circles and in conservative antagonists to Hays’s revolutionary rhetoric. What these reviews both miss, however, is the extent to which Hays uses Wollstonecraft’s philosophical arguments to develop her own individual perspective, particularly on the role of the passions in the development of reason. This focus is developed in Memoirs of Emma Courtney and becomes one of the touchstones in her representation of Wollstonecraft in her later memoir and obituary.

### 3) ‘Neither a Philosopher, nor a Heroine’: Memoirs of Emma Courtney

Hays uses the epistolary form in Letters and Essays firstly to present her sometimes controversial philosophical discussions in an engaging style and secondly to frame

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<sup>22</sup> John Barrell, The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

her fictional accounts of idealised relationships. In Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Emma's memoirs are themselves framed by letters to her adopted son Augustus Junior, explaining their didactic purpose of serving as a warning both to him and to Hays's reading public, and connected together by letters exchanged between Emma, her love object Augustus Harley (senior) and her confidant Mr. Francis. In spite of Hays's explicit aim of representing Emma's 'hazardous experiment [as] calculated to operate as a warning, rather than as an example',<sup>23</sup> Hays's own hazardous experiment refuses to settle on this cautionary objective, always returning to a radically unresolved reading of its own didactic purpose.

Memoirs of Emma Courtney is Hays's most discussed work, both at the time and in subsequent criticism. Marilyn Butler argues that it 'attracted more remonstrance than any other individual revolutionary novel'.<sup>24</sup> I discuss some of these contemporary responses at the end of this section. Modern critical debate on the novel focuses on Hays's use of autobiography to shape her fiction, the revolutionary consequences of her feminist arguments, and both text and author's relationships to Godwin, Wollstonecraft and other writer's lives and works. Tilottama Rajan unravels Hays's commingling of autobiography and fiction in her exemplary chapter 'Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney', arguing that the movement between life and text is more complex and ambiguous than the straightforwardly confessional mode for which it often gets mistaken.<sup>25</sup> Building on Rajan's work, I examine how Hays's restructuring of her correspondence

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Hays, Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), ed. Marilyn L. Brooks (Aldershot: Broadview, 2000), 36. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>24</sup> Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen and the War of Ideas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 117.

<sup>25</sup> Tilottama Rajan, 'Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays's Memoirs of Emma Courtney' in Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre, eds. Rajan and Julia Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 213-39.

with Godwin in Emma's with Mr. Francis allows her to deploy Wollstonecraftian arguments to critique Godwinian political philosophy. Eleanor Ty situates Emma Courtney as a subversive rereading of female intellectual and sexual desire, privileging the position of the passions in human consciousness in her chapter on Hays in Unsex'd Revolutionaries. I also explore Hays's balancing of reason and passion in the novel, arguing that the cautionary moral urges for balance, whilst the revolutionary energy of the text privileges, as Ty perceives, emotional expression. Gary Kelly argues that Hays 'feminizes Godwin's novel form', by combining it with Thomas Holcroft's more feminine epistolary style, thus 'masculiniz[ing] Holcroft's', in order 'to construct her own, Revolutionary feminist version of the English Jacobin novel, or "philosophical romance"'.<sup>26</sup> Kelly points out that, by making a female philosopher her protagonist, Hays 'went beyond Godwin and Holcroft, and [was] doubly scandalous in relation to the gendering of discourse and culture' (Women, Writing and Revolution, 105). I analyse Hays's more ambiguous position towards the female philosopher in the novel.

This ambiguity begins with the novel's framing device which 'presents a split in "feeling and thinking"... with two letters from the narrator-heroine showing her as woman of feeling one moment, "philosopher" the next' (Kelly, 96). Emma's two letters enact a tripartite movement from presenting herself as a woman of feeling to adopting a distancing philosophical tone to finally questioning the usefulness of 'abstract' philosophy in negotiating the trials and tribulations of existence. Hays's ambivalent relationship to philosophy is apparent here: she wants to both eschew and embrace the term in relation to herself, taking a philosophical position to critique

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<sup>26</sup> Gary Kelly, Women, Writing and Revolution 1790-1827 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 105.

the consolations offered by contemporary philosophers, such as Godwin. In doing so, she contrasts her own female philosophy, which traces the connections between feeling and reason, to Godwin's brand of philosophy, which she depicts as stressing rationality over emotional engagement.

Emma's philosophical letter introduces her major preoccupation with balancing reason and passion, which governs the rest of her memoirs:

Rouse the nobler energies of your mind; be not the slave of your passions, neither dream of eradicating them. Sensation generates interest, interest passion, passion forces attention, attention supplies the powers, and affords the means of attaining its end: in proportion to the degree of interest, will be that of attention and power. Thus are talents produced. (42)

Augustus' 'nobler energies' of mind balance his intellect with his emotions. Patricia Meyer Spacks analyses the use of the term 'energies of mind' in the plots of 1790s novels, arguing that the use of the term 'dramatizes the developing ideology of harmony—between reason and feeling, between power and reconciliation, between socially constructed versions of "masculine" and "feminine"—implicit... in the novelistic celebration of "energy of mind".<sup>27</sup> Although Spacks does not discuss Hays's novel, Emma Courtney is profoundly involved in this search for equilibrium. Hays grounds her philosophy in a sensationalist focus on the way in which passionate feeling leads to intellectual power. This interrelationship of reason and passion is central to Emma's, and Hays's, female philosophy.

I focus my discussion of Hays's novel on the central exchanges of correspondence between Emma and Augustus Harley and her and Mr. Francis, focussing particularly on one letter from Emma to Augustus Harley, which I argue represents the climactic moment in their all too brief relationship, and three crucial

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<sup>27</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Energies of Mind: Plot's Possibilities in the 1790s' Eighteenth-Century Fiction 1.1 (October 1988), 37-52, 51.

letters between Emma and Mr. Francis, which comment, in a revolutionarily metafictional way, on the preceding action of Memoirs of Emma Courtney itself. Other critics have also focussed on this exchange, for example Kelly states that it 'completes the novel's statement of Hay's Revolutionary feminism', arguing that it differentiates her feminism from Wollstonecraft's as it emphasises erotic and intellectual equality over professional and civic potential (*Women, Writing and Revolution*, 102). However, he does not analyse in detail the way in which Hays mobilises Wollstonecraftian feminism to develop her own political philosophy and to confront Godwin's with its failings in relation to women's situation in society, missing the intertextual complexity of this exchange.

Feeling depressed about the ambivalent nature of her relationship with Augustus Harley, Emma writes him a letter which combines the feminine and philosophical modes of her first two letters to his son. Excluding from her hypotheses the 'absolutely invincible' obstacle of Augustus' marriage to another woman, which will be revealed as the actual obstacle with terrible irony at the end of the novel, Emma enumerates 'every other possible species of objection' (152) to their union: that he loves another; that he is engaged in 'a mere affair of the senses' (155); that he esteems and respects Emma but doesn't love her; that he has 'a plan of seeking some agreeable woman of fortune' (155) to relieve his eccentric financial situation; and that 'the peculiar, pecuniary embarrassments' (154) specific to Harley's case – that he will lose his endowment from an uncle's will if he ever marries – prevents his relationship with her. Emma's radical solution is for Augustus to 'retain your present situation, and I will retain mine' arguing that this posited extra-marital affair would 'triumph' over her 'prudence' but not her 'principles' 'for the individuality of an affection constitutes its chastity' (154, Hays's emphasis). In this solution, the focus

for attacks on novel and author in contemporary reviews, Hays develops Godwin and Wollstonecraft's criticisms of marriage to suggest her own perspective on relationships between men and women: that relationships can be chaste outside of marriage if focused on one partner. Emma stresses the climactic moment embodied in this letter, and situates the expression of her scandalous sexual desire for Augustus as an explicitly revolutionary act:

This moment may decide your future destiny and mine – it may, even, affect that of unborn myriads! My spirit is pervaded with these important ideas – my heart flutters – I breathe with difficulty – My friend – I would give myself to you – the gift is not worthless. (155)

Emma seeks to open a radical space for feminine desire in her letter to Augustus, addressed too to Hays's reading public, and create the freedom necessary for its expression: she offers Augustus a sexual relationship outside of marriage, and suggests that by virtuously modelling this relationship, they could positively affect the (sex) lives of future generations. Hays's revolution in female manners both stems out of and is strikingly different from Wollstonecraft's position in the Vindication of the Rights of Woman, for, whereas Wollstonecraft stresses the need for female rationality, underpinned by improved education, Hays highlights the role of the emotions in structuring this rationality. The adjective 'unborn' also suggests the offer of bearing children for Augustus; Emma has already characterised herself as a 'judicious mother' in the same letter. Although 'myriads' in this instance has the unintentionally comic effect of generating the image of the couple having hundreds of babies, it hints at the way Emma's ideas are intended to influence the lives of future generations.

Disgusted with both Augustus and herself after discovering that he is, in fact, already married to a woman he abhors, Emma writes that 'The Augustus I had so

long and so tenderly loved, no longer seemed to exist' (164), hinting at the almost imaginary quality of her love affair and foreshadowing the diminution of his importance in the novel. She then pours out her heart to the kindly philosopher Mr. Francis in what I see as the central exchange of the novel. It is in this section that Hays engages directly with Godwin's literary criticism of her novel so far, structuring her use of actual letters between her and Godwin in order to expose the limitations of Godwinian political philosophy in explaining or ameliorating women's position in society. In response to this criticism, Hays articulates through Emma her individual development of Revolutionary feminism. Although critics like Kelly have argued similarly, they have not focussed on the complexities of Hays's use of her correspondence with Godwin in order to formulate her feminist response. I argue that this exchange of letters brings into sharp focus Hays's sophisticated use of autobiographical material in order to shape her philosophical arguments, modelling the balance of reason and passion she and her protagonist Emma strive for elsewhere.

Emma begins her letter by reminding Francis that 'You once told me, I was incapable of heroism; and you were right' (166). This echoes Emma's earlier statement to herself: 'I feel, that I am neither a philosopher, nor a heroine, but a woman, to whom education has given a sexual character' (149). Both of these statements are adapted from letters to Godwin. The letter opening with Hays's incapacity for heroism is dated 11 January 1796, in which she tells him 'You think me incapable of heroism, I fear so, &, yet, I am call'd to great exertions.'<sup>28</sup> The letter analysing women's sexual character is dated 20 February 1796. In it she contrasts

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<sup>28</sup> The Correspondence of Mary Hays (1759-1843), British Novelist, ed. Marilyn L. Brooks (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 422. Subsequent references, in text.

Godwin's position as 'a philosopher, a man of first-rate talents' with her own as 'a woman, I mean by this, that education has given me a sexual character' (Correspondence, 434). She continues: 'It is true, I have risen superior to the generality of my sex, I am not a mere fine lady, a domestic drudge, or a doll of fashion. I can think, write, reason, converse with men & scholars, & despise many petty, feminine [sic] prejudices. But I have not the talents for a legislator or reformer of the world, I still have many shrinking delicacies & female foibles, that unfit me for rising to arduous heights' (Correspondence, 434). Hays contrasts her character, corrupted by the sexual double standard, with Godwin's, whose talents and reputation protect him from the persecution and injustice which she has experienced. Hays has reversed the order of these sentiments in the novel, situating Emma's refusal to be designated as either a philosopher or a heroine before her analysis of the failure of Mr. Francis's masculinist philosophy to account for female desire. This is a critical rhetorical manoeuvre as Emma pre-empts Mr. Francis's criticism of her story so far as insane by stressing the artificial, acculturated nature of gendered identity. Hays's re-ordering of her letters to Godwin allows her to control the metafictional critique of her novel represented in Francis / Godwin's letter.

Francis's letter criticising Emma Courtney's narrative, meaning the novel itself up to this point, represents the extraordinary eruption of another writer's voice, based on a non-extant letter from Godwin tantalisingly excerpted in Hays's own reply of 6 February 1796, into Hays's novel. In her letter dated 6 February, Hays quotes from Godwin's letter in order to respond to it: 'Had I, you say, "worship'd at the altar of reason but half as assiduously as I have sacrificed at the shrine of illusion, my happiness might have been enviable.'" – But, do you not perceive, that my reason was the auxiliary of my passion – or rather, my passion the generative principle of

my reason?' (Correspondence, 425). The pattern of Hays's reply, quotation followed by refutation mirrors Mr. Francis's literary critique of Emma's manuscript. Francis first tells Emma 'Your narrative leaves me full of admiration for your qualities, and compassion for your insanity' (168),<sup>29</sup> before quoting from the above-mentioned letter to Augustus and subjecting it to what amounts to Godwinian literary criticism:

I entreat however your attention to the following passage, extracted from your papers. 'After considering all I have urged, you may perhaps reply, that the subject is too nice, and too subtle, for reasoning, and that the heart is not to be compelled. This, I think, is a mistake. There is no topic, in fact, that may not be subjected to the laws of investigation and reasoning. What is it we desire? pleasure, happiness. What! the pleasure of an instant, only; or that which is more solid and permanent? I allow, pleasure is the supreme good! but it may be analysed. To this analysis I now call you?'

Could I, if I had studied an hundred years, invent a comment on your story, more salutary to your sorrows, more immoveable in its foundation, more clearly expressed, or more irresistibly convincing to every rational mind? (168)

By having Francis quote Emma and then reply to Emma's point, as Harley never satisfactorily did, Hays both accentuates the difference between Francis / Godwin and Harley / Frennd and underscores the disjunction in tone, purpose and character between Emma's narratorial voice and Francis's interjection. The first difference, between the two male characters, is a narrative concern: Augustus barely exists in the novel outside of Emma's eroticised representation of him to herself and her readers; Francis is a fully formed foil and confidant for Emma; the second difference is more radically a novelistic concern: it represents a complex change of voice. One of the criticisms of Hays's novel is that the reader is never allowed a perspective separate from Emma's own obsessive consciousness; with her inclusion of Godwin's

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<sup>29</sup> In her letter to Godwin, Hays describes herself as 'at least, a reasoning maniac \_ perhaps the most dangerous species of insanity' (Correspondence, 425) which Marilyn L. Brooks speculates is her response to Godwin's accusation of her own 'insanity' (fn, 425).

critique of her novel, reformatted as Francis's letter, Hays allows a different, and deeply challenging, perspective on her narrative.<sup>30</sup>

Francis uses his quotation from Emma's narrative to drive his criticism of what he sees as her self-defeating desire to make herself miserable: 'The whole force of every thing which looks like a misfortune was assiduously, uninterruptedly, provided by yourself' (169). Francis enumerates 'a catalogue of all the real evils of human life; bodily pain, compulsory solitude, severe corporal labour...' adding, 'But I should be ashamed of putting disappointed love into my enumeration' (169 – 70). He concludes his letter with a peroration on a very Godwinian ideal: 'The first lesson of enlightened reason, the great fountain of heroism and virtue, the principle by which alone man can become what man is capable of being, is independence' (170).

Hays's inclusion of a Godwinian critique of her novel is astonishingly bold, as Francis's argument seeks to overwhelm Emma's revolutionary goal of unleashing feminine desire by diminishing it as 'disappointed love'. However, Hays has carefully controlled this inclusion of another perspective into her novel by structuring her dialogue with Godwinian political philosophy to allow for the fullest expression of her Revolutionary feminism, revealing the masculine presuppositions underpinning radical philosophy. Her re-ordering of her letters to Godwin has already prepared the reader for Emma's riposte to Francis, and her response to Godwin's political philosophy. Francis's terms in his apostrophe to independence are almost identical to the terms Emma rejects: his 'enlightened reason' is countered by her refusal to be considered a philosopher; his 'great fountain of heroism and virtue' by her denial of her own heroism; his 'principle by which alone man can become what man is

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Katherine Binhammer criticises *Emma Courtney* for this in 'The Persistence of Reading: Governing Female Novel-Reading in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*' *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27.2 (Spring 2003), 1-22, 10.

capable of being' is almost mocked by her characterisation of herself as a 'woman, to whom education has given a sexual character'. Education, a term for Hays inclusive of the society and culture in which she lives, for women precludes any independence, as it conflates individual character with gendered preconceptions of female behaviour.

Hays enlists Wollstonecraft's critique of eighteenth-century society's oppression of women to reveal the ways in which Godwin's political philosophy both fails to confront, and implicitly perpetuates, such misery. For example, Wollstonecraft begins the second chapter of her Vindication with this insight:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man... (Vindication, 88, emphasis in original)

In other words, women's sexualised education prepares them precisely for dependence, rather than independence, and this subordination corrupts both women's and men's minds. Emma echoes Wollstonecraft in her argument with Mr. Francis, revealing the underlying sexual hierarchy embedded in Godwinian political philosophy. Emma first of all confronts Francis's dismissal of her love for Harley as imaginary misery: 'What does it signify whether, abstractedly considered, a misfortune be worthy of the names real and substantial, if the consequences produced are the same? That which embitters all my life, that which stops the genial current of all health and peace is, whatever be its nature, a real calamity to me' (171). In a footnote to this passage, Marilyn Brooks comments that 'Emma is taunting Mr Francis with the inadequacy of his fondness for abstraction. The phrase "abstractedly considered" is used frequently by Godwin in Political Justice to

distinguish between rational conceptualisation and practical experience' (171). Hays accomplishes more than simply taunting Godwin here, using Godwinian tropes to critique his intellectual position. This shows Hays's sophisticated ability to enter into existing radical discourse and develop it in unexpected, individual and challenging ways.<sup>31</sup>

Emma's reply to Francis's call to independence stutters with indignation: 'Why call woman, miserable, oppressed, and impotent, woman – crushed, and then insulted – why call her to independence – which not nature, but the barbarous and accursed laws of society, have denied her. This is mockery!' (173).<sup>32</sup> Emma refashions herself as 'woman' here, as Francis wrote of 'man' achieving his potential through independence. This emotional response underscores Emma's more philosophical analysis of the social and economic barriers against women's independence, which she describes here as not natural inferiority but a cultural imposition. In her focus on the difficulties facing women seeking independence, Hays develops her own philosophical position based on Wollstonecraft's analysis of the need to foster greater independence in women in her second Vindication, in which she argues: 'It is vain to expect virtue from women till they are, in some degree, independent from men' (Vindication, 211). Hays broadens Wollstonecraft's scope from dependence on men, especially husbands, to 'the barbarous and accursed laws

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<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Emma's question here is another excerpt from Hays correspondence to Godwin, particularly the letter of 6 February which responds to Godwin's critique of her novel: 'What does it signify, whether abstractedly consider'd (if there be any such thing as abstraction) a misfortune be worthy of the names, substantial, or real, if the consequences are the same? That which embitters all my life, that which stops the genial current of health & peace, is, what ever be its nature, a substantial calamity to me!' (Correspondence, 425). Hays parenthetical questioning of abstraction further attacks Godwin's philosophical dependence on the concept.

<sup>32</sup> In her 6 February 1796 letter, Hays berates Godwin in almost identical terms to Emma's response to Francis: 'Why call woman, miserable, oppress'd, & impotent, woman, crushed & then insulted – why call her to an "independence" which not nature, but the accursed & barbarous laws of society have denied her? – This is mockery – even you – wise & benevolent as you are – can mock a child of slavery & of sorrow!' (Correspondence, 426).

of society', showing how social, economic and judicial institutions conspire to deprive women of independence. Emma Courtney climaxes with the death of Augustus Harley, who admits on his deathbed his love for Emma. This conclusion represents a dark form of wish fulfilment for heroine and author as Emma's distant love object, based on William Frenn, is revealed to have loved Emma all along, unable to reciprocate her advances because of his sense of social propriety. The novel itself ends in a melodramatic bloodbath – Emma is forced, due to financial necessity, to marry Montague, who murders his illegitimate child then kills himself: an extreme example of women's precarious social position, even in marriage. Montague, who seems like a suitable suitor, is revealed to be a violent adulterer. A second generation fairy tale ending, in the burgeoning romance between Emma's daughter and her adopted son Augustus Junior, is scotched by Emma Junior's death.

Written three years after the publication of Emma Courtney, the Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine's post facto attack on the novel was formulated in the reactionary literary atmosphere following Wollstonecraft's death and Godwin's scandalous Memoirs of his dead wife. The Anti-Jacobin's review forms part of a wider assault on Godwin's political philosophy and Wollstonecraft's posthumous reputation. Framing its own critique of the novel by quoting the liberal Monthly Review's positive response to it, the Anti-Jacobin emphasises the earlier review's use of pro-revolutionary language, particularly Emma giving vent to her 'wildest feelings with conscientious sincerity', only to dismiss it:

Setting aside this slang of modern philosophy, the plain question is – Whether it is most for the advantage of society that women should be so brought up as to make them dutiful daughters, affectionate wives, tender mothers, and good Christians, or, by a corrupt and vicious system of education, fit them for revolutionary agents, for heroines, for Staels, for Talliens, for Stones, setting aside all the decencies, the

softness, the gentleness, of the female character, and enjoying indiscriminately every envied privilege of man?<sup>33</sup>

The *Anti-Jacobin* links the Monthly's and Hays's interest in 'sincerity' with Godwin's demand for candour, aligning both with 'the slang of modern philosophy', again reducing Hays's engagement with and criticism of Godwin's 'modern' philosophy to a simplistic blind discipleship. In this review, and in the novel's subsequent reputation, Emma Courtney, a text which criticises Godwin's masculinist political philosophy from a radical and feminist perspective, revealing its inability to address or ameliorate women's situation in society, is dismissed as a corollary to Godwin's ideas.

With *Emma Courtney*, text and heroine, Hays creates her own innovative interpretation of female philosophy which takes elements from Wollstonecraft's feminism and Godwin's political philosophy in order to firstly represent the female philosopher's intellectual development as founded on her passionate feelings, and secondly to confront Godwinian philosophy with its limitations: its blindness on the position of women within patriarchal society. Emma's unwillingness to be labelled a philosopher reveals her, and her creator's, concerns that existing philosophical models do not allow for the balance of reason and passion which both Emma and Hays seek. Hays's novel seeks to develop a new form of female philosophy, balancing rationality with sensuality, revising representations of the female philosopher which have become entangled in both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary discourse which occludes the figure's radical potential. The contemporary reception of the novel as subordinate to Godwinian and Wollstonecraftian philosophy therefore underestimates Hays's sophisticated

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<sup>33</sup> Rev. of Memoirs of Emma Courtney, by Mary Hays, The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine; or, Monthly Literary Censor 3 (1799), 54.

engagement with her friends' ideas, missing her complex reevaluation of the female philosopher figure's importance.

#### 4) 'PERPETUAL BABYISM': Appeal to the Men of Great Britain & Victim of Prejudice

Published in the aftermath of Wollstonecraft's death, amidst the reactionary furore which greeted Godwin's Memoirs, the anonymous Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of the Women (1798), convincingly attributed to Hays,<sup>34</sup> and her second novel Victim of Prejudice (1799), function as Hays's Post-Jacobin works: both move from the sophisticated English Jacobin position of her earlier Letters and Essays and Emma Courtney to a more cautious, seemingly conservative stance, although this new conservatism acts as a cover for more nuanced, progressive critique of existing social conditions. If the attribution of authorship of the Appeal to Hays is correct, she worked on this polemic at the same time as preparing her novel for publication. Victim's publication may have been delayed until 1799 because Johnson, her publisher for both works, was sentenced to six months in prison from February 1799 for publishing seditious material. Walker speculates that he was supervising the

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<sup>34</sup> In her reprint of Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of the Women (1798) (New York: Garland, 1974), Gina Luria argues for the internal and external markers in the text which suggest the work should be attributed to Hays, from its author's use of scriptural exegesis to support her feminist arguments to William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler's original attribution of the text in their Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men of 1825. Kelly presents the case that Appeal's author was not Mary but Elizabeth Hays (Women, Writing, and Revolution, 113), comparing its tone to that of Elizabeth Hays's contributions to Letters and Essays. Although the Appeal's various tone and its anonymity – something it shares with several other works of 1798: the Lyrical Ballads, The Pursuits of Literature, which inspired Polwhele's poem, Malthus' work on population and Joanna Baillie's Plays on the Passions (see 1798: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads, ed. Richard Cronin (London: Macmillan, 1998), 1) – obviously complicate a simple attribution of the text to Hays, I find Walker's argument more convincing than Kelly's, for reasons discussed below, and, for all intents and purposes, will assume Hays is the author of the text.

publication of other works from his cell, delaying the publication of Hays's novel (Growth of a Woman's Mind, 195).

The relationship between the two works, therefore, can be seen as analogous to that between Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, or indeed Godwin's Political Justice and Caleb Williams: I argue that the Appeal is Hays's theoretical explanation of her philosophical ideals; Victim its fictionalised exposition, developing Ty's argument that the novel is 'a transcription of the feminist conceptions in her prose writings' (Unsex'd Revolutionaries, 60).

Arguing that greater education would enable women to at least see their constraints, Hays coins the most oft-quoted phrase from her Appeal: 'Thus awakened to a sense of their injuries, they would behold with astonishment and indignation, the arts which had been employed, to keep them in a state of PERPETUAL BABYISM'.<sup>35</sup> Although this could be read as, and was perhaps intended to be, a call for women to realise their own infantilisation, the manner in which it is written also argues that this realisation is unlikely: better education for women will not occur without a transformation in the perception of women's situation by men, the very people who deliberately retard the intellectual development of women. Women, on the contrary, 'find themselves enclosed in a kind of magic circle, out of which they cannot move, but to contempt or destruction' (Appeal, 111). Hays repeats in this passage a leitmotif which echoes throughout her published oeuvre: Emma Courtney urges women to break the magic circle of male prejudice and Mary Raymond finds herself trapped, literally and metaphorically, in this magic circle throughout The Victim of Prejudice. Indeed, as part of her Post-Jacobin strategy, she makes the 'magic circle'

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<sup>35</sup> [Mary Hays], Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of the Women [1798], ed. Gina Luria (New York: Garland, 1974), 97. Subsequent references, in-text.

seem seductively safe in the novel, describing how her heroine Mary Raymond forgets 'the painful sense of my misfortunes, of my wrongs' in William Pelham's arms: 'I felt guarded as by a talisman, encompassed in a magic circle, through which neither danger could assail nor sorrow pierce me'.<sup>36</sup> In a footnote, Ty argues that Hays's use of the term here hints to the attentive reader of her work 'that the security [Mary] feels with William Pelham is a false or confining one' (Victim, fn 190). The author of the Appeal's despairing use of the phrase is one of the arguments for Hays's authorship of the text, connecting her general analysis of women's confinement within hypocritical social expectations in her polemic with the particular example of her novel's heroine, caught between contempt and destruction.

Wollstonecraft's ghost haunts the Appeal, as it will Victim of Prejudice. In the 'Advertisement to the Reader' which prefaces the main text, Hays firstly claims to have written the body of the work 'some years ago' when 'no work had appeared... for the professed purpose of advancing and defending the pretensions of women' (unpaginated). Situating the origin of her text before Wollstonecraft's Vindication, Hays then professes that the publication of another work, Alexander Jardine's Letters from Barbary, France, Spain, Portugal, etc. (1788), prevented her from publishing her own thoughts about women's rights because Jardine's writing 'treated the subject of it so well [that] those who should come immediately after him, could have little claim to notice' (unpaginated). She overcame her reservations in this instance, only to be interrupted again by the 'demon of intelligence' that Wollstonecraft had published her own Vindication of the Rights of Woman:

Mortified still more I must candidly acknowledge, by this second anticipation; because by its pointed title, and declared

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Hays, Victim of Prejudice [1799], ed. Eleanor Ty, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ontario: Broadview, 1998), 122.

purpose, it was more likely than even the first, to impede the success of an attempt, which now had less claim to that novelty which ensures at least temporary notice; I flung aside my little sketch in favour of women, with a degree of disdain, which, I begin to hope, it did not deserve. (unpaginated)

Hays claims that the publication of Wollstonecraft's Vindication delayed that of the Appeal by more than five years. Although she may have been working on a feminist polemic before 1792, the Appeal as published reveals the influence of Wollstonecraft's arguments on the text's own structure and content. Hays's arguments for publication in the remainder of the 'Advertisement' revolve around both her own personal reading and the general reception of Wollstonecraft's earlier polemic. Firstly, she argues that many books on the same subject need to be published 'before the public opinion is influenced to any great degree' (unpaginated). Secondly, she makes it clear that her work should be seen as a collaborative project, extending Wollstonecraft's arguments into a more conservative era. As an implied comment on the vicissitudes of Wollstonecraft's reputation after her death, Hays notes that 'So far indeed, are works of very superior merit, from superseding the necessity of others; that on the contrary, it is too evident, that such are not always the more popular', concluding that a genius such as Wollstonecraft's 'seldom deigns, by managing, and sympathizing with, the prejudices of mankind, to make new and unexpected truths palatable to common minds' (unpaginated). The 'Advertisement', therefore, sets forth the mission of the Appeal: to add to the literature on women's rights in order to further establish its doctrine amongst the public; to popularise the ingenious arguments of Wollstonecraft, and to manage and sympathise with the 'prejudices of mankind' in order to accomplish these aims. Hays's interest in the 'prejudices of mankind' again connects her polemic with the title of her novel, in which she explores how a woman who loses her reputation through no fault of her

own becomes a victim of violent prejudice. The phrase also returns in her obituary for Wollstonecraft, showing how Hays is aware both of the destructive potential of prejudice, in the reception of her own and Wollstonecraft's work, and of the need to work within existing social expectations in order to combat such damaging ideas.

Throughout the Appeal Hays is deeply concerned with the position of the knowledgeable woman, or female philosopher. Her initial, despairing prognosis draws on counter-revolutionary fears of the figure in order to begin to dismiss this representation of the female philosopher:

if women were all educated philosophers and pedants, - which God forbid! – Nay what is more to the point, if they were all educated, and allowed to be, on the reasonable and respectable footing I contend for; still! still! folly, insipidity, and vice, would have their reign, and sweep away millions in their train. To expect that it should be otherwise in the present imperfect state of existence were vain. (112)

Like Emma Courtney, Hays takes an ambiguous position towards female philosophy here, reflected in her 'God forbid!' and her suspicion that even if women all occupied the position of female philosopher, society would still be vicious, insipid and foolish. She dissociates herself from 'educated philosophers' in this passage, relating them to pedants, and therefore to the counter-revolutionary image of the female philosopher as dogmatic and abstruse. Instead, she focuses on making women's education 'reasonable and respectable', troped as distinct from the aim of female philosophy.

Hays returns to this counter-revolutionary representation of female philosophy later in her text in order to question its legitimacy, attacking the reviled term in order to maintain and develop the substance of the earlier Enlightenment tradition of the figure. She first of all confronts men's allegations that 'when women are educated too much upon an equality with them, it renders them – presuming and conceited...

masculine, and consequently disgusting in their manners' (162). She begins her counterattack on this position by first of all appearing to agree with it:

I will not pretend to deny, but that some women who have a great deal of knowledge, are neither so amiable, nor so useful members of society, as others who have little, or none, above what is necessary in the common occurrences of life. (163)

However, her seeming agreement has a sting in its tale: 'But does not this likewise apply to men of the same description? And what does it after all prove? Nothing' (163). If knowledgeable women are not so amiable or useful as their uneducated counterparts, neither are men. More sympathetically, towards women at least, Hays argues that women who possess 'knowledge, learning and... solid acquirements' are in such a minority that they both 'know it, and feel it' and that it is unsurprising that they 'endeavour to let others know it, and feel it too' (164). Hays then follows Wollstonecraft by countering the objection that knowledgeable women make bad mothers with the contention that uneducated mothers bring up uneducated, and therefore vicious, children. She also distinguishes between different sorts of masculine women in Wollstonecraftian vein: women who hunt, fish and comport themselves in a physically masculine manner are as disgusting as the men they copy; women who pursue knowledge and education for its own sake, and behave in a reasonable and religious manner are only masculine in their divine rationality.

Hays concludes the Appeal by re-ordering women's religious responsibilities from a traditional, Miltonic model, also criticised by Wollstonecraft in the Vindication,<sup>37</sup> which saw women firmly at the base of a hierarchy which moved from duty to God followed by duty to man with duty to themselves as last and least, to a

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<sup>37</sup> Wollstonecraft attacks Milton's line 'God is thy law, thou mine' (Vindication, 89), arguing that this subordination is only suitable for children, with the caveat that the child begins to use reason to think independently.

model in which duty to God was followed by duty to their own happiness. She ends her angry and often despairing polemic with an appeal to the men of Great Britain to ‘endeavour to make women happy – not by flattering their follies and absurdities – but by every reasonable means; and above all by considering them as rational beings upon a footing with themselves’ (293).<sup>38</sup>

The anonymous publication of the Appeal garnered a positive review from the Anti-Jacobin, which contradicts Walker’s argument that ‘Only the most radical periodicals commented favourably on the Appeal’ (Growth of a Woman’s Mind, 197). This review highlights the success of Hays’s Post-Jacobin authorial strategy in her polemic, rendering revolutionary arguments palatable to a reactionary media prepared to attack such ideas as dangerously foreign. After the Anti-Jacobin’s vociferous review of Hays’s first novel the previous year, the Appeal’s anonymity procured it a more impartial reading. The Anti-Jacobin condescendingly commends the Appeal as a ‘little volume’ in which the reader will find ‘a variety of... lively and ingenious remarks interspersed; and, allowing for the predilection, which the author discovers throughout, for the system she has adopted, there will nothing occur offensive to the feelings of delicacy, nor injurious to the interests of religion of

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<sup>38</sup> After Wollstonecraft’s death in 1797, a series of polemics arguing for the continued importance of women’s rights were published sharing a set of similar concerns with Hays’s Appeal. Mary Anne Radcliffe’s The Female Advocate (1799), Mary Robinson’s A Letter to the Women of England (1799) and Priscilla Wakefield’s Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex (1798) each argue for the importance of women’s education and increased opportunities for paid work for women, differentiating their approach from Wollstonecraft’s. They share with Hays’s work an anxiety about the role of the female philosopher. Ashley J. Cross examines Robinson’s position on this issue in ‘He-She Philosophers and Other Literary Bugbears: Mary Robinson’s A Letter to the Women of England’ Women’s Writing 9:1, 53-68, arguing that Robinson “defends women’s reputations as intellectuals and provides an answer to the self-erasure women face in the conflict between love and philosophy: a shared women’s intellectual history”, 54. Hannah More, Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1799) refracts these arguments from a position explicitly opposed to Wollstonecraft’s philosophy, although Mitzi Myers, for example, argues that More’s concerns overlap with Wollstonecraft’s in several places in ‘Reform or Ruin: “A Revolution in Female Manners”’ Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 11 (1982), 199-216.

morality'.<sup>39</sup> The review takes gentle issue with Hays's scriptural exegesis, but approves her critique and redefinition of the 'masculine woman', agrees with the need for improved female education to enable mothers to bring up their children successfully, and joins in her censure of men taking women's work. Finally, it suggests that the author is Scottish because of 'the use of such Scotticisms as proven, exhonor, opens up, etc' (Anti-Jacobin, 157-8, original emphasis). The review misses or ignores the more egalitarian thrust of some of Hays's arguments, particularly her concluding argument that women need to be placed on an equal footing with men.

Published the year after the Appeal, Hays's second novel The Victim of Prejudice develops several of the arguments from the polemic: particularly women's victimisation by a society which keeps them in a state of dependence, or 'perpetual babyism', and the concomitant difficulties in finding happiness, let alone reaching an equal footing with men. In many ways, Hays's Victim also reads as an off-beat apology for Emma Courtney. In the 'Advertisement to the Reader' which prefaces her second novel, Hays muses on the reception which greeted her first work of fiction, arguing that her attempt to exemplify 'the errors of sensibility, or the pernicious consequences of indulged passion, even in a mind of no common worth and powers' led to 'the cry of slander [being] raised against me; I was accused of recommending those excesses, of which I laboured to paint the disastrous effects'.<sup>40</sup> Hays then links the reception of her first novel with the theme of her next work, declaring that she attacks 'the too-great stress laid on the reputation for chastity in

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<sup>39</sup> Rev. of Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of the Women, The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine 7 (London: Cadell and Davies, 1801), 157.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Hays, Victim of Prejudice [1799], ed. Eleanor Ty (Peterborough: Broadview, 1996), 1. Subsequent references, in-text.

woman' and that 'no disrespect is intended to this most important branch of temperance, the cement, the support, and the bond, of social-virtue: it is the means only, which are used to ensure it, that I presume to call in question' (Victim, 1). Hays carefully considers here the manner in which the reception of her writing impacts on her own reputation as writer: she is involved in a difficult, Post-Jacobin mediation between her self-presentation as a philosophical writer and her relationship with her audience. She does this by tempering the radicalism of her earlier works within a more traditional framework, allowing her to radically reappraise women's social situation within a seemingly more conservative novel.

Unlike Emma Courtney, Mary Raymond does not pursue her love object William at all, and is instead herself pursued, first in a rather lacklustre manner by William and then with violent passion by the villain of the piece, Sir Peter Osborne. In a way, Emma's revolutionary pursuit of Harley has regressed, in Hays's next novel, back into the traditional gender stereotype of the pursued, virtuous woman. However, Hays uses the traditional trope in seduction narratives of 'woman as fugitive' to analyse the material costs of societal prejudice on women. In Emma Courtney, Hays uses Wollstonecraft's philosophy to critique Godwin's. In Victim of Prejudice, she uses Wollstonecraft's own fictional exploration of the Vindication in Maria to analyse the potential for female philosophy to impact upon women's experience of social prejudice and hypocrisy. Wollstonecraft's ghost drives Hays to present 'a catalogue of possible "wrongs" or acts of social injustice perpetrated on the eighteenth century middle-class female' (Ty, Unsex'd Revolutionaries, 60), linking Hays's novel to the posthumously published Wrongs of Woman. Hays began composing the novel before Wollstonecraft's death, but Godwin was still commenting on drafts of it in November 1797. Walker also suggests that Victim of Prejudice

echoes Maria (Growth of a Woman's Mind, 193). In her novel, Hays merges Maria's narrative of imprisonment in Wollstonecraft's unfinished text with Jemima's story of the costs of a damaged reputation to create the tragic tale of Mary Raymond. Mary is an orphan raised in Wollstonecraftian vein who attracts the vile attentions of patriarchal Osborne, who kidnaps and brutally rapes her.<sup>41</sup> After she escapes her rapist, Mary continues to strive for suitable work and living conditions, all the time pursued by Osborne. The narrative ends with the heroine preparing for death, having been rescued from another of Osborne's imprisonments by a kindly vicar and his wife, who also die – the wife admitting to Mary the hollowness of her life of much more traditional marital obedience.

Mrs Neville contrasts Mary's life over which 'injustice has triumphed' with hers, wherein she is 'a feeble victim to an excessive, and therefore blameable, tenderness' (Victim, 172, emphasis in original). Mrs Neville's unthinking adoration of her husband means that she 'had no individual existence; my very being was absorbed in that of my husband' (173). Because 'All the worth, all the talent, all the powers of mind, were the product of my affection', Mrs Neville's life is contingent upon that of her husband – when he dies, she follows. Mrs Neville's self-analysis gives psychological force to the legal position of women in the eighteenth century, in which a woman's person was absorbed into that of the husband, described in Blackstone's now infamous commentary, meaning that she had no legal standing

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<sup>41</sup> Eleanor Ty argues that Hays's depiction of Osborne 'sets out to disprove and dispel the Burkean myth of the benevolent country squire as an adequate miniature head or 'monarch' of the residents of his estates' (Unsex'd Revolutionaries, 60). Osborne is shown to be driven by naked self-interest in his treatment of dependents, and violent lust in his relationship with Mary Raymond. In her second novel, Hays replays Wollstonecraft's confrontation with Burke in A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) to reveal the moral bankruptcy of the conservative position entrenching privilege against any kind of reform.

apart from her spouse.<sup>42</sup> Hays places the novel's most trenchant critique of the damage even a good marriage can do to a woman's intellectual, emotional and physical strength in the mouth of one of its most conventional characters. Female philosophy spreads from The Victim of Prejudice's heroine outwards to influence even the most seemingly innocuous of women.

Hays stresses her heroine's precarious position within society, as an orphan with a 'fallen' mother hidden in her background, as an inherent cause of her downfall. She falls in love with the rich, enlightened yet irresolute William Pelham (the names in Victim of Prejudice recall Mary Hays's unrequited passion for William Frennd as well as Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin's more successful relationship). Mr. Raymond warns Mary away from developing her friendship with William, finally revealing the tragic past of her mother, also called Mary, whose own love affair ended in ignominy and ruin, leading her to become a murderer's accomplice. Hays shows how Mary senior was seduced by 'sophistical pretences' (63). She narrates her shame to Mr. Raymond: 'Unaccustomed to reason, too weak for principle, credulous from inexperience, a stranger to the corrupt habits of society, I yielded to the mingled intoxication of vanity and my senses, quitted the paternal roof, and resigned myself to my triumphant seducer' (63). Hays grafts a Wollstonecraftian

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<sup>42</sup> In 1765, William Blackstone wrote:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-French a feme-covert, foemina viro co-operta; is said to be covert-baron, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. Upon this principle, of a union of person in husband and wife, depend almost all the legal rights, duties, and disabilities, that either of them acquire by the marriage. (Commentaries on the Laws of England I (London, 1765), 442, emphasis in original)

The ramification of this passage was that upon marriage a woman ceased to have a legal identity separate from her husband.

analysis of women's situation in society onto a more conventional seduction narrative.<sup>43</sup> Hays focuses on how Mary senior's deficiencies in education have led to her disgrace, instantiating the trope of innocent woman seduced by 'sophistical' arguments developed in more conservative writing, such as Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, which spoofs Hays's earlier novel. Mary urges William to reveal her shameful origins to his father before accepting his proposal of marriage. William's father is predictably outraged and sends William abroad, leaving Mary vulnerable to the depredations of Osbourne. Mary suffers similar injustices to her mother, revealing the circular nature of prejudice and oppression: she is attacked by Osborne, unlike her mother's willing if foolish submission, but the consequences for women remain the same: social exile conjoined with the threat of sexual violence.

In a sequence which shows Mary's creativity and her ability to remain productive in London society in spite of her 'fallen' position, Mary finds work, after escaping from Osborne's captivity and rape, as a print-shop designer. Her all too brief burst of creativity and respite illustrates the imaginative possibilities envisioned by Hays for women's liberation:

I returned with my patterns to my humble lodging, with light spirits and a beating heart, anticipating the dignity of INDEPENDENCE. Stimulated by motives thus powerful, I surpassed the expectation of my employer; a new creation, blooming and vivid, rose beneath my pencil: abandoning the models, and disdaining control, my fancy wantoned in luxurious varieties; every new effort brought an access of profit and of praise. (Victim, 138)

Mary's 'INDEPENDENCE' is short-lived, destroyed by the scurrilous spread of gossip about her ruined reputation. However, Mary's brief burst of creativity when

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<sup>43</sup> See Katherine Binhammer, The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) for an analysis of the mechanisms of the seduction narrative from Richardson's Clarissa to the end of the eighteenth century.

presented with a chance at gainful employment allows for the possibility of independence, about which Emma Courtney, text and heroine, was more pessimistic. Victim of Prejudice externalises the internal conflicts which afflicted Emma, meaning that the psychological and philosophical pressures limiting Emma's access to independence have turned, in Hays's later novel, into social and economic issues, backed up by the threat of male, physical force. This links back to the philosophical arguments in the Appeal, in which Hays argues that women are kept in a state of infantilised dependence, not because of their own intellectual incapacity, but because of social and economic prejudices.

### **5) Passion, Reason, Imagination: Hays's 'Memoirs of Wollstonecraft'**

Questions about the nature of female philosophy haunt Hays's work memorialising Wollstonecraft. Hays published the first public notice of Wollstonecraft's death in September 1797, eulogising her friend and mentor in a brief but heartfelt and highly wrought obituary. Hays's Wollstonecraft couples a 'masculine tone of understanding' with 'exquisite sensibility', heroically straddling the gender divide.<sup>44</sup> Wollstonecraft is 'Quick to feel, and indignant to resist the iron hand of despotism', exerting herself to 'awaken the minds of her oppressed sex [to] a sense of their degradation, and to restore them to the dignity of reason and virtue' ('Obituary', 7). Hays adds that Wollstonecraft's 'philosophic mind' (7) also encompassed wider social, political and economic ills, presenting Wollstonecraft unequivocally as a female philosopher. However, she also paints her friend as a 'victim of the vices and prejudices of

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<sup>44</sup> See Mary Hays, 'Obituary of Wollstonecraft' in Lives of the Great Romantics III: Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley by Their Contemporaries, Vol. 2: Wollstonecraft, ed. Harriet Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), 7. Subsequent references, in-text as 'Obituary'.

mankind' (7), commenting on the personal costs of inhabiting the position of female philosopher. Walker suggests that Hays raced to produce her version of Wollstonecraft before Godwin's Memoir was published, in order to present 'her Wollstonecraft, emphasising her proud feminism' (Growth of a Woman's Mind, 189, emphasis in original). Hays's desire to be first in print with her obituary hints at the tensions in her relationship with Godwin, who had refused to admit Hays to see Wollstonecraft on her deathbed, although she alludes to Godwin's Memoir as being written by an 'abler hand' in her later letter to the Monthly.<sup>45</sup>

Godwin presented his vision of Wollstonecraft in his Memoir in early 1798. Its publication represented a catastrophe for all concerned: Godwin's candid exposition of Wollstonecraft's unconventional private life scandalised and titillated a public, and particularly a critical intelligentsia, already prepared to turn against proponents of revolution. Godwin's well-meaning attempt to present his dead wife as an extraordinary genius led instead to representations of Wollstonecraft as sexually promiscuous, religiously heterodox and politically dangerous; allowed unfriendly commentators to present Godwin himself as a cuckolded laughing-stock; and tainted Godwin and Wollstonecraft's circle of friends by association.<sup>46</sup>

Hays's own 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft' published two years later in Richard Phillips's Annual Necrology for 1797-1798 (1800) both follows Godwin's lead, acts as a corrective to some of his views, and often responds defiantly to the reactionary attacks on Godwin's text and Wollstonecraft's character. Like Godwin, Hays presents Wollstonecraft as an extraordinary woman, gifted with masculine understanding and feminine sensibility: reason and passion inextricably linked

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<sup>45</sup> Mary Hays, 'Letter to the Editor' The Monthly Magazine 4 (October 1797), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Godwin's representation of Wollstonecraft in his Memoirs and the way in which the reception of this text influenced her posthumous reputation are discussed in detail in my next chapter.

together, as in her portrait of the heroine of Emma Courtney. In fact, Hays's Wollstonecraft bears more than a passing resemblance to Emma Courtney, and her 'Memoirs' have a similar epistolary structure to her first novel. Hays uses Godwin's publication of Wollstonecraft's letters to Imlay to focus on Wollstonecraft's private self, passionately expressed in these letters, over and above her public discourse.

Hays uses Wollstonecraft's extraordinary nature to excuse the 'extravagance' of her writing and life story:

Vigorous minds are with difficulty restrained within the trammels of authority; a spirit of enterprise, a passion for experiment; a liberal curiosity, urges them to quit the beaten paths, to explore untried ways, to burst the fetters of prescription, and to acquire wisdom by an individual experience.<sup>47</sup>

Hays develops her private view of Wollstonecraft as a genius, Lavater's 'one in a million', as a defiant apology for the infamous eccentricity of her 'untried' way through life. Barbara Taylor argues that this eulogy for Wollstonecraft is a 'reminder of what Enlightenment could mean to a woman'.<sup>48</sup> In her own memoir of her friend, Hays seeks to explain, soften and engage her readers' sympathies with the woman she recognises from Godwin's Memoirs, attempting to superimpose her own construction of Wollstonecraft over Godwin's.

Hays both follows and questions Godwin's treatment of Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs as 'almost entirely of her own creation'<sup>49</sup> and his contention that on her deathbed 'not one word of a religious cast fell from her lips' (Memoirs, 138) in her

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<sup>47</sup> See Mary Hays, 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft' in Annual Necrology for 1797-98 (London: Phillips, 1800), 411-60, 411. Subsequent references, in-text as 'Memoirs'.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Taylor, 'Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightenment Britain' in Women, Gender and Enlightenment, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 30-52, 46.

<sup>49</sup> William Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman [1798], 138, in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol 1, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992). Subsequent references, in-text.

depiction of her friend's religion. Hays's Wollstonecraft 'laid no stress on creeds and forms' and 'rested not upon critical evidence or laborious investigation' but 'she adored the Creator in the temple of the universe, worshipped him amongst the beauties of nature, or, suffering her mind to expatiate amidst ideas of spotless purity and boundless goodness, humbled herself before him in the still hour of recollection' ('Memoirs', 416). On her deathbed, Hays's Wollstonecraft is calm and contented, not in the determinedly secular manner according to Godwin but because 'The religious sentiments she had imbibed in her youth, had in them no terrors [sic] that could discompose a dying hour; her imagination had embodied images of visionary perfection, giving rise to affections in which her sensibility delighted to indulge' (457). Comparing Hays's projection of Wollstonecraft's beliefs with Godwin's, Barbara Taylor argues that the latter's 'owes too much to Godwin's own religious scepticism to be wholly reliable' but that Hays's 'better captures Wollstonecraft's credo', yet both underestimate the centrality of Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs to her feminist philosophy.<sup>50</sup> Both Godwin and Hays's downplaying of Wollstonecraft's active engagement with religion throughout her work contributes to later, reactionary representations of her as threateningly irreligious.

Hays's analysis of Wollstonecraft's most famous text, her second Vindication, also follows Godwin's in her characterisation of its 'perspicuity and arrangement' as 'defective' and 'its style, though frequently rich and glowing... sometimes inflated, and generally incorrect' (423). On the other hand, she defends it against 'the virulence of opposition, the clamours of ignorance, the cavils of superstition, and the misrepresentation of wilful perversion', perhaps remembering the reception of her

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<sup>50</sup> Barbara Taylor, 'The Religious Foundations of Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminism' in The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 99 – 118, 101.

own texts, arguing that Wollstonecraft's work promises 'a rich and abundant harvest' once 'this ferment has subsided' (423). Again foregrounding Wollstonecraft's melding of traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics, Hays concludes:

The high masculine tone, sometimes degenerating into coarseness, that characterizes this performance, is in a variety of parts softened and blended with a tenderness of sentiment, an exquisite delicacy of feeling, that touches the heart, and takes captive the imagination. (423)

In her 'Memoirs', Hays turns to Wollstonecraft's private correspondence, made available by Godwin's publication of her letters to Gilbert Imlay amongst her Posthumous Works, to exemplify Wollstonecraft's commingling of reason and passion. Quoting extensively from these letters, Hays tracks the progress of Wollstonecraft's love affair with Imlay, from her ecstatic early letters pulsing with pleasure and excitement to the more and more desperate notes leading to her suicide attempts and the eventual dissolution of their relationship. In her selection of Wollstonecraft's correspondence, Hays highlights her friend's 'exquisite' sensibility. One exemplary excerpt berates Imlay for his lack of imagination:

Believe me, sage sir, you have not sufficient respect for the imagination – I could prove to you in a trice that is the mother of sentiment, the great distinction of our nature, the only purifier of the passions... The impulse of the senses, passions, if you will, and the conclusions of reason, draw men together; but the imagination is the true fire, stolen from heaven, to animate this cold creature of clay, producing all those fine sympathies that lead to rapture...  
(429)

Passion, reason, imagination: Hays uses Wollstonecraft's private correspondence with Imlay to explicate her own philosophical ideals. Walker argues that 'In representing Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays validated her own life-in-writing. Her Wollstonecraft evolved to reflect Hays's understanding in changing times. In this

way, the two Marys sustained each other'.<sup>51</sup> Wollstonecraft, so important for Hays's self-presentation in life, becomes essential, with her death, in sustaining Hays's sense of self represented through her life writing of her friend and mentor. Her image of Wollstonecraft as an ingenious figure, balancing reason and passion, creates an imaginative space for herself to accomplish the same feat. Hays's writing shows her struggling for this balance throughout her career. Arguably, her most successful self-representation comes in the balanced authorial voice of Female Biography, using her depiction of her friend and mentor to inform her intellectual approach in a text criticised for excluding Wollstonecraft.

## 6) Feminism in the Footnotes: Female Biography<sup>52</sup>

Hays's intense personal and professional relationship with Wollstonecraft in the 1790s makes her omission of Wollstonecraft from the six volume Female Biography (1803) puzzling, especially as Wollstonecraft receives a generous entry in Matilda Betham's Biographical Dictionary of Celebrated Women the following year, under 'Mary Godwin'.<sup>53</sup> Betham lists Wollstonecraft's publications, notes her charitable work, and follows Godwin's account of her religious beliefs.<sup>54</sup> For some feminist critics, Hays's omission is unforgivable. For example, Taylor characterises the

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<sup>51</sup> Gina Luria Walker, 'The Two Marys: Hays Writes Wollstonecraft', 5. Chamber Music: The Life Writing of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and Mary Shelley. Romantic Circles. University of Maryland. 14 June 2009.

<<http://www.rc.umd.edu/features/features/chambermusic/index.html>>

<sup>52</sup> See my 'Feminism in the Footnotes: Wollstonecraft's Ghost in Mary Hays's Female Biography' Life Writing 8.3 (September 2011), 273-85, for an earlier version of this argument.

<sup>53</sup> Matilda Betham, Biographical Dictionary of Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country (London: B Crosby, 1804), 374-77.

<sup>54</sup> Elaine Bailey argues that Betham's inclusion of Wollstonecraft is 'striking' at triple the length of an average entry and that, in spite of a 'careful disapproval of Wollstonecraft's sexual adventures', she is not particularly censorious of her work. See her 'Lexicography of the Feminine: Matilda Betham's Dictionary of Celebrated Women' Philological Quarterly 83.4 (Fall 2004), 289-313, 299.

omission as intellectual cowardice in response to the reactionary political atmosphere of the early nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Kelly dismisses the text as ‘hack’ work on six separate occasions in his otherwise sympathetic overview of Hays’s oeuvre, including contemporary criticism of the omission.<sup>56</sup> Mary Spongberg argues that Hays dilutes Wollstonecraftian concerns with “the language of domestic heroism”, more consonant with Hannah More’s counter-revolutionary feminism.<sup>57</sup> Walker counters these accusations by portraying Hays’s earlier obituaries of Wollstonecraft as ‘prototypical entries’ for Female Biography, noting that Hays’s memoir shares the same publisher as the later work (Growth of a Woman’s Mind, 222).

Greg Kucich, Miriam Wallace and Jeanne Wood have begun to analyse Female Biography on its own terms, especially Hays’s strategic engagement with the genre of women’s history writing. Kucich argues that Hays, in her entry on Joan of Arc, shows ‘how legal systems construct gender identity in ways that both subordinate women and inflict punishment on those... who transgress’.<sup>58</sup> Wallace focuses on the way in which Hays reinscribes women into history, arguing that Female Biography expands the contemporary conception of the political sphere to include women’s personal lives.<sup>59</sup> Wood explores the way in which alphabetisation

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<sup>55</sup> Barbara Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 247.

<sup>56</sup> Gary Kelly, Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 234, 246, 250, 257.

<sup>57</sup> Mary Spongberg, Writing Women’s History since the Renaissance (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 117.

<sup>58</sup> Greg Kucich, ‘Women’s Historiography and the (Dis)embodiment of Law: Ann Yearsley, Mary Hays, Elizabeth Benger’ Wordsworth Circle 33 (2002), 2-7, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Miriam Wallace, ‘Writing Lives and Gendering History in Mary Hays’s Female Biography (1803)’ in Romantic Autobiography in England, ed. Eugene Stelzig (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 63-78, 66.

allows Hays to cross historical boundaries, creating a transhistorical space for the analysis of more, and especially less virtuous, women.<sup>60</sup>

My argument differs from these historicist approaches by focussing on the ways in which Hays shapes her biographical entries on a series of women to reflect upon contemporary politics and gender roles, revivifying Wollstonecraftian feminism for a reactionary age in her footnotes and other authorial interjections throughout Female Biography. Although Wollstonecraft's name does not appear in Female Biography, the influence of her life, her feminism, and her friendship with Hays throbs throughout its pages. Indeed, in several of the longer entries, Wollstonecraft appears as a shadowy third figure, in a ghostly triumvirate forged between Hays as biographer, her historical subject and Hays's representation of Wollstonecraft's life and thought. My analysis of this text focuses on four individual entries. Catherine II of Russia is celebrated as demonstrably undomesticated, and Hays carefully separates out consideration of her gender from her sovereign achievements. The seventeenth-century French ambassador's wife, the Countess de Bregy, is castigated as a vain, arrogant aristocrat. The figures of Madame Roland and Mary, Queen of Scots are moulded by Hays's earlier representations of Wollstonecraft.

Hays claims neutrality in her Female Biography, suggesting it is 'Unconnected with any party' and that 'disdaining every species of bigotry, I have endeavoured, in general, to serve the cause of truth and virtue'.<sup>61</sup> In the main body of her biographical sketches, Hays strives to occupy this neutral position. In her footnotes, however, she

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<sup>60</sup> Jeanne Wood, "'Alphabetically Arranged": Mary Hays's Female Biography and the Biographical Dictionary' Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture 31.2 (Summer 1998), 117-42.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Hays, Female Biography, or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries, Alphabetically arranged, vol. 1. (London: Richard Phillips, 1803), vi. Subsequent references in-text, with volume numbers.

pursues a more personal perspective on issues centring on women's education, position in society and potential. These constitute critical interventions which revivify Wollstonecraftian feminism for the post-revolutionary audience for whom Hays is writing; an audience she specifies in her preface, stating that 'my book is intended for women, and not for scholars' (Female Biography, viii). Indeed, Wollstonecraft herself seems to return as a shadowy third figure in some of Hays's biographies, occupying the liminal space between Hays as authorial voice and her biographical subjects.

Hays's deployment of footnotes is central to her feminist project in Female Biography, as their extensive use allows her to channel her critiques of gender roles and social prejudices, while allowing the main body of her biographical entries to appear deceptively neutral. This method allows an articulation of her feminist philosophy through a series of deliberately provocative footnotes. Hays had used footnotes in earlier works, but mainly to attribute her quotations from her favourite philosophers such as Wollstonecraft, Godwin, Rousseau and Helvétius, rather than to comment on their, or her own, arguments. Hays also includes attributions of her sources at the end of each individual entry in Female Biography, ranging from eighteenth-century biographical dictionaries such as Ballard's Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain (1752), the anonymous Biographium Faemineum (1766), and De Lacroix's Dictionnaire Historique des Femmes Célèbres (1788) to classical sources such as Tacitus and Suetonius. In this, she differs from these other compilers, who tend not to acknowledge their sources, and, as Miriam Wallace argues, thereby allows her readers to follow up her research with their own ('Writing Lives', 74). Betham's Biographical Dictionary (1804) follows Hays by including sources at the end of each entry. However, she also criticises Hays's work as 'rather

a selection of historical extracts, than a digested compilation of Female Biography' (Betham v-vi), presenting her own work as both more concentrated and original.

Unlike Hays, Betham does not include footnotes to her dictionary. Hays's footnotes help to further shape her readers' responses, guiding them to a nuanced feminist approach to her individual subjects.

Rather than focussing on exclusively domestic women, Hays, on the contrary, devotes the longest, and most detailed, biographies to women who in no way fit early nineteenth-century ideals of the domestic heroine. Catherine II receives by far the longest entry at 428 pages, sprawling across the second and third volumes of Hays's work. Concluding her book-length biography of Catherine II, Hays determines that 'the estimate of her character must be formed from her actions: her reign was perhaps for her people rather brilliant than happy' (III 269). She continues:

For her licentiousness as a woman no excuse can be offered; as a sovereign she must be allowed the title of great. If her love of glory too often assumed the features of a destructive ambition, the praise of an enlightened and magnanimous mind cannot be denied to her. (III 269-70, emphasis in original)

Hays carefully separates questions about her sex from questions about her greatness, praising her 'enlightened and magnanimous mind' irrespective of her gender. Hays's separation of gender from achievement here mirrors her focus on Wollstonecraft's genius regardless of her sex.

Hays has fun when analysing the character of a more domestic woman, the Countess de Bregy.<sup>62</sup> Hays's entry consists of de Bregy's autobiographical account of her life, studded with Hays's footnotes. Her sharp interventions offer an alternative representation of the narrator's character which contrasts with de Bregy's self-

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<sup>62</sup> Charlotte Saumaise de Chasan (1619-93) married M. de Fecelles, the Count de Bregy, French ambassador to Poland and Sweden. She corresponded with the Queens of Austria, England and Sweden and wrote poetry and memoirs.

presentation. De Bregy begins her self-portrait by focussing on appearance: 'My person... perfectly well proportioned, is neither too large or too small. I have a certain negligent air, which convinces me that I am one of the finest women of my size' (II 47). Hays seems both horrified and fascinated by de Bregy's vanity and self-confidence, and undermines de Bregy's descriptions with her own commentary on them. For example, de Bregy proclaims: 'It appears to me that I possess judgement to estimate things properly, though not by acquired knowledge' to which Hays adds the footnote, 'It would be a curious question to ask, What is the knowledge or judgement which we do not acquire?' (II 48). This is both a defence of Hays's belief in the supremacy of nurture over nature and a snippy aside on a vain woman. To de Bregy's statement, 'I can with truth say, that I was born modest and discreet, while pride has preserved in me these qualities', Hays attaches a footnote to the word modest: 'This appears not perfectly evident from the lady's account of herself' (II 48). Finally, de Bregy self-deprecatingly boasts: 'I am greatly affected by the merit of others, and apt to overrate my own; but my presumption extends but to the qualities of the heart' to which Hays attaches a footnote to presumption: 'To this the reader perhaps may not quite agree' (II 50).

Hays uses de Bregy's own words against her to highlight the Countess' vanity and hypocrisy. Her analysis of de Bregy's character follows Wollstonecraft's aggressive asides on the vanity of upper class ladies in her Vindication. In her most famous work, Wollstonecraft characterises rich women as 'Weak, artificial beings [who], raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society!' (Vindication, 75), continuing that their education makes them 'vain and helpless' (75). Hays follows Wollstonecraft's attack on

aristocratic women's vanity and pride, repeated throughout the Vindication. Hays's footnotes in Female Biography draw her readers' attentions to the affectation in de Bregy's self-portrait in a way which humorously continues Wollstonecraft's earlier critiques of the artificiality of rich women's lives.

Hays makes a point of using her subjects' own words, not just to satirise a lack of self-perception as in de Bregy's case, but to better exemplify their extraordinary character, especially in the case of her long biography of Madame Roland.<sup>63</sup> In fact, Hays presents the entry on Roland in Female Biography as simply an abridgement of Roland's own memoirs, using the 'spirit and interest, that glow through every page [to] awaken in the heart of the reader the most affecting and elevated sentiments' (VI 103). Hays uses Madame Roland's words to bolster her own philosophical endeavours, representing her as a sympathetic female philosopher: "Philosophy", says Madame Roland, "in calling forth the powers of my soul, and giving firmness to my mind, did not diminish the scruples of sentiment, or the susceptibility of my imagination, against which I had reason to be so much on my guard" (VI 147). Hays shows Roland struggling to find the balance between reason and passion here. The search for this equilibrium drives Hays's entire oeuvre, but is especially emphasised in her earlier depictions of Wollstonecraft as the prototypical female philosopher. For example, in Letters and Essays, Hays excerpts Wollstonecraft's ambivalent response to the religious question of rationality and suffering in her Vindication: 'When that wise Being who created us... saw the fair

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<sup>63</sup> Marie-Jeanne Roland (1754-1793) was a member of the Girondin party, opponents to Robespierre's Jacobins in the early stages of the French Revolution. She was friends with Wollstonecraft during Wollstonecraft's time in Revolutionary France and was guillotined, along with her husband and most of the rest of the Girondin party, during one of Robespierre's purges. She is one of the most contemporary figures in Hays's Female Biography, and her entry is linked in many ways to Hays's earlier representations of Wollstonecraft and the female philosopher figure.

idea, he willed... that the passions should unfold our reason, because he could see that present evil would produce future good'.<sup>64</sup> This returns to her own argument on the importance of reason, founded on sensibility, in securing this good. In discussing the figure of Madame Roland, one of Wollstonecraft's close friends and contemporaries during her time in Revolutionary France, Hays finds an echo of both Wollstonecraft's, and her own, attempts to balance reason and passion throughout their work.

As in her entry on de Bregy, Hays uses her footnotes both to comment on Roland's words and to develop her own philosophy. Musing on the domestic work allotted to women, Roland wonders, 'I have never been able to comprehend... how these cares can absorb the attention of a woman, however considerable may be her household, who possesses method, and activity; a little vigilance, and a wise distribution of employments, are all that is necessary.' To this Hays responds, 'Madame Roland's acquaintance with her sex could not have been very extensive. Has their education been such that we may reasonably expect from them method, activity, vigilance, and wisdom? Alas, no! these are great qualities, and rarely combined' (VI 176). This echoes Wollstonecraft's complaint at the end of her Vindication: 'we shall not see... that dignified domestic happiness [in women], the simple grandeur of which cannot be relished by ignorant or vitiated minds' until their education is improved (Vindication, 263). Hays questions whether education for women has equipped them satisfactorily for their allotted role in life; implicitly agreeing with Madame Roland, and Wollstonecraft herself, that women's education

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Letters and Essays, 184, taken from the first chapter of the Vindication, 83. See my discussion of Letters and Essays, above.

must be improved not only in order for women to accomplish their domestic function, but in order to fully develop their potential in private and public life.

In another footnote to Madame Roland's memoirs, Hays reveals herself to both empathise with her biographical subjects and to use them to reflect upon her own position as female author. She uses Roland's complaint about the treatment of women writers to reflect upon the treatment of herself and, I would argue, Wollstonecraft. She quotes Roland's words that, 'If the public are forced to acknowledge that she [a female author] has talents, they sift her character, her morals, her conduct, and balance the reputation of her genius by the publicity which they give to her errors'. Hays's footnote extends Roland's words: 'Madame Roland might have added, And if they cannot find any real blemishes in her conduct, they are ingenious to substantiate fiction for facts; the more absurd, the more credible and more eagerly received' (VI 178). Here, Hays explicitly deals with the troublesome reception which greeted both her work and Wollstonecraft's, blaming the sexual double standard whereby a female author cannot be accepted for her talents alone, because her morals are either censured or slandered with the effect that her work is diminished.

In her entry for Mary, Queen of Scots, Hays carefully divides Mary Stuart's talents from her real or imagined moral conduct. By doing so, she is able to write a sympathetic account of a complex woman, making her concluding defence of Mary's conduct read more persuasively. More than any other individual entry, the ghost of Wollstonecraft hovers over Hays's version of this other Mary. Her separation of the queen's natural genius from her problematic reputation reads as another defence of both Wollstonecraft and Hays herself. Throughout her biography of the unhappy queen, Hays presents her as another Haysian heroine, for example representing the

queen as straddling a gendered divide. Hays praises the ‘graces of her person, the insinuation of her address, and the elegance of her manners’ as feminine ‘accomplishments’, to which Mary ‘added many of the accomplishments’ of men, including her ability in modern languages and Latin and progress in the arts and sciences (V 24-5). Hays’s Mary Stuart combines feminine accomplishments and masculine learning, thus challenging the gendered hierarchies of Hays’s own, as well as Mary’s time. In Hays’s idealised portrait of the queen’s education, there is an echo of Wollstonecraft’s plans for national education in her Vindication, in which she argues that boys and girls should be educated together ‘in the improvement of the arts and sciences, never forgetting the science of morality, or the study of the political history of mankind’ (Vindication, 249). Hays’s portrait of the queen’s education shows that it was possible to achieve learning in what were considered masculine subjects and combine them with conventionally feminine traits. She therefore establishes an historical precedent for Wollstonecraft’s radical plan for national education.

Hays criticises earlier historians for their gendered association of female figures with uncontrolled emotion and absence of reason. She takes Dr. Robertson to task for sexism in his History of Scotland. Praising the English Queen Elizabeth for ‘sagacity in the choice of her ministers’, Robertson chastises her for bestowing favour on ‘beauty and gracefulness of person, polished manners and courtly address’, concluding ‘In one case she acted with the wisdom of a queen; in the other she discovered the weakness of a woman’ (qtd in Hays, V 48). Hays comments:

Favour undoubtedly... is distinct from esteem. The latter is the offspring of judgement, the former of taste and feeling. Nor is it peculiar to women to be dazzled by the qualities enumerated by the grave historian. When do men, it may be asked, where their taste and passions are concerned, turn from personal

graces and captivating manners, to distinguish the endowments of the mind, or recompense the virtues of the heart? (V 48, emphasis in original)

Hays carefully distinguishes between rational judgement and emotional taste here, refusing to give a gendered meaning to either term. Instead she argues that both women and men are liable to make mistakes when favouring feeling above reason.

Throughout the entry on Mary Stuart, Hays makes links between the situation of Scotland in the sixteenth century and that of her own historical moment, connecting the religious, political and social unrest which ensnared the Scottish queen with the dangers of writing and publishing as a woman in the early nineteenth century. Hays's opening comment, that Scotland's 'friendship with France had... become more fatal to the nation than the enmity and violence of England' (V 7), uses the fraught relationships between Scotland, England and France in the sixteenth century to obliquely comment on the relatively recent Jacobite uprisings in Scotland and, more broadly, on the fate of British radicalism after the French Revolution. Her concluding remarks on the queen resonate with her own difficulties both in rescuing Wollstonecraft from reactionary opprobrium and avoiding it herself: 'The turbulence of the times, the rancour of party rage, and the medium of prejudice or partiality, through which every object in those periods was beheld, render it difficult to form a just opinion of the character of Mary' (V 273). 'Mary', in this paragraph, could as easily encompass Wollstonecraft or Hays herself, as much as it refers to Mary Stuart. Between the authorial sympathy Hays shows for the Scottish queen and other difficult women and her own self-representation as a female biographer of women who do not fit into the category of domestic heroines, Hays creates a space for a reconsideration not only of Wollstonecraftian feminism in a reactionary age but of the personal qualities of Wollstonecraft herself.

After the main body of her biography of Mary Stuart, Hays adds a long endnote, stating: 'In the course of this narrative it has been studiously avoided to pronounce any decision respecting the real guilt or criminality of Mary' (V 278). Hays uses her endnote to weigh the sources for and against Mary, being careful to note that these sources are in themselves unreliable, as their authors' stance towards Mary is already determined by their religious and political sympathies. Although Hays clearly sympathises with Mary, and believes her innocent of the murder of Darnley and forced into her intemperate marriage to Bothwell, she attempts to allow her readers' interpretative freedom: 'The reader will then be left to form his own conclusions on the evidence presented to him' (V 278). This dynamic dialogue between Hays as historiographer, her reader, and historical subject, including the ghost of Wollstonecraft, shows how much Hays has grown in confidence throughout her career. Instead of being a betrayal of Wollstonecraft's friendship and feminism, Female Biography works as the text in which Hays most successfully combines Wollstonecraft's influence with her self-presentation as a female philosopher.

The success of this balancing act lies in Hays's presentation of the main body of Female Biography as a neutral space, allowing her copious footnotes to expound a profoundly personal and persuasive feminist philosophy. The main text's neutrality depends upon the absence of Wollstonecraft's body for its success. After Hays's earlier reception as Wollstonecraft's disciple, explicit reference to her in Female Biography would attract the rancorous criticism directed at Wollstonecraft posthumously, at Godwin's biography, and at Hays's own earlier work. Instead, Hays chooses to empty the main text of Wollstonecraft's overt influence only to return to Wollstonecraftian feminism in her personal, provocative footnotes. In the most engaged entries of Female Biography, the influence of Wollstonecraft's life and work

seeps from the footnotes back into its main body. Wollstonecraft's ghost haunts these biographies in the liminal space between Hays's representation of herself as author and the historical figures she brings back to life through her writing. The trajectory of Hays's treatment of the female philosopher figure moves from early pride in the appellation in Letters and Essays, growing ambivalence from Emma Courtney to Victim of Prejudice, to the successful integration of female philosophy in Female Biography, combining her own confident authorial voice with the lives of these illustrious and celebrated women, connected by the ghost of Wollstonecraft.

Hays's writing career over the course of her 1790s heyday also has repercussions for the later Post-Jacobin writers I describe in the following chapters of my thesis. Firstly, Hays's later works offer a Post-Jacobin way out of the level of opprobrium directed at her at the end of the 1790s: in particular, her Appeal and Female Biography avoid this backlash; the first through its anonymity, the second by seemingly neglecting Wollstonecraft whilst appropriating her feminist arguments in her authorial interventions. Secondly, later writers such as Elizabeth Hamilton, Maria Edgeworth, Frances Burney and even Jane Austen use a caricatured version of Hays, based in part on a distorted version of the heroine of her first novel, Emma Courtney, to distinguish between positive and negative iterations of the female philosopher figure. Finally, later women writers use and adapt Hays's authorial strategies, especially her representation of Wollstonecraft as an ideal, romanticised female philosopher figure, at the same time as abusing a satirised representation of her in their works

## II: The Philosopher and the Lover: Reading Wollstonecraft's Public and Private Selves in Godwin's Memoirs and St. Leon

### 1) Introduction: 'JACOBIN MORALITY'

In 1798, Godwin's tandem publication of his Memoirs and Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, including Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria and her letters to Gilbert Imlay, prompted both radical and reactionary reassessments of Wollstonecraft's writing, often conflating the couple's quite distinct political philosophies on the family, education and engagement with the public sphere of the late eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This chapter explores the ways in which Godwin drew upon his own intense, personal relationship with Wollstonecraft, expressed passionately in their private correspondence, in order to develop firstly, a radical, Romanticised representation of his wife in biography and fiction; secondly, an evaluation of the links between Wollstonecraft's private personality and her public writing; and thirdly, a revised account of the importance of private relationships, what he terms the 'domestic affections', in his public philosophy of political justice. What I mean by a radical, Romanticised representation of Wollstonecraft is a depiction which couples together her radical philosophy, arguing for the extension of social, political and economic rights to women, based on an Enlightenment model of progress, with a vision of her as a Romantic figure, privileging her creativity, imagination and sensibility. At its most successful, this

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvana Tomaselli argues that 'few theorists were as effective and clear-minded in the eighteenth century as Wollstonecraft was in placing (or maintaining) the family at the heart of political reform and in pursuing Enlightenment issues within the social and political context of the revolutionary years' in 'The Most Public Sphere of All', in Eger et al., 239-56, 241. Furthermore, she contends that for Wollstonecraft, '[t]he family was the most public sphere of all because it made or broke public-spiritedness'.

representation traces the links between Wollstonecraft's private self and her public works, as in Godwin's treatment of her educational works in the light of her teaching experience, in his deeply personal response to her Scandinavian travelogue, and in his conclusions on her most famous text, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. More problematically, it created a divided representation of Wollstonecraft, which means, as Nicola Trott notes, that 'Wollstonecraft is split between her amazonian-critical-rational and feminine-imaginative-emotional representations'.<sup>2</sup> This split allowed for both the Anti-Jacobin attacks on Wollstonecraft in which her sexual history is used to invalidate her philosophical arguments, as Trott argues, and, more positively, the splitting of the female philosopher figure into positive and negative iterations, as I discuss in my next chapter on novels by Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Maria Edgeworth.

Godwin's radically Romantic representation of Wollstonecraft also enables him to revise his position on the domestic affections. Mitzi Myers argues that Godwin's coupling together of Wollstonecraft's biography with his own autobiography leads him to reconsider his philosophical position on the place of the domestic affections: 'Comprehending this life requires that he reassess his former position step by step, a process not thoroughly accomplished until the reworked second edition of the Memoirs where he emerges as a fully-fledged "new man of feeling" to anticipate the subtitle of his 1805 novel Fleetwood' (310).<sup>3</sup> I focus on his representations of Wollstonecraft in biography and in fiction to explore the way in which Godwin's troubled engagement with the female philosopher figure leads to a

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<sup>2</sup> Nicola Trott, 'Sexing the Critic: Mary Wollstonecraft at the Turn of the Century' in 1798: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads, ed. Richard Cronin (London: Macmillan, 1998), 32-67, 54.

<sup>3</sup> See Mitzi Myers, 'Godwin's Memoirs of Wollstonecraft: The Shaping of Self and Subject' Studies in Romanticism 20.3 (Fall 1981), 299-316, 310.

more ambiguous model of the place of the domestic affections within his philosophy. For example, his depiction of the 'new man of feeling' is more critical than Myers allows, especially in his treatment of the eponymous hero-villain of St. Leon. In the Memoirs, I argue that Godwin couples an analysis of Wollstonecraft's radical politics with a representation of her as a romantic heroine, revealing his own anxieties about his dead wife's status as female philosopher, at the same time as celebrating Wollstonecraft's literary achievements. St. Leon, published in the aftermath of the reactionary response to the Memoirs, borrowed from Godwin's earlier representation of Wollstonecraft to create the character Marguerite de Damville, combining his nostalgia for Wollstonecraft's brand of revolutionary politics with a more conventional interpretation of women's domestic duties. Godwin's shift from Romantic radicalism in the Memoirs to revolutionary nostalgia in St. Leon marks the turn from a Jacobin, or revolutionary, to a Post-Jacobin, post-revolutionary aesthetic in Godwin's work.

The Jacobin aesthetic, in texts from the early 1790s and continuing through the early stages of war with France, and the macabre revelations of the Terror, remained broadly celebratory; Post-Jacobin texts, from 1798 onwards, were perforce more critical, even pessimistic, about the possibility of revolutionary change, advocating instead moderate reform, as the war with France took its toll, revolutionary hopes were squashed abroad by the rise of the increasingly despotic Napoleon, and at home through a government crackdown on suspected subversive elements. Referring to Raymond Williams's concept of 'structures of feeling', Miriam L. Wallace gives a broad definition to English Jacobin novels as texts 'united by a constantly negotiated and engaged dialectic of thought and feeling', therefore

avoiding an ‘over-rigid classification into “Jacobin” and “anti-Jacobin” literature’.<sup>4</sup> In Wallace’s view, English ‘Jacobin’ novels, whether radical or more moderate, were interested in ‘celebrating the universal rights-bearing subject, [whilst] inadvertently question[ing] the limitations of such universalist conceptions by seeking to include and make coherent subjects previously excluded from full subjectivity: property-less men, criminals, women without men and non-Europeans’ (Revolutionary Subjects, 14). In my view, Wallace’s broad definition of the English Jacobin novel shades into my conception of Post-Jacobinism when earlier inadvertent questioning becomes more deliberate, and darker in tone. For example, the conclusion to Godwin’s Caleb Williams questions the eponymous servant’s ability to free himself of his employer, Falkland, by showing the ingrained sense of guilt in Caleb at his murderous master’s downfall, but still celebrates Caleb’s drive towards truth throughout the novel. In St. Leon, Godwin critiques both his hero’s inability to stay true to his beliefs and the legitimacy of these beliefs themselves, showing how St. Leon’s devotion of honour and fame, like Falkland in the earlier novel, destroys his integrity. Throughout the Memoirs and St. Leon, Godwin struggles to find a positive meaning in both his sense of personal loss, at the death of Wollstonecraft, and in the demise of radical expectations in the French Revolution. Godwin’s proposed answer, pursued in the Memoirs and problematised in St. Leon is that, by linking the domestic affections felt in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family with a radical notion of political justice, one can act in the political public sphere.

I argue that it is the private correspondence, unpublished by Godwin, between himself and Wollstonecraft, which reveals the couple’s arguments about the place of

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<sup>4</sup> Miriam L. Wallace, Revolutionary Subjects in the English ‘Jacobin’ Novel (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2009), 16. Subsequent references, in-text. See also Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 133.

radical philosophy in domestic life. This argument informs Godwin's conflicting representations of Wollstonecraft as a female philosopher, struggling to resolve images of Wollstonecraft as radical thinker with Wollstonecraft as passionate woman through both editions of the Memoirs. Godwin finally resolved these contradictions in St. Leon by erasing Wollstonecraft's political commitment from his idealised representation of her in the figure of Marguerite. My emphasis on Wollstonecraft and Godwin's private correspondence, rather than Wollstonecraft and Imlay's which Godwin publishes to conveniently (and conventionally) package Wollstonecraft as a literary heroine of sensibility, reconstructs an alternative 'lived' account of the couple's engagement with the domestic affections and public philosophy. Stormy exchanges of philosophical debate and private passion are refigured in my account in a way which keeps 'philosophy' – as both intellectual argument and sexual activity – alive.

Modern criticism of Godwin's biography has focused on this representation of Wollstonecraft as a heroine of sensibility, which I argue is a troubling effect of the radical, Romantic image of Wollstonecraft that Godwin depicts in his biography. Lisa Butler, Nicola Trott, Mitzi Myers, and Mary Jacobus analyse the split in Godwin's representation of Wollstonecraft, between the revolutionary female philosopher figures of the 1790s and a prototypical Romantic heroine.<sup>5</sup> Jacobus focuses on Godwin's publication of Wollstonecraft's letters to Gilbert Imlay which tend 'to assimilate both her love life and her letters to a literary culture of sensibility',

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<sup>5</sup> See Lisa Butler, 'The Paradox of Effeminized Masculinity and the Crisis of Authorship' ESC 31.2-3 (June / Sept 2005), 79-98, which argues that Godwin's presentation of Wollstonecraft as a 'female Werther' 'recuperates her back into a normative discourse of femininity', 88. Godwin's exploration of Wollstonecraft's challenge to gender boundaries, at least implicit in his characterisation of her as a female Werther, complicates Butler's analysis. See Mary Jacobus, 'Intimate Connections: Scandalous Memoirs and Epistolary Indiscretion' in Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830, eds Elizabeth Eger et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 274-89.

meaning, for Godwin, that ‘her “life” is all “works”; living and writing are equivalent’, (‘Intimate Connections’, 280). She criticises Godwin’s decision to publish these letters as ‘ill-judged’ but ‘entirely consistent with his Enlightenment (and proto-Habermasian) belief in a public sphere of unimpeded rational communication’ (281). Aligning herself with revisionist accounts of Habermas, Jacobus has already criticised The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere ‘for its unitary, unnuanced, ungendered, disembodied, classless and de-racinated account of the bourgeois public sphere’, arguing that the Habermasian public sphere ‘seems both an abstraction and an idealisation – at best a mobilising fiction for cultural theorists, at worst a “phantom public sphere”..., lacking either libidinal investments or a textual unconscious’ (276). As I argue in my introduction, Habermas is more aware of the fictional quality of his conception of the public sphere than Jacobus allows. In this chapter, I use Habermas’s critical engagement with the eighteenth-century bourgeois family, especially the institution of marriage, to illuminate Godwin’s own critique of these institutions in his Memoirs.

Jacobus’s suggestion that the ‘unofficial telos’ of Godwin’s biography is ‘the transformation of the despotic, dysfunctional eighteenth-century family into the Enlightenment ideal of companionate, egalitarian marriage’ (278) is therefore another criticism of Godwin’s own abstracting and idealising tendencies. However, I argue that Godwin’s Memoirs explicitly engages with the despotism in the eighteenth-century family both he and Wollstonecraft critique throughout their writing careers, at the same time as Godwin attempts to articulate a radical reformulation of the meaning of marriage in the biography of his wife. Moreover, Jacobus’s revisionist criticisms of Habermas’ public sphere do not move beyond problems already addressed by Habermas himself within the text of his Structural Transformation.

Habermas argues that the slippages between eighteenth-century private and public sphere occluded the function of marriage in ensuring the development of capitalist hegemony. As I discuss in my introduction, Habermas describes how ‘the conjugal family’s self-image of its intimate sphere... collided even within the consciousness of the bourgeoisie itself with the real functions of the bourgeois family’: the reproduction of capital through inheritance.<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, I use Habermas’ own troubling of his public sphere schema in order to explore Godwin’s problematic reading of Wollstonecraft’s public and private selves, and their unification in Jacobus’ fantasy space of ‘companionate, egalitarian marriage’. In Godwin’s treatment of his relationship with Wollstonecraft, he both deepens his critique of the despotism of the eighteenth-century bourgeois family, at the same time as celebrating the unique merits of their own marriage.

Whereas modern criticism focuses on Godwin’s ambiguous representation of Wollstonecraft as a heroine of sensibility, contemporary reviews, whether positive or, more likely, negative, of the Memoirs focus on the links between Wollstonecraft’s private life and public works, in order to attack the couple’s political philosophies, often conflated as one and the same in these accounts. For example, the Anti-Jacobin Review follows the shape of Godwin’s in its pursuit of Wollstonecraft’s private character in public, in its emphasis on the importance of reading texts and personalities together, and in its focus on the practical impact of Godwin and Wollstonecraft’s theories on the family, but does so in order to satirise and distort the actual content of Godwin’s biography. The detailed review of the Memoirs links Wollstonecraft’s perceived immorality in print with her private behaviour: ‘Godwin has

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<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, trans. Thomas Burger (1989) (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 47. Subsequent references in-text.

laboured to inform the world, that the theory of Mrs Wollstonecraft was reduced to practice, that she lived and acted, as she wrote and taught'.<sup>7</sup> The Anti-Jacobin's re-interpretation of Godwin's Memoirs begins by satirically agreeing with his intention of displaying Wollstonecraft as an exemplar in her public and private life: 'We coincide with him in his opinion of the utility of a life of Mrs Wollstonecraft; though for a very different reason. Intended by him for a beacon, it serves for a buoy; if it does not shew what it is wise to pursue, it manifests what it is wise to avoid' (94). The review attacks Godwin's public rendering of Wollstonecraft's private personality by conflating her public discourse on morality with its reading of her private immorality: 'Soon after her death, to do honour to the memory of his wife, and himself in choosing such a wife, he records her adventures. The moral sentiments and moral conduct of Mrs Wollstonecraft, resulting from her principles and theories, exemplify and illustrate JACOBIN MORALITY' (98, emphasis in original). In its title and editorial viewpoint the Anti-Jacobin Review clearly positions itself against 'JACOBIN MORALITY'. The term suggests the foreignness of Wollstonecraft's political philosophy, linking her to the French revolutionary group of Jacobins, including Robespierre, whom Wollstonecraft campaigned against, and contrasts her position with the English 'old system of morals' which the magazine loudly defends. The Anti-Jacobin's focus on Wollstonecraft's 'Jacobin Morality' links her to the French ideal of the femme philosophe, instantiating the reactionary press' representation of revolutionary philosophy as threateningly foreign and dangerous to British interests.

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<sup>7</sup> Rev. of *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, by William Godwin, and *Posthumous Works*, ed. Godwin, *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine; or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor* 1 [July 1798] (London: J. Plymsell et al., 1799), 93, parentheses in original. Hereinafter, Anti-Jacobin. Subsequent references, in-text.

The conservative press, led by the newly-formed Anti-Jacobin, used Godwin's publication of the Memoirs as a focal point for reactionary attacks against so-called Jacobin morality, as well as against the new, or modern, philosophy. Godwin's representation of Wollstonecraft was used to revile women, and men, sympathetic to the revolutionary fervour of the earlier 1790s. Godwin was very much associated with the enthusiasm for the French Revolution in Britain, which celebrated the overthrow of Louis XVI's distant, autocratic regime as the French catching up with the English Revolution of 1688.<sup>8</sup> The public's initial enthusiasm had soured as news of the bloody violence associated with the Terror crossed the channel, turning definitively against revolutionary ideals after Britain's declaration of war in 1793.<sup>9</sup> By 1798, Godwin, and those associated with French revolutionary sympathies, came under increasing scrutiny from government agencies, including the Anti-Jacobin, financed as it was by Pitt's cabinet, through its editor Canning.<sup>10</sup> The vitriolic reception of the Memoirs from the conservative press provides one of the contexts for Godwin's turn towards a Post-Jacobin perspective in St. Leon.

## 2) Love Letters and Philosophy

In the Memoirs, Godwin searches for a philosophical basis on which to privilege the 'domestic affections', or private family feeling, as stimuli to act in the public sphere,

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<sup>8</sup> As with many details of Godwin's contemporary reception, this overstates his own enthusiasm for the early events of the French Revolution, as he consistently campaigned against violent political action. However, his Political Justice (1793) capitalised on Revolutionary fervour to make his anti-governmental arguments. See Mark Philp, Godwin's Political Justice (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1986) for a detailed account of Godwin's arguments.

<sup>9</sup> The essays in The French Revolution and British Popular Politics, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) give a good overview of the changes in the public perception of the French Revolution throughout the 1790s in Britain.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Andrews explores the links between reactionary magazines such as the Anti-Jacobin and government policy in The British Periodical Press and the French Revolution (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 69-82 and 97-110. He also recounts the contemporary reception of Godwin's Memoirs, 111-23.

inspired by his Romanticised representation of Wollstonecraft, and developed through his analysis of the connections between her private self and public writing. In this chapter, I argue that the private correspondence between Godwin and Wollstonecraft provides a valuable insight into the couple's discussions about the intersections between intimacy, domesticity and philosophy; discussions which Godwin uses to inspire his representation of Wollstonecraft as a radical, Romantic figure. In their letters, 'philosophy' becomes a crucial nexus for Godwin and Wollstonecraft's debates over the relationship between reason and passion, first as a means for Wollstonecraft to tease Godwin out of his nervously protected bachelorhood, then potentially as a quirky pseudonym for the sexual act, and finally as a contested term in their continuing argument over the place of the domestic affections in private life, the public sphere and their own different philosophical systems. The couple's disagreements and reconciliations highlight the extent to which the Wollstonecraft in Godwin's Memoirs is a radical, Romanticised representation, reconciling the tensions between domesticity and philosophy throughout their uneasy courtship and marriage.

Wollstonecraft begins her first letter, dated 1<sup>st</sup> July 1796, to Godwin by comparing him, to disadvantage, with Rousseau. Lending him 'the last volume of "Héloïse"', she teasingly tells him that 'I do not give you credit for as much philosophy as our friend', adding 'I want besides to remind you, when you write to me in verse, not to choose the easiest task, my perfections, but to dwell on your own feelings – that is to say, give me a bird's-eye view of your heart'.<sup>11</sup> Wollstonecraft both suggests that Rousseau's combination of reason and passion in his famed

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<sup>11</sup> The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, ed. Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 2004), 342. Subsequent references, in-text.

philosophical novel reveals the deficiencies in Godwin's own system and uses the allusion to gently criticise Godwin's first attempts at amorous verse. Wollstonecraft's mockery here has a serious purpose, using Rousseau's exploration of female emotion and sexual attraction in Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse to urge Godwin to share his own feelings with her.

Godwin's reply of 13<sup>th</sup> July 1796, mocks the clichéd conventions of love letters, cursing 'the mechanical, icy medium of pen and ink' and offering a teasingly stereotypical alternative: 'No, when I make love, it shall be with the elegant tones of my voice, with dying accents, with speaking glances (through the glass of my spectacles), with all the witching of that irresistible, universal passion'.<sup>12</sup> Gesturing towards her criticisms of his earlier love letter, he asks: 'Shall I send you an eulogium of your beauty, your talents & your virtues? Ah! that is an old subject...'. Instead, he wonders: 'Shall I write citizenness Wolstencraft [sic] a congratulatory epistle upon the victories of Buonaparti?' (Letters of Godwin, 171), referencing Napoleon's series of victories over continental Europe, and connecting, if only laughingly, their developing relationship with European politics.

Wollstonecraft continues her teasing depreciation of Godwin's philosophy over the course of her next dozen or so letters. Her sixth letter to him is addressed 'To Willm Godwin Philosopher' adding 'Not to be opened 'till the Philosopher has been an hour, at least, in Miss Alderson's company, cheek by jowl' (Collected Letters, 346, fn). The jocular note reads, 'Miss Alderson, was wondering, this morning whether you ever kissed a maiden fair – As you do not like to solve problems, on paper, TELL her before you part – She will tell me next – year –'

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<sup>12</sup> The Letters of William Godwin, Vol. 1: 1778-1797, ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 171. Subsequent references in text as Letters of Godwin.

(346).<sup>13</sup> Wollstonecraft's repetition of the word 'Philosopher' seems to suggest Godwin's inexperience of female company, stressing the theoretical nature of his political philosophy against the possibility that he has ever been kissed.

Wollstonecraft's mockery of Godwin's dislike of answering questions 'on paper' and her instructions that he spends at least an hour in Amelia Anderson's company 'cheek by jowl' justifies a reading of her capitalised request that Godwin 'TELL' Alderson before they part as Wollstonecraft's demand for a kiss herself, with Alderson working as her proxy. Her final hesitation in the line 'She will tell me next – year' works both to undermine this reading by delaying any such kiss and to confirm it, as the note is dated 6<sup>th</sup> August 1796 rendering a delay until next year nonsensical. Another reading of this note is that Godwin had already kissed Wollstonecraft, and therefore she is sharing a joke with her philosopher against Alderson. In this reading, both her plea for Godwin to 'TELL' Alderson and Alderson's delayed message, until 'next – year', teases Godwin for his ponderous pursuit of Wollstonecraft.

In a later letter of 10<sup>th</sup> September 1796, Wollstonecraft cautions Godwin 'do not make too many philosophical experiments, for when a philosopher is put on his metal, to use your own phrase, there is no knowing where he will stop – and I have not reckoned on having a wild-goose chase after a – wise man' (360). Again, Wollstonecraft leaves a teasing gap in the last clause, highlighting the disjunction between a philosophical 'wild-goose chase' and the search for a 'wise man'. In a less teasing vein, Wollstonecraft finishes another letter, 'When the heart and reason accord there is no flying from voluptuous sensations, I find, do what a woman can – Can a philosopher do more?' (363). Here, Wollstonecraft links her balancing of

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<sup>13</sup> Amelia Alderson was a mutual friend of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, and later married the portrait painter, John Opie. Her relationships with Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and her reformulation of them in her second novel, *Adeline Mowbray*, form part of my next chapter.

reason and sensibility with sexual passion (or 'voluptuous sensations'), challenging Godwin to contradict her.

On August 17<sup>th</sup> 1796, Wollstonecraft and Godwin exchanged a series of emotionally fraught letters on their deepening feelings for each other, sharing their doubts about the relationship, and situating the importance of the imagination in both their private lives and public philosophies. Explaining her hurt feelings from a perceived snub by Godwin, Wollstonecraft admits that she is 'Mortified and humbled, I scarcely know why – still, despising false delicacy I almost fear I have lost sight of the true' (Collected Letters, 348), wishing she could flee to France or Italy to 'become again a Solitary Walker' (349), underscoring the importance of Rousseau in her self-image with this last reference to his Reveries of a Solitary Walker (1782). She complains to Godwin that her 'Imagination is for ever betraying me into false misery' (348) and instructs him to 'Consider what has passed as a fever of your imagination' (349). In reply, Godwin apologises for his dilatory response to Wollstonecraft's advances, explaining 'I feared that I might be deceiving myself as to your feelings, & that I was feeding my mind with groundless assumptions' (Letters of Godwin, 173). He urges her against returning to her life as a solitary walker, and directly counters her fears of false delicacy, stating 'I see nothing in you but what I respect and adore'. 'Upon consideration I find in you one fault, & but one,' he tells her. 'You have the feelings of nature, & you have the honesty to avow them. In all this you do well. I am sure you do. But do not let them tyrannise over you. Estimate everything at its just value' (173). He concludes his conciliatory letter by asking for some comfort himself: 'Do you not see, while I exhort you to be a philosopher, how painfully acute are my own feelings? I need some soothing, though I cannot ask it from you' (174).

Godwin's mild criticism of the tyranny of Wollstonecraft's feelings prompts her to consider their intellectual differences:

One word of my ONLY fault – our imaginations have been rather differently employed – I am more of a painter than you – I like to tell the truth, my taste for the picturesque has been more cultivated – I delight to view the grand scenes of nature and the various changes of the human countenance [–] My affections have been more exercised than yours, I believe, and my senses are quick, without the aid of fancy – yet tenderness always prevails, which inclines me to be angry with myself, when I do not animate and please those I [love]. (Collected Letters, 350)

Wollstonecraft's account of her and Godwin's differently employed imaginations is echoed in Godwin's later account of her intellectual character which concludes his Memoirs, in which he contrasts his 'attempt at logical and metaphysical distinction' with her 'taste for the picturesque' (discussed further below).<sup>14</sup> This shows the extent to which Godwin drew on their private correspondence, particularly these emotionally charged missives, in order to create his representation of Wollstonecraft in the Memoirs.

Shortly after this exchange of letters, Wollstonecraft and Godwin became lovers. William St Clair dates the beginning of their sexual relationship as 21<sup>st</sup> August 1796.<sup>15</sup> Through a careful analysis of Godwin's diary, in which sexual intercourse with Wollstonecraft is marked with a dash followed by a dot (–.), St. Clair tracks the development of this relationship, interrupted by illness and visits from friends and family, until their marriage on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1797, when Godwin stops using the code (502-3). After 21<sup>st</sup> August, Wollstonecraft's references to philosophy begin to take on a different cast. On 15<sup>th</sup> September, Wollstonecraft informs Godwin that her daughter

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<sup>14</sup> William Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol. 1, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1992), 140. Hereinafter, Memoirs. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>15</sup> William St Clair, The Godwins and the Shelleys (London: Faber, 1989), 498. Subsequent references, in-text.

Fanny's illness will interrupt their plans for a trip to the country, 'We must then woo philosophy chez vous ce soir, n'est-ce pas; for I do not like to lose my Philosopher even in the lover' (Collected Letters, 365). Both Godwin and Wollstonecraft used French as their preferred language to share passionate feelings, sexual or otherwise. Wooing philosophy, in this note, combines Godwin and Wollstonecraft's shared education of each other with the sexual act: Godwin tutoring Wollstonecraft in grammatical usage and Wollstonecraft Godwin in self-expression; both expanding their reading of French and German philosophers and sentimental literature; and both tentatively experiencing sexual pleasure. On 21<sup>st</sup> September, Wollstonecraft invites Godwin to her house, reminding him that 'you must not leave the philosopher behind' (367), which both Janet Todd and St. Clair argue might refer to a form of birth control – a usage which would complete the couple's sexualisation of the word 'philosophy'. This reading gives an unexpected lustre to a later letter of 30<sup>th</sup> September, in which Wollstonecraft asks 'What say you – may I come to your house, about eight – to philosophize?' (369).<sup>16</sup>

'Philosophy' moves from being a term of gentle mockery between Wollstonecraft and Godwin to a highly charged part of their love affair, possibly euphemistic of the sexual act itself, and finally to a counter in their continuing debate over the importance of the domestic affections in both private and public life. Upon receiving one of Godwin's love letters, Wollstonecraft responds with a clear expression both of her own feelings and her own philosophy. She thanks him for his letter by telling him 'you know not how much tenderness for you may escape in a

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<sup>16</sup> I find the 'philosopher' as contraceptive device argument unconvincing, reading Wollstonecraft's reminder as a request to focus on their intellectual discussions above their love-making. However, her desire 'to philosophize' with Godwin, suggests that philosophy formed a particularly charged aspect of their love affair.

voluptuous sigh, should the air, as is often the case, give a pleasurable movement to the sensations, that have been clustering round my heart, as I read this morning – reminding myself, every now and then, that the writer loved me' (4<sup>th</sup> October 1796, 370-1). She then corrects herself:

Voluptuous is often expressive of a meaning I do not now intend to give. I would describe one of those moments, when the senses are exactly tuned by the rising tenderness of the heart, and according reason entices you to live in the present moment, regardless of the past or future – It is not rapture. – It is a sublime tranquillity. I have felt it in your arms. (371)

In this beautiful passage, Wollstonecraft moves from the senses, to the passions ('the rising tenderness of the heart'), to her reasoning faculties ('according reason') to explicate her sensation of 'sublime tranquillity': a movement, both rational and passionate, which allows her to live in and enjoy the present moment – in other words, love. In several letters, Wollstonecraft dwells on the happiness of being in love and being loved, as well as in making love. For example, on 13<sup>th</sup> November, she writes to Godwin: 'If the felicity of last night has had the same effect on your health as on my countenance, you have no cause to lament your failure of resolution: for I have seldom seen so much live fire running about my features as this morning when recollections – very dear; called forth the blush of pleasure, as I adjusted my hair' (375). And in another letter, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1796, she concludes with an echo of Hamlet: 'There are other pleasures in the world, you perceive, beside those know [sic] to your philosophy' (386). Wollstonecraft returns here to her gentle teasing of earlier in her relationship with Godwin, but in this case, she uses their shared experience of falling in love to underscore her point: that Godwin's published works and private conversations do not take into account the effect of the domestic affections on individual and social life.

In the couple's last, extended series of letters, on Godwin's trip to Etruria to visit Drs. Parr and Darwin and the radical author Robert Bage, Wollstonecraft and Godwin discuss a variety of topical and philosophical issues, as well as frank admissions of their feelings for each other. In a letter combining heartfelt and avant garde sentiment, Wollstonecraft tells Godwin: 'A husband is a convenient part of the furniture of a house, unless [he] be a clumsy fixture. I wish you, from my soul, to be riveted in my heart; but I do not desire to have you always at my elbow – though at this moment I did not care if you were' (6<sup>th</sup> June 1797, Collected Letters, 418).

Wollstonecraft's construction of marriage here is at once domestic, a husband is a 'convenient part of the furniture of a house'; passionate, she wishes him 'riveted in my heart'; and rational, she does not desire him to be 'always at my elbow', although she wistfully adds that she would not mind if he were, 'at this moment'. Godwin responds:

You cannot imagine how happy your letter made me. No creature expresses, because no creature feels, the tender affections, so perfectly as you do: &, after all one's philosophy, it must be confessed that the knowledge, that there is some one that takes an interest in our happiness something like that which each man feels in his own, is extremely gratifying. (10 June 1797, Letters of Godwin, 215)

Godwin acknowledges here the impact his relationship with Wollstonecraft has had on his philosophy, recognising the importance of reciprocal affection above his stress on independence in his published writing.

Throughout the series of short notes and longer love letters which make up Godwin and Wollstonecraft's private correspondence, philosophy returns as a term of teasing affection, sexualised importance and rational debate but it also informs the couple's relationship at a deeper level, structuring the way in which they choose to conduct their love affair and marriage. The correspondence reveals Wollstonecraft's

idiosyncratic combination of reason and passion, which Godwin will draw upon for his idealised representation of her in the Memoirs. It is Wollstonecraft's rationality which becomes a site of controversy and contention, both within Godwin's biography and in the text's contemporary and modern receptions. Her passionate sensibility, on the other hand, drives Godwin's representation of her as a Romantic heroine. Godwin uses his private correspondence with Wollstonecraft to drive his competing representations of her as both philosopher and lover.

### **3) Romantic Radicalism in the Memoirs**

Godwin creates a radical, Romanticised representation of Wollstonecraft in the Memoirs by drawing on their intense, emotional and sometimes difficult private correspondence, in order to exemplify Wollstonecraft's complex, demanding personality. In his biography, Godwin moves through a series of Wollstonecraft's personal relationships, culminating in his own courtship and marriage, analysing the connections between Wollstonecraft's private self and Wollstonecraft's developing authorial persona in her public work. Over the course of the Memoirs, Godwin explores Wollstonecraft's difficult relationship with her family, her passionate friendship with Fanny Blood, the development of her religious and pedagogical beliefs amongst the Dissenters of Newington Green, and her love affairs with Henry Fuseli, Gilbert Imlay and himself. These relationships form the background of Wollstonecraft's development as a radical thinker and, for Godwin, a Romantic heroine.

In his opening analysis of the dynamics of the Wollstonecraft family, Godwin builds on Wollstonecraft's own criticisms of her family in print in order to shape his

depiction of her overcoming childhood adversity. In the first edition of the Memoirs, Godwin describes Wollstonecraft's father as a 'despot', 'subject to alternate fits of kindness and cruelty'; her mother as 'the first, and most submissive of his subjects', and their treatment of Wollstonecraft as 'characterised by considerable rigour'.<sup>17</sup> Godwin tones down, barely, his description of Edward Wollstonecraft, by altering 'cruelty' to 'severity' and 'despot' to 'he was absolute', in the second edition. Godwin quotes from Wollstonecraft's novel Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman, to demonstrate the formative effect Wollstonecraft's childhood had on her intellectual character, also showing her transmutation of often painful experience into a radical critique of existing social structures. Godwin writes that:

When, in the Wrongs of Woman, Mary speaks of "the petty cares which obscured the morning of her heroine's life; continual restraint in the most trivial matters; unconditional submission to orders, which, as a mere child, she soon discovered to be unreasonable, because inconsistent and contradictory; and the being often obliged to sit, in the presence of her parents, for three or four hours together, without daring to utter a word"; she is, I believe, to be considered as copying the outline of the first period of her own existence. (Memoirs, 89)

Godwin moves from this quotation to dramatically demonstrate how Wollstonecraft overcame these 'petty cares', declaring: 'But it was in vain, that the blighting winds of unkindness or indifference, seemed destined to counteract the superiority of Mary's mind. It surmounted every obstacle; and, by degrees, from a person little considered in the family, she became in some sort its director and umpire' (89).

In the second chapter of the Memoirs, Godwin shows Wollstonecraft beginning to search for and create her own, radically reinterpreted, family circle, moving from her bitter experiences within a traditional family structure to her

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<sup>17</sup> William Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol. 1, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1992), 88-9. Hereinafter, Memoirs. Subsequent references, in-text.

passionate friendship with Fanny Blood. This also entailed her taking an increasingly directorial role in the running of the Blood family, offering Fanny's parents money and finding work for her brother. Godwin describes Wollstonecraft's relationship with Blood as having 'for years ... constituted the ruling passion of her mind' (92).

Wollstonecraft's first meeting with Blood, for Godwin, 'bore a resemblance to the first interview of Werter with Charlotte' (92). He will return to the image of Wollstonecraft as a 'female Werter' in his depiction of her love affair with Imlay. Butler argues that this construction of Wollstonecraft 'recuperates her back into a normative discourse of femininity' ('Paradox', 88). On the other hand, even if we accept Goethe's Werther as the archetypal example of what Butler calls 'effeminized masculinity', Godwin's representation of Wollstonecraft as a female Werther complicates any simple reinscription into a 'normative discourse of femininity': Wollstonecraft troubles the gender divide here, and Godwin deletes this troubling analogy between Wollstonecraft as Werther and Blood as Charlotte in the second edition.

Godwin's third chapter details his controversial views on Wollstonecraft's religious thought, grounding his depiction of her religious education in her daughterly relationship with the Dissenting minister Richard Price. Their friendship developed within the Dissenting community of Newington Green, where Wollstonecraft, along with her sisters and Blood, had opened a school in 1783. Bred 'in the principles of the church of England', Wollstonecraft's religion, according to Godwin, 'was, in reality, little allied to any system of forms; and, as she has often told me, was founded rather in taste, than in the niceties of polemical discussion' (Memoirs, 96). Godwin's anxiety to present a vision of Wollstonecraft unanchored by religious doctrine is expressed in his unlikely claim that Wollstonecraft 'often told me' (note the assertion of autobiography) she was uninterested in 'polemical discussion'. Godwin's

later account of his uncomfortable first meeting with Wollstonecraft, in which he was disturbed by her pressing interest in polemics, belies this oversimplification of Wollstonecraft's religious underpinnings. His depiction of Wollstonecraft taking 'inexpressible delight in the beauties of nature, and in the splendid reveries of the imagination', and conclusion that 'her religion was almost entirely of her own creation' (96) coincides with his mission to envision his late wife as an exemplar of sensibility, rather than giving any solid account of the religious arguments running through her work. Wollstonecraft's delight in nature and imaginative engagement with religious ideas also connects her to the later Romantic heroine which her daughter Mary Shelley engages with throughout her work.<sup>18</sup>

Godwin is more even-handed in his analysis of Wollstonecraft's educational endeavours at Newington Green, using her skill as an educator to reflect on her private personality. So, Godwin begins: 'No person was ever better formed for the business of education' only to reflect on her 'quickness of temper'; writing from wry experience, 'when she strongly disapproved [she] was apt to express her censure in terms that gave a very humiliating sensation to the person against whom it was directed' (98). Godwin skilfully contrasts Wollstonecraft's mercurial temper with her patience and kindness towards children, students and servants, highlighting the charisma which 'personally attached' the children in her care to herself. Godwin ends on a painfully personal note: 'While I thus enumerate her more than maternal

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<sup>18</sup> Godwin's characterisation of Wollstonecraft's religious beliefs also implicitly aligns her with 'natural religion' or deism as opposed to 'revealed religion' or theism, as her belief depends on finding evidence of God's existence in the natural world rather than in 'revealed' sources such as the Bible. See J.C.A Gaskin, 'Hume on Religion' in *The Cambridge Companion to David Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 313-344, particularly 314-16, for a helpful analysis of the differences between deism and theism, and related eighteenth-century debates. Although Godwin is often called an atheist in both contemporary and modern criticism of his writing, his focus here on nature and the imagination chimes with his own later writing on religious belief, as outlined by Rowland Weston in 'William Godwin's Religious Sense' *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.3 (2009), 407-23.

qualities, it is impossible not to feel a pang at the recollection of her orphan children!' (98). Godwin uses Wollstonecraft's public endeavours in education to illuminate her private character, revealing the cost of her absence on his family.

Godwin was both criticised and lampooned for his sympathetic account of Wollstonecraft's passionate, and increasingly desperate, love affair with Gilbert Imlay, but I see his representation of their relationship as part of his Romanticised portrait of his wife's radical experiments in personal relationships, as well as a precursor to his own love affair with her. Godwin's description of her changing temperament when in love with Imlay, imbued with sexual imagery, led to mocking accusations of self-willed cuckoldry: 'She was like a serpent upon a rock, that casts its slough, and appears again with the brilliancy, the sleekness, and the elastic activity of its happiest age' (117-18). This sentence is deleted in the second edition. In the remainder of the paragraph, Godwin eulogises Wollstonecraft in love:

She was playful, full of confidence, kindness and sympathy. Her eyes assumed new lustre, and her cheeks new colour and smoothness. Her voice became chearful; her temper overflowing with universal kindness; and that smile of bewitching tenderness from day to day illuminated her countenance, which all who knew her will so well recollect, and which won, both heart and soul, the affection of almost every one that beheld it. (118)

Rather than a disturbing, imaginary engagement in his late wife's love for another man, Godwin, as Lyndall Gordon argues in her own biography of Wollstonecraft, is remembering the transformation of his lover in the early stages of his own love affair with her.<sup>19</sup> Godwin concludes his analysis of the Imlay affair with surprising sympathy, arguing that the reader should admit the sentiment 'of pity for the mistake of the man, who, being in possession of such a friendship and attachment as those

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<sup>19</sup> Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 237.

of Mary, could hold them at a trivial price, and, “like the base Indian, throw a pearl away, richer than all his tribe” (120). Wollstonecraft’s first real attempt at building her own family ends nearly in tragedy, with her suicide attempts. Godwin stresses the way in which her literary production rescues Wollstonecraft from perdition. His account of the effect of her Letters Written During a Short Residence in Norway, Sweden and Denmark on himself as a reader, ‘If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book’ (122), reveals Wollstonecraft’s transmutation of private pain into public allure in her travelogue.

Before discussing the progress of his own love affair with Wollstonecraft, he candidly represents the awkwardness of their first meeting, revealing the challenging, uncompromising woman with whom he would later fall in love. Arriving at the publisher Joseph Johnson’s house to listen to Paine, he found instead that ‘the conversation lay principally between me and Mary. I, of consequence, heard her, very frequently when I wished to hear Paine’ (113). Discussing the moral character of eminent men, Godwin has Wollstonecraft ‘bestowing censure with a plentiful hand’ whereas he ‘had a strong propensity, to favourable construction’; religious argument also created friction between them, as it would continue to do in their later relationship, as ‘her opinions approached much nearer to the received ones, than mine’. Godwin concludes, ‘We touched upon all topics, without treating forcibly and connectedly upon any’ (113). Finally, in retelling their disagreement amongst other friends, Godwin discovered that whereas he was magnanimous enough ‘to yield her the praise of a person of active and independent thinking’, Wollstonecraft ‘did me no part of what perhaps I considered as justice’ (113). Godwin’s troubled account of his first meeting with Wollstonecraft reveals a strictly unromantic vision of his later wife: difficult, pugnacious, even wearisome.

Godwin's account of their second meeting, love affair and marriage refuses likewise to align it with societal mores, and is tinged by both his love for her and his grief at her death. Godwin confronts these societal mores in the introductory paragraph of Chapter Nine: 'If there ever were any motives of prudence or delicacy, that could impose a qualification upon the story, they are now over. They could have no relation but to factitious rules of decorum. There are no circumstances of her life, that, in the judgment of honour and reason, could brand her with disgrace' (127). Wollstonecraft's life, for Godwin, transcends societal mores: 'motives of prudence or delicacy', those feminine virtues, have no place in his representation of their relationship, replaced instead by 'the judgment of honour and reason'. In response to the outcry, created by his challenge to the 'factitious rules of decorum' throughout the Memoirs, Godwin adds in the second edition: 'She had errors; but her errors, which were not those of a sordid mind, were connected and interwoven with the qualities most characteristic of her disposition and genius' (155). Again, Godwin uses the opportunity of a second edition to sharpen his radical, romanticised vision of Wollstonecraft: even her flaws contribute to her intellectual gifts and personal charms.

Godwin's depiction of the couple's blossoming love for each other again carefully transgresses gender expectations: 'The partiality we conceived for each other... grew with equal advances in the mind of each... One sex did not take the priority which long established custom had awarded it, nor the other overstep that delicacy which is so severely imposed' (128). In this passage, Godwin both stresses the revolutionary equality of their affair in that he did not take on a leading, masculine or aggressive role in the seduction but also carefully presents Wollstonecraft's actions as in line with customary notions of female delicacy: 'I am not conscious that

either party can assume to have been the agent or the patient, the toil-spreader or the prey, in the affair. When, in the course of things, the disclosure came, there was nothing, in a manner, for either party to disclose to the other' (128). It is difficult to understand how their relationship progressed if this mutually passive description is to be believed; even as Godwin attempts to quietly feminise his wife in this passage, one suspects that it was Wollstonecraft who drove the relationship forwards.

Godwin struggles to justify his and Wollstonecraft's decision to marry, controversially making it clear in the first edition that the couple had sex outside of marriage:

We did not marry. It is difficult to recommend any thing to indiscriminate adoption, contrary to the established rules and prejudices of mankind; but certainly nothing can be so ridiculous upon the face of it, or so contrary to the genuine march of sentiment, as to require the overflowing of the soul to wait upon a ceremony, and that which, wherever delicacy and imagination exist, is of all things most sacredly private, to blow a trumpet before it, and to record the moment when it has arrived at its climax. (129)

In the second edition, Godwin removes the sexual imagery – 'the overflowing of the soul'; 'climax'; qualifies their marital situation – 'We did not immediately marry'; removes the equivocal terms 'sentiment' and 'delicacy', which he discovered to have very different applications in the Anti-Jacobin reaction to his biography; and adds his own equivocating argument in (slight) favour of marriage: 'an accurate morality will direct us to comply with customs and institutions, which, if we had a voice in their introduction, it would have been incumbent on us to negative' (155). Godwin's depiction of his eccentric living arrangements with Wollstonecraft, in which they worked and visited friends separately, to meet again in the evening – 'We seemed to combine... the novelty and lively sensation of a visit, with the more delicious and heart-felt pleasures of domestic life' (133) – is repeated in his idealised vision of the

domestic situation of St. Leon and his wife, Marguerite de Damville, further explored below. Throughout his engagement with the series of Wollstonecraft's relationships leading up to his own with her, Godwin represents her developing radicalism, reaching its pinnacle in their deliberately non-conformist union, together with a Romantic vision of her as both challenging and charming.

Godwin's analysis of Wollstonecraft's most famous text, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, focuses on her self-representation throughout the polemic, tracing the links between her private self and public, authorial persona. He strives to connect Wollstonecraft's radical philosophy in her polemic to her developing status as a Romantic heroine of sensibility within the rest of the Memoirs, a strategy which reveals some of the stresses in his representation of his wife. He begins by celebrating the text as 'certainly a very bold and original production' (109). However, he is anxiously apologetic about the boldness and originality of Wollstonecraft's throughout the remainder of his evaluation. His discomfort is revealed in the juxtaposition of complimentary and critical passages. He asserts that 'Many of the sentiments are undoubtedly of a rather masculine description. The spirited and decisive way in which the author explodes the system of gallantry, and the species of homage with which the sex is usually treated, shocked the majority', which seems to appreciate Wollstonecraft's 'masculine' explosion of specious gallantry. This is undercut by Godwin's later admission, 'There are also, it must be confessed, occasional passages of a stern and rugged feature, incompatible with the true stamina of the writer's character' (109). In this paragraph, Godwin moves from appreciating Wollstonecraft's 'spirited and decisive' manner to criticising the way in which her writing style can become instead 'stern and rugged'. In this passage, Godwin strives to celebrate Wollstonecraft's 'masculine' style when 'spirited and

decisive', tying in with his later depiction of her bold decision-making in his conclusion (discussed further below), criticising her more aggressive asides.

In fact, as his analysis continues, Godwin seeks to replace the 'masculine' cast of Wollstonecraft's self-representation as a political polemicist with a more socially acceptable 'feminine' image. Godwin first conflates Wollstonecraft's earlier 'masculine' sentiments into a 'rigid and somewhat amazonian temper', reducing her challenge to gender norms into an eighteenth-century favourite, the fierce but female figure of the Amazon. He then further feminises Wollstonecraft by associating her with both the 'luxuriance of imagination' and 'delicacy of sentiment' (109), all four terms traditionally gendered feminine at the time. Godwin's anxiety over the 'masculine' quality of Wollstonecraft's writing, and his desire to feminise her in this passage, is indicative of a wider ideological debate over the extent to which women could intervene in the public sphere. From a Habermasian standpoint, Godwin seeks to position Wollstonecraft in the more acceptable sphere of literary production, smoothing the rougher edges of her political argument by placing her Vindication within more feminine generic parameters.

Godwin returns to Wollstonecraft's perceived gender-bending in the Vindication by analysing her personal reception after the work's publication, contrasting the public's (or perhaps his own) expectations of finding 'a sturdy, muscular, raw-boned virago' with their surprise 'when instead of all this, they found a woman, lovely in her person, and, in the best and most engaging sense, feminine in her manners' (109-110). Godwin uses the opportunity of a second edition to invent further insulting expectations of Wollstonecraft's imagined appearance, changing this nightmare Wollstonecraft from a 'sturdy, muscular, raw-boned virago' to a 'rude, pedantic, dictatorial virago', shifting the emphasis on Wollstonecraft's perceived

physical masculinity to her imagined personality. Godwin's concluding remarks again shift between celebration and apology, making a huge claim for the endurance of Wollstonecraft's work at the same time as criticising its style: 'The Vindication of the Rights of Woman [sic] is undoubtedly a very unequal performance, and eminently deficient in method and arrangement... But when we consider the importance of its doctrines, and the eminence of genius it displays, it seems not very improbable that it will be read as long as the English language endures' (110). In his treatment of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Henry Fuseli (discussed further below), Godwin criticises Fuseli for his belief in the 'divinity of genius' as 'a power that comes complete at once from the hands of the creator of all things, and the first essays of a man of real genius are such, in all their grand and most important features, as no subsequent assiduity can mend' (Memoirs, 111). Godwin's criticism of Wollstonecraft's Vindication as 'eminently deficient in method and arrangement', whilst celebrating its genius, is echoed in his critique of Fuseli's arrogant lack of 'assiduity' in his own pursuit of genius. One of Godwin's conclusions about Wollstonecraft and Fuseli's relationship is that 'Mary came something more of a cynic out of the school of Mr Fuseli, than she went into it' (Memoirs, 111). His treatment of the Vindication's flawed genius further seems to be confronting the trace of Fuseli's influence in Wollstonecraft's writing style.

Godwin had expressed similar reservations about Wollstonecraft's writing style during her life, precipitating a fierce disagreement between the two. Her letters provide an alternative reading of Godwin's problem with the style of the Vindication. In a letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 1796, Wollstonecraft complains that the 'radical defect' Godwin perceives in her writing style leaves her with an invidious choice: 'I must either disregard your opinion, think it unjust, or throw down my pen in despair;

and that would be tantamount to resigning existence; for at fifteen I resolved never to marry from interested motives, or to endure a life of dependence' (Collected Letters, 357). Neither Godwin's original criticism of the defect in Wollstonecraft's writing nor his response to this letter exists in writing (it is possibly based on a disagreement in person, in any case), but in October 1796 he started tutoring her in Latin grammar, an event interpreted by Janet Todd as Wollstonecraft accepting the legitimacy of some of Godwin's criticisms (Collected Letters, fn 357). In her letter, Wollstonecraft's swift slippage between Godwin's criticism of her writing style and the question of being dependent on a husband reveals both the importance to her self-representation of her status as a writer and her anxieties about the issue of independence. She then mounts an ardent defence of her personal style, based on both intellectual and emotional grounds:

And, for I would wish you to see my heart and mind just as it appears to myself, without drawing any veil of affected humility over it, though this whole letter is a proof of painful diffidence, I am compelled to think that there is something in my writings more valuable, than in the productions of some people on whom you bestow warm eulogiums – I mean more mind – denominate it as you will – more of the observations of my own senses, more of the combining of my own imagination – the effusion of my own feelings and passions than the cold workings of the brain on the materials procured by the senses and imagination of other writers – (358)

Wollstonecraft's self-justification moves from a wish for absolute candour, however painful, to a proud declaration of her own talents compared to those of Godwin's favoured authors,<sup>20</sup> to an exemplification of the wellsprings of these talents: the senses, the imagination, feelings and passions. These will become the touchstones

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<sup>20</sup> Discussing the sources informing Political Justice, Peter H. Marshall lists Godwin's favourite authors including: Thucydides, Livy, Sallust, Plutarch, Rollin, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Holbach, Helvétius, Condillac, Mably, Raynal, Mirabeau, Turgot, Locke, Clarke, Collins, Edwards, Hume, Price and Priestley, in William Godwin (Yale University Press, 1984), 83.

for Godwin's uncertain celebration of his wife's heart and mind. Whereas Wollstonecraft connects her imagination, feelings and passions to the strength of her intellectual pursuits, explaining her sense that her writings contain 'more mind' than those of other authors, Godwin often seems to separate his consideration of her sensibility, which he admires, from her intellect, which he finds troubling.

Wollstonecraft's focus on the imagination in this letter from September 1796 harks back to the couple's earlier discussion on the differences in their imaginations in August that year (discussed above).<sup>21</sup>

Godwin uses Wollstonecraft's private correspondence on love, philosophy and imagination in order to refine his views on the position of the 'domestic affections', or love, in his own political philosophy. Mark Philp argues against the claim that his relationship with Wollstonecraft 'must necessarily have had a profound impact on Godwin', downplaying her role in his changing appreciation of the place of the domestic affections in his publications (Godwin's Political Justice, 175). Philp suggests that St. Leon and Fleetwood show evidence of such a change, but not the third edition of Political Justice nor the first edition of the Memoirs (175). I locate the effect of Wollstonecraft on his understanding of the role of intimacy in political justice in the rewritten account of Wollstonecraft's relationship with Henry Fuseli. This passage is so important for Godwin that he repeats it in St. Leon and in his Reply to Dr. Parr, arguing that his public philosophy of political justice is able to incorporate his developing appreciation of domesticity.

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<sup>21</sup> See Karen Green, 'The Passions and the Imagination in Wollstonecraft's Theory of Moral Judgement' Utilitas 9 (1997), 271-90, for a comparison of Wollstonecraft's position on the imagination with Godwin, Rousseau, Richard Price and Adam Smith, setting the couple's debates within the wider arguments on the role of feeling and sympathy in ethical reasoning.

This extensively rewritten passage indirectly bears witness to Wollstonecraft's emotional impact on Godwin through his treatment of her relationship with Fuseli. Godwin uses the second edition to make a more general statement on the place of the domestic affections in his political philosophy, by abstracting Fuseli from his account. In the first edition, his description of Wollstonecraft's developing attachment to Fuseli simply, and to Godwin's contemporary readers shockingly, tells of the 'delight she enjoyed in his society... transferred by association to his person', arguing that 'the state of celibacy and restraint in which she had hitherto lived' added to her passion for the artist (111). Godwin stresses Wollstonecraft's realisation that Fuseli's marriage denied her the opportunity of further developing this relationship as she would like, but makes it clear that 'There is no reason to doubt that, if Mr Fuseli had been disengaged at the period of their acquaintance, he would have been the man of her choice' (112). He candidly concludes: 'As it was, she conceived it both practicable and eligible, to cultivate a distinguishing affection for him, and to foster it by the endearments of personal intercourse and a reciprocation of kindness, without departing in the smallest degree from the rules she prescribed to herself' (112). Godwin's careful distinction here between societal and self-willed 'rules' of decorum obfuscates Wollstonecraft's much more radical offer to live as Fuseli's mistress together with his wife: a reconfiguration of the family beyond even Godwin's radical desire for sincerity.<sup>22</sup> In the reworked passage, Wollstonecraft's troubling relationship with the Swiss painter gets transformed into a prophetic account of Godwin's own love for Wollstonecraft.

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<sup>22</sup> See Janet Todd, Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life (London: Phoenix, 2001), xi.

Godwin substantially edits the paragraph in the second edition detailing Wollstonecraft's love for Fuseli, moving from the concrete details of Wollstonecraft's admiration for the painter to a more abstract apologia for her privileging of private feeling over public decorum. In the end, he offers, as Myers points out, 'a position paper on domestic affections as vivifiers of sensibility and social sympathy' ('Shaping', 315). To explain the delight Wollstonecraft took both in Fuseli's society and his person, Godwin generalises from her experience to form a corollary to his own philosophy on the place of the domestic affections within his idea of political justice. He asks his reader to 'recollect how dear to persons of sensibility is the exercise of the affections' (151), developing this point in a long paragraph he would excerpt in his preface to St. Leon and quote again in his Reply to Dr. Parr.

Godwin begins by arguing that 'True wisdom will recommend to us individual attachments' (Memoirs, 151) which sounds like a commonplace platitude. Read in the light of his previous arguments against any sense of private obligation in Political Justice, it is a painfully exact recantation of this position. In the chapter 'Of Promises' in Political Justice, Godwin argues against promises because the sense of obligation which arises from the use of them obstructs actions 'of general application' for the good of human happiness.<sup>23</sup> Individual obligations, in this analysis, are either surplus to requirements, as a sense of justice would require the promised action to be fulfilled without needing a promise, or hypocritical, forcing someone to act against their sense of justice. In the Memoirs, Godwin strives to connect his new emphasis on the domestic affections with his old arguments for societal justice, as 'the man who lives in the midst of domestic relations, will have many opportunities of

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<sup>23</sup> William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice [1793] in Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin, vol. 3, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 87.

conferring pleasure, minute in the detail, yet not trivial in the amount, without interfering with the purposes of general benevolence' (151). Godwin stresses the happiness and virtue attendant on domestic affections, which before he argued should be solely dependent on an individual's engagement in 'disinterested benevolence': now, such benevolence is created and expanded through private relationships.<sup>24</sup> The final sentence of the paragraph makes clear the introspective movement away from Wollstonecraft's relationship with Fuseli to her effect on his private life and public philosophy: 'Nay, by kindling his sensibility, and harmonizing his soul, they ['individual attachments'] may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and of the public' (Memoirs, 151). Wollstonecraft has clearly kindled Godwin's sensibility and harmonised his soul, enabling him to write these Memoirs which he sees as rendering an important service to strangers and the public.

In the final chapter of his biography, Godwin recounts in painfully exacting detail the complications attendant on the birth of their daughter leading to Wollstonecraft's death.<sup>25</sup> Particularly with reference to this chapter, Angela Monsam argues that Godwin adapts the language of contemporary dissection reports in order to write an 'autopsical biography' of his dead wife. She concludes that Godwin 'approach[es] his biography of Wollstonecraft from the vantage point of a detached observer rather than a husband. Godwin adopted the rhetoric of a dissecting surgeon because the voice of a grieving husband would no doubt crack from the

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<sup>24</sup> In Political Justice, Book IV, Chapter VIII 'Of the Principle of Virtue', Godwin argues that disinterested benevolence is the only basis for virtue, critiquing earlier philosophers such as De La Rochefoucauld and Rousseau for promulgating the negative theory of self-love, which at its best can only 'place the perfection of virtue in doing no injury', 195.

<sup>25</sup> See Vivien Jones, 'The Death of Mary Wollstonecraft' British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies 20.2 (Autumn 1997), 187-205, for her reconsideration of the circumstances leading up to Wollstonecraft's death and Godwin's account of it.

strain of such monumental loss'.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, Godwin melds the perspective of the detached observer with that of the grieving husband to create a discourse in which detachment sits uneasily with grief; detachment is used to probe his grief; and grief informs his strained objectivity. Godwin's account of Wollstonecraft's illness and death indeed appears coldly clinical, but his candid admissions of his own turmoil and confusion inflect such surgical detachment with jarring human emotions:

When I went for Dr Poignand... on the morning of Thursday, despair was in my heart. The fact of the adhesion of the placenta was stated to me; and, ignorant as I was of obstetrical science, I felt as if the death of Mary was in a manner decided. But hope had re-visited my bosom; and her cheerings were so delightful, that I hugged her obstinately to my heart. (136)

Godwin's oscillations here, and throughout the chapter, between hope and despair, between sentiment and detachment, manage to represent the confusion of his feelings – recreating them in the reader – and to control them by switching the register from that of sensibility to medical authority.

Godwin makes no changes to his account of Wollstonecraft's last illness and death between the first and second editions of the Memoirs, allowing his first painful exploration to stand unchanged. However, his concluding paragraphs on Wollstonecraft's personality and philosophy undergo extensive changes between editions. These revisions, I argue, show Godwin's dissatisfaction with his summary of her intellectual character, revealing the extent to which their discussions on imagination, domesticity and philosophy remained unresolved at Wollstonecraft's death and in Godwin's Memoirs. Throughout the conclusions to both first and second editions, Godwin contrasts Wollstonecraft's character with his own. The first edition

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<sup>26</sup> Angela Monsam, 'Biography as Autopsy in Godwin's Memoirs of the Author of "The Rights of Woman"' Eighteenth-Century Fiction 21.1 (Fall 2008), 109-30, 130.

begins by setting up a gendered difference: 'We had cultivated our powers... in different directions; I chiefly an attempt at logical and metaphysical distinction, she a taste for the picturesque' (140). Godwin returns here to his private correspondence with Wollstonecraft, drawing on her distinction between their uses of the imagination to insist on a traditional divide between masculine and feminine intellectual characteristics, reducing Wollstonecraft's life and thought to the 'taste for the picturesque' she identifies with in her letter, whereas he seeks for 'logical and metaphysical distinction'. His next sentence seems to me to express Godwin's dissatisfaction with this reduction: 'One of the leading passions of my mind has been an anxious desire not to be deceived', leading him to 'examine and re-examine' particular issues, as he will do in returning to Wollstonecraft's personality in the second edition (140).

In the first edition, Godwin continues to contrast their characters: 'I did not possess... an intuitive perception of intellectual beauty.... What I wanted in this respect, Mary possessed, in a degree superior to any other person I ever knew. The strength of her mind lay in intuition' (140). Godwin's interest in summarising Wollstonecraft's philosophical personality lies in its complementarity to his own. In this way, Godwin's most upsetting declaration, 'and yet, though perhaps, in the strict sense of the term, she reasoned little, it is surprising what a degree of soundness is to be found in her determinations' (notice how the central clause 'she reasoned little' is hedged by qualifiers 'and yet', 'though perhaps', 'in the strict sense of the term', 'it is surprising'), is used to complement Godwin's indecisiveness: 'my oscillation and scepticism were fixed by her boldness' (140-1).

In the second edition, Godwin generalises the distinction between himself as logical and Wollstonecraft as intuitive into a statement of gender difference: 'A

circumstance by which the two sexes are particularly distinguished from each other, is, that the one is accustomed more to the exercise of its reasoning powers, and the other of its feelings' (156). Godwin's 'attempt at logical and metaphysical distinction' is here elevated to the male sex's 'exercise of its reasoning powers'; Wollstonecraft's 'taste for the picturesque' further reduced into a woman's exercise of her 'feelings'. Finally, Godwin argues that 'Mary and myself perhaps each carried farther than to its common extent the characteristic of the sexes to which we belonged' (Memoirs, 156). Godwin moves from acknowledging that this gender difference is customary, that men are 'accustomed more to the exercise' of reason and women of feelings, rather than biological, to the more troubling declaration that he and Wollstonecraft represent extremes of masculinity of femininity. This statement elides his own more complex representation of Wollstonecraft's radical challenge to gender norms throughout the Memoirs, as well as obfuscating the extent to which their private correspondence debated the way in which the imagination acts as a bridge between feeling and reasoning powers.

Godwin goes on to reiterate his own 'love of intellectual distinction', lack of 'an intuitive sense of the pleasures of the imagination', and 'anxious desire not to be deceived', concluding nervously enough for a second edition, 'Endless disquisition however is not always the parent of certainty' (156). In contrast to, and complementing, his own strengths and weaknesses, he represents Wollstonecraft's in more detail:

Her feelings had a character of peculiar strength and decision; and the discovery of them... she found herself unable to control... Her education had been fortunately free from the prejudices of system and bigotry, and her sensitive and generous spirit was left to the spontaneous exercise of its own decisions. The warmth of her heart defended her from artificial rules of judgement; and it is therefore surprising what a

degree of soundness pervaded her sentiments. In the strict sense of the term, she had reasoned comparatively little; and she was therefore little subject to diffidence and scepticism... (156-7)

In this passage, Godwin further qualifies the controversial clause from his first edition, 'she reasoned little', not only with 'comparatively', but throughout the rest of the long paragraph. Godwin romanticises Wollstonecraft's lifelong struggle to direct and control her powerful emotional energy as an overflow of feminine feeling. He turns her lack of formal education into an opportunity for the 'spontaneous exercise of [her spirit's] own decisions'. He transforms her critique of 'artificial rules of judgement' into a surprising 'degree of soundness' in her sentiments. Finally, he depersonalises the earlier account of his own 'oscillation and scepticism' in the first edition, which contrasted with Wollstonecraft's 'boldness', to her own lack of 'diffidence and scepticism' in the second edition. Godwin concludes his Memoirs with the claim: 'While I have described the improvement I was in the act of receiving, I believe I have put down the leading traits of her intellectual character' (141). Here, Godwin interlinks Wollstonecraft's own personality with the effect she had on him, conjoining her biography with his autobiography.

By splitting Wollstonecraft 'between her amazonian-critical-rational and feminine-imaginative-emotional representations' ('Sexing the Critic, 54), as Nicola Trott argues, Godwin's Memoirs allowed Anti-Jacobin commentators to further feminise Wollstonecraft, coupling the details of her private life with an already existing, misogynistic discourse of the prostitute in order to defuse her radical critique of the contemporary treatment of women. This split both taps into and borrows from the deepening division between the idealised Enlightenment representation of the female philosopher and her nightmarish, counter-revolutionary

double, using Godwin's candid revelations to fuel reactionary abuse of the couple's life and work. On the other hand, and more positively, Godwin's divided representation of Wollstonecraft in his Memoirs also allowed women writers sympathetic to her feminist thought to draw on this split to separate Godwin's feminine ideal of Wollstonecraft from the counter-revolutionary iteration of the female philosopher, together with aspects of her political philosophy which they wished to develop in the post-revolutionary era.

#### 4) Revolutionary Nostalgia in St. Leon

As I discuss in my introduction, Peter Knox-Shaw connects Godwin's 1799 St. Leon to Austen's Sense and Sensibility, in order to make his argument that Jane Austen is not an Anti-Jacobin writer, as Marilyn Butler influentially proposed in Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, but a Post-Jacobin novelist, arguing that both novels 'took shape more or less concurrently'.<sup>27</sup> He compares St. Leon's self-destructive behaviour in relation to his family with Willoughby's in relation to Marianne, finding verbal echoes in Willoughby's 'language and verbal deference to Marianne [which] recall St. Leon, who while he professes to be in awe of Marguerite's superior and simple taste[,] indulges in a frenzy of rake-hell epithets himself'. He focusses particularly on both characters' claim that their lovers' every word was 'a dagger to my heart' and that news regarding both women's responses to their perfidy struck them like 'a thunderbolt'.<sup>28</sup> Although Austen satirises, and has Willoughby self-deprecate, this language as 'hackneyed metaphor', she shares with Godwin an

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Knox-Shaw, Jane Austen and the Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 131.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Knox-Shaw, 'Sense and Sensibility, Godwin and the Empiricists' Cambridge Quarterly 27.3 (1998), 183-208, 192-3. Subsequent references, in text.

interest in the social ‘forces that mould individual character’ as both authors explore ‘the way different sets of societal impulse interlock and buckle to form the psychic landscape’ of their characters (Sense and Sensibility, Godwin and the Empiricists’, 193). For me, Godwin’s St. Leon marks the beginning of a Post-Jacobin reassessment of revolutionary ideals, which goes beyond Knox-Shaw’s connection of Godwin’s novel to Austen’s, to include other authors from Amelia Opie to Mary Shelley.

Godwin’s Memoirs act primarily as a work of mourning for Wollstonecraft. In St. Leon, Godwin transmutes this mourning into nostalgia for a lost revolutionary moment in his fictional (anti)hero’s relationship with the idealised Wollstonecraftian figure in the novel, Marguerite de Damville. The complexity of the novel, already balanced between the radicalism of Godwin’s early work, especially his portrait of Wollstonecraft in the Memoirs, and the more conservative demands placed upon his writing in the post-revolutionary period, resides in the contradictory tension between Godwin’s genuine nostalgia for the revolutionary potential of the early 1790s and his perceptive critique of the paralysing quality of such nostalgia. Godwin draws on the conclusions he reaches in the second edition of the Memoirs about the importance of the domestic affections in ensuring the justice of one’s public actions in order to mount his critique both of St. Leon’s increasingly selfish actions and in society’s inability to respond ethically to challenging individuals. I describe this critique as Post-Jacobin because it has lost the directness of earlier, revolutionary attacks on *Things As They Are* in English Jacobin novels, but is more complex in its engagement with national identity, domesticity and the public sphere than the loyalist propaganda of Anti-Jacobin writing.

On the other hand, the Anti-Jacobin Review itself claims to be ‘delighted to

find the social and domestic virtues placed in their proper rank' in St. Leon.<sup>29</sup> The Anti-Jacobin gives St. Leon an extraordinarily positive review given the scorn piled on Godwin's Memoirs, and his earlier works. Indeed, Godwin's novel is read as 'an opportunity [for Godwin] of retracting many of the opinions advanced in his former works' (151), focusing on the preface's awkward apologia for the melding of the domestic affections onto a pursuit of political justice. It concludes that Godwin's 'style is more polished, and altogether more pleasing, than in his former novel' (153). The Anti-Jacobin misreads Godwin's novel as a recantation of his former philosophy, positioning it as effectively Anti-Jacobin, rather than Godwin's Post-Jacobin development of his conception of political justice, with the domestic affections constructed as its wellspring and foundation. The magazine notices Godwin's shift of direction, but its gleeful appropriation of St. Leon as his philosophical recantation misses the novel's more complex critique of the ways in which socio-political systems combine to corrupt individual relationships, particularly the links Godwin draws in the novel between the religious suspicion aroused by St. Leon's secret alchemy and the persecution of radical philosophers in the late 1790s.

In his analysis of Godwin's novel, Gary Handwerk contrasts Godwin's 'liberal critique of institutional power', consistent with Political Justice, with a 'Romantically sceptical assessment of the power of any individual to free his mind from the ideological fetters of his age'.<sup>30</sup> Handwerk concludes by questioning the historical specificity of Godwin's dilemma:

Liberalism and Romanticism had already in his lifetime begun

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<sup>29</sup> Rev. of St. Leon, by William Godwin, The Anti-Jacobin Review 5 (London: J. Whittle et al, 1800), 152.

<sup>30</sup> Gary Handwerk, 'History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination: William Godwin's Historical Fiction' in Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre, eds. Tilottama Rajan and Julia Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 64-85, 75.

to drift further and further apart, the former prey to recurrent waves of unselfconscious progressivist optimism, the latter trapped within one or another nostalgic visions of the past. Two centuries later, Godwin's question remains as open for us as it was for him: how might the liberal imagination come to acknowledge the reality of [historical] repetition and, rather than denying its force or lamenting its futility, seek to invest it with some positive value in the political economy of the psyche? ('William Godwin's Historical Fiction', 82)

For Handwerk, Godwin remains trapped between a liberal and romantic view of the past, unable to move out of this deadlock to imbue the catastrophes of history with positive meaning. For me, the attempt to wrangle a sense of progress from history's catastrophes, particularly the French Revolution, is one of the defining characteristics of Post-Jacobinism, as it tempers the earlier radicalism of the 1790s with a more moderate recognition of the need for social stability. As Godwin discovered to his cost after the reactionary response to the publication of the Memoirs, and which he muses over in the fictional format of St. Leon, such action is liable to misreading, misrepresentation and misuse by forces inimical to radical projects. In St. Leon, Godwin fictionalises his insight, developed over the course of the two editions of the Memoirs, that private behaviour underpins public action, by showing how his protagonist's failure to behave appropriately in his domestic relationships impedes his ability to act successfully in the public sphere. However, Godwin himself fails to imagine a role for women in his reconception of the domestic affections beyond offering emotional support for men.

Godwin uses the preface of St. Leon, and the novel as a whole, to introduce modifications to his argument in Political Justice. He argues against 'any change' in his fundamental argument concerning justice, but places within this broader polemic the 'domestic and private affections' as 'not incompatible with a profound and active

sense of justice in the mind of him that cherishes them'.<sup>31</sup> By quoting from his Memoirs of Wollstonecraft, Godwin concludes the preface by maintaining the links between his radical philosophy, notorious biography and new fictional project, in the face of the reactionary attacks orchestrated by the Anti-Jacobin against him. Godwin concludes the preface by defending himself against the anticipated charge of inconsistency, 'the affections and charities of private life being every where in this publication a topic of the warmest eulogium, while in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice they seemed to be treated with no great degree of indulgence and favour' (St. Leon, 11). The first edition then adds, 'The way in which these seemingly jarring principles may be reconciled, is in part pointed out in a little book which I gave to the public in the year 1798' (11). He then quotes from the Memoirs, the 'little book' to which he is referring, the crucially re-edited passage regarding Wollstonecraft's relationship with Fuseli, discussed above. In future editions, Godwin deletes the explicit reference to the Memoirs but keeps the quotation, without quotation marks. Godwin's explicit use of the Memoirs in the first edition underscores their importance in both his personal development and in his career as a writer; his elision of the reference in subsequent editions, quoting by stealth, similarly illuminates both the savagery of the contemporary reception of his biography and his dilatory response to it.

In the novel, the object of St. Leon's obsession, the philosopher's stone, serves to connect his historical milieu of sixteenth-century Europe to Godwin's contemporary, late eighteenth-century Britain, profoundly suspicious of 'modern philosophy'. Gary Kelly also suggests that the destruction of St. Leon's alchemical

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<sup>31</sup> William Godwin, St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century (1799), ed. Pamela Clemit in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol. 4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), 11. Subsequent references, in-text.

experimentarium deliberately echoes the contemporary trashing of Priestley's scientific laboratory in a spate of mob violence towards threatening 'philosopher' figures in the 1790s.<sup>32</sup> Godwin tracks the costs of St. Leon's public actions on the private sphere of his conjugal family, representing the dichotomy between private intentions and public reception. In doing so, Godwin reveals a new pessimism towards his earlier belief in unimpeded rational communication, particularly evident in the unreliability of St. Leon's narration and his distrust in reading and the reader.

In St. Leon, Marguerite De Damville is a deeply unsatisfying fictional representation of Wollstonecraft. Marguerite, identified with Wollstonecraft by Godwin's friend Thomas Holcroft, is a much more conventionally feminine character, although her conversation is imbued with some of Wollstonecraft's searching intellectual ability. Thomas Holcroft wrote to Godwin after St. Leon's publication, making explicit his understanding that Marguerite was based on Wollstonecraft: 'Your Marguerite is inimitable. Knowing the model after which you drew, as often as I recollected it, my heart ached while I read'.<sup>33</sup> For modern readers, however, Marguerite reads as a falling-off from Godwin's complex portrait of his late wife in the Memoirs. She remains passive, resigned, obedient and supportive throughout St. Leon's worst egotistical excesses. Wollstonecraft's active radicalism is consigned to some aspects of Marguerite's conversation. As such, she becomes representative of Godwin's nostalgia for the lost revolutionary moment of the 1790s, and perhaps, the lost revolutionary moment of his love affair with Wollstonecraft. This moment is only addressed in Marguerite's words, never her actions; radical political action remains

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<sup>32</sup> Gary Kelly, The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 210.

<sup>33</sup> Qtd in C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries, vol. 2 (1876) (New York: AMC Press, 1970), 25.

only a distant, ever more unlikely possibility in her relationship with St. Leon. St. Leon's first meeting with Marguerite leads to a detailed, almost fetishised description both of her personal appearance and intellectual capabilities. He stresses her femininity at the same time as focusing on her physical and intellectual strength: 'Her step was airy and light as that of a young fawn, yet at the same time firm, and indicative of strength of body and vigour of mind... her understanding was bold and correct' (39). St. Leon concludes that Marguerite's 'mind was well furnished with every thing that could add to her accomplishments as a wife or a mother' (39). Godwin's, or at least St. Leon's, weak feminism is visible in the above description: Marguerite has a healthy body and mind, but these attributes only fit her as wife and mother, roles which both define and delimit her role in the text. He further erodes any proto-feminist qualities in Marguerite by focusing his admiration on her physical beauty, simplicity, prudence and amiableness.

On the other hand, Godwin recycles his description of his eccentric living arrangements with Wollstonecraft in St. Leon's with Marguerite: 'We had each our separate pursuits, whether for the cultivation of our minds, or the promotion of our mutual interests. Separation gave us respectability in each other's eyes, while it prepared us to enter with fresh ardour into society and conversation' (43). His description of St. Leon and Marguerite companionably reading together also seems to recall his experience of shared reading with Wollstonecraft:

The terrible, the majestic, the voluptuous and the melting, are all of them, in a considerable degree, affairs of sympathy; and we never judge of them so infallibly, or with so much satisfaction, as when, in the presence of each other, the emotion is kindled in either bosom at the same instant, the eye-beams, pregnant with sentiment and meaning, involuntarily meet and mingle; the voice of the reader becomes modulated by the ideas of his author, and that of the hearer, by an accidental interjection of momentary comment or applause,

confesses its accord.  
(44)

Reading becomes a form of spiritual, almost sexual, communion between St. Leon and Marguerite; their reading matter – Petrarch’s Laura, Dante’s Beatrice, Eloise and Abelard, and the poetry of the troubadours – all contributes to the idealisation of Marguerite as Wollstonecraft’s ghost in the novel.

St. Leon’s literary utopia does not last long, however. The domestic happiness of the St. Leon family is destroyed by his descent into gambling, closely followed by his analogical search for the philosopher’s stone. He squanders his fortune in Paris, leaving his family destitute and himself temporarily mad with guilt and self-loathing. Offered the secret of eternal youth and infinite riches by a mysterious stranger, St. Leon only manages to alienate first his wife, then his son from him, and then he finds himself alienated from the rest of civil society. St. Leon’s alienation from his family and society triggers a concomitant alienation in his relationship with his readers. Defending himself against the imagined charge of selfishness because he does not impart the secret of immortality to his ailing wife, St. Leon addresses the reader directly:

Some readers will perhaps ask me why, anxious as I was for the life of Marguerite, and visible as was the decline of her health, I did not administer to her of the elixir of immortality which was one of my peculiar endowments. Such readers I have only to remind, that the pivot upon which the history I am composing turns, is a mystery. If they will not accept of my communication upon my own terms, they must lay aside my book. (178)

Godwin shows St. Leon’s corruption by the philosopher’s stone in this movement from reading as a companionable activity in his early relationship with Marguerite to

reading as a non-negotiable issue of trust.<sup>34</sup> The status of reading falls further as Marguerite's health disintegrates. Describing himself as a 'better and kinder husband' (212) because of Marguerite's ill health, St. Leon then admits that, even so, domestic harmony is no longer enough for him, and that he feels compelled to pursue 'chemistry and the operations of natural magic' (213). Godwin makes St. Leon's corruption clear when he categorises the 'most imperious passions of the human mind' as 'wealth, power, and pleasurable sensation' (213), focussing on his growing greed and selfishness.

It is in these scenes, first supporting St. Leon to get over his gambling addiction, then confronting his secretive pursuit of power, in which Marguerite seems the most authentically Wollstonecraftian. Musing on their fall from high society into a life of labour in rural Switzerland, Marguerite asks St. Leon, 'have you done us a mischief, or have you conferred a benefit?' answering herself:

I more than half incline to the latter opinion. Let us at length dismiss artificial tastes, and idle and visionary pursuits, that do not flow in a direct line from any of the genuine principles of our nature! ... What is chivalry, what are military prowess and glory? ... You, like me, are fond of the luxuriant and romantic scenes of nature. Here we are placed in the midst of them.  
(77-8)

Marguerite's focus on the natural above the artificial, and dismissal of 'visionary pursuits' and old chivalric codes, echo Wollstonecraft's concerns throughout her published work. She also pinpoints St. Leon's continuing psychological problems: his overwhelming need for honour and fame which lead him and his family to destruction.

Marguerite also perceptively deconstructs St. Leon's character in his secretive

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<sup>34</sup> St. Leon's demand for unwarranted trust from his readers also represents Godwin's attempt to fill the plot hole of why his protagonist does not simply give the elixir of immortality to his wife.

usage of the philosopher's stone to move his family out of honest poverty into the degraded, mercantile society of Constance. Constance itself is described in hauntingly similar terms to Wollstonecraft's climactic experiences in Hamburg in her Letters from Norway. Constance exists without 'the politeness, the elegance, the learning or the genius, an intercourse with which had once been familiar to me. It scarcely contained within its walls any but such as were occupied in merchandise or manufacture' (150). This mirrors Wollstonecraft tracing the cost of commerce on the human soul after her experiences in Hamburg: 'A man ceases to love humanity, and then individuals, as he advances in the chase after wealth'.<sup>35</sup> Further, in this section, St. Leon displays the characteristics of Wollstonecraft's construction of Imlay in her travelogue: greedy, selfish and callous.

Using his mysteriously-gotten gains to return to high society, St. Leon takes his son Charles on a luxurious tour of the French court. However, as he is unable to give any sensible justification of his new-found wealth, St. Leon's lavish behaviour raises suspicions, including those of his son. Incapable of honest dealing with Charles, St. Leon finds himself disowned by his son. The degrading effect the pursuit of wealth has had on his character is visible in his plaintive cries: "My son! my son! – wealth! wealth! – my wife! – my son!" (163), echoing Shylock's distressed "My daughter! – O my ducats! – O my daughter!" in The Merchant of Venice (Act II, Scene 8).

When St. Leon returns to Constance without Charles, Marguerite berates him with the costs of his pursuit of the philosopher's stone on his family: "You have lost your son; you have lost your honest fame; the life of your Marguerite is undermined

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, Letters Written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark (1796) in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 6, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Brooks (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 342.

and perishing” (174). Again, in a manner reminiscent of Wollstonecraft’s correspondence with Imlay, Marguerite continues to savage St. Leon:

One thing further let me add. I will speak it, not in the character of a censor, but a friend. It must ever be right and useful, that a man should be undeceived in any erroneous estimate he may make of himself. I have loved you much; I found in you many good qualities; my imagination decorated you in the virtues that you had not; but you have removed the veil. An adept and an alchemist is a low character. (175)

Marguerite concludes her character evisceration of her husband: ‘Equality is the soul of real and cordial society... How unhappy the wretch, the monster rather let me say, who is without an equal’ (176); sentiments imbued with Wollstonecraftian radicalism and, perhaps, providing an early inspiration for Mary Shelley’s study in monstrosity, Frankenstein.

St. Leon sinks ever lower in Marguerite’s opinion, so much so that she becomes ‘languid, indisposed in body and mind, her thoughts gloomy, her hopes blasted, her wishes bankrupt’ (211). He is imprisoned for the suspected murder and embezzlement of Zampieri, the alchemist who had passed on the secrets of the philosopher’s stone to St. Leon, and only escapes by bribing his way out. Moving to the Italian countryside, his alchemical practices mean that he is viewed with suspicion by nearby villagers. Increasingly prone to violence, these villagers kill St. Leon’s dog then burn down his house; his faithful servant Hector dying in the blaze. Gary Kelly argues that Godwin draws deliberate parallels between this act of destruction and the contemporary burning down of Priestley’s laboratory in the Birmingham Riots: that for Godwin ‘the fate of the adept and the lover of wisdom are the same, both are feared by the ignorant and persecuted by the powerful’ (English Jacobin Novel, 210).

St. Leon had already sent his wife and daughters onwards to Barcelona, but

the news of Hector's death has speeded Marguerite towards her own. Giving birth to a stillborn child, she becomes 'reconciled and content to die' (239), demanding that her feckless husband give up the care of his daughters to someone both better suited and more responsible. As soon as St. Leon (quickly) agrees, she expires. Marguerite's death, related to childbirth, and negating St. Leon's role in the upbringing of his orphaned daughters, shares a series of uneasy echoes with Godwin's account of Wollstonecraft's death and his own concern for the best way to bring up Fanny and Mary.

Apart from a brief reunion with his daughters, during which he remains anonymous, and the weird, quasi-incestuous debacle of his matchmaking efforts on behalf of his son which concludes the novel, St. Leon cuts his ties to the domestic affections and goes it alone, being repeatedly imprisoned and misunderstood. St. Leon's incarceration by the Spanish Inquisition allows Godwin further scope to link the events of the sixteenth century with the eighteenth:

If these papers of mine are ever produced to light, may it not happen that they shall first be read by a distant posterity, who will refuse to believe that their fathers were ever mad enough to subject each other to so horrible a treatment, merely because they were unable to adopt each other's opinions? Oh, no! human affairs, like the waves of the ocean, are merely in a state of ebb and flow... two centuries perhaps after Philip the Second shall be gathered to his ancestors (he died in 1598), men shall learn over again to persecute each other for conscience sake. (275)

In this passage, Godwin uses the widespread vilification of Inquisitorial practices to comment on the contemporary turmoil caused by the French Revolution, and the turn against his own works in the reactionary reception of his Memoirs of Wollstonecraft, and the subsequent attacks on his entire corpus. Further, Pamela Clemit notes that 'Godwin's commitment to radical concerns in St. Leon is... fraught

with problems: the increased range of his historical analysis gives rise to heightened scepticism about the fulfilment of progressive ideals, which are viewed either as hopelessly nostalgic, or as open to distortion'.<sup>36</sup> Godwin confronts the distorting effects of nostalgia in St. Leon, both in his own nostalgic reformulation of Wollstonecraft in the character of Marguerite and through his analysis of the effect St. Leon's memories of his wife have on his ability to act responsibly in public and private. Godwin's treatment of nostalgia, then, is both self-critical and more generally sceptical. This scepticism becomes more pronounced in St. Leon's charitable interventions in the political turmoil of sixteenth century Hungary and his subsequent imprisonment by Bethlem Gabor. St. Leon's aim to improve the impoverished existence of the Hungarians leads to increasing demands from the country's Turkish inhabitants, suspicion from Christians, and a vortex of compromise and competition from building contractors and other interested parties. St. Leon's experiences reflect Godwin's growing pessimism about the possibilities for reform. The novel concludes with St. Leon being rescued by his son, who fails to recognise him because of the effects of the philosopher's stone. Charles, now a military commander, complains about St. Leon's actions in Hungary, without realising either that he is attacking the man he has just saved or that this man is his father, depicting him as a Turkish collaborator, propping up an ailing country, otherwise ready for military Christianisation. St. Leon's reflection on the painfulness of these charges chimes with what Godwin must have felt at the reception of his sincerely candid Memoirs: 'I could not repress the vehemence of my emotions, while I was thus calumniated and

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<sup>36</sup> Pamela Clemit, The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown and Mary Shelley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 94.

vilified for actions, which I had firmly believed no malice could misrepresent, and fondly supposed that all sects and ages, as far as their record extended, would agree to admire' (353).

The conclusion of Godwin's novel shifts the potential of the domestic affections to improve the public sphere of political action onto the next generation: as St. Leon's actions have effectively alienated him from both his family and society, he focuses his hopes on the future relationship between his son Charles and Pandora. However hopeful St. Leon attempts to be at the end of his narrative, this imposed optimism is undercut both by the perpetuation of damaging ideals of chivalry and military valour in his son Charles and by the arbitrariness of the conclusion: as St. Leon could potentially live forever, his focus on Charles and Pandora's possible happiness is necessarily anti-climactic. Just as Godwin's fictionalisation of his earlier Political Justice results in the complex, contradictory novel Caleb Williams, which challenges some of Godwin's philosophical positions whilst also disseminating them to a wider public, so too does St. Leon both build on and subvert Godwin's biographical representation of Wollstonecraft in the Memoirs. In the Memoirs, Godwin creates a radical, Romanticised representation of Wollstonecraft, which offers both an image of an attractive, forceful and complex woman and one which is anxiously split between celebrating her feminist thought and apologetically reformulating this thought as the intuitive effusion of spontaneous feeling. This split allows him to create a 'safe' representation of Wollstonecraft in the thoroughly domestic heroine of St. Leon, Marguerite de Damville. Ironically, it also allows for the Anti-Jacobin attack on Wollstonecraft's life and work, which exploits Godwin's divided representation of his wife to create a nightmarish Wollstonecraft, depicting her radical philosophy as sexual profligacy, and connecting this to the increasingly

polarised debate around the female philosopher figure.<sup>37</sup> My next chapter turns to the seemingly conservative women writers, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Hamilton and Amelia Opie, who also drew one Godwin's divided representation of Wollstonecraft. Their works include both the counter-revolutionary model of the female philosopher figure, in line with Anti-Jacobin attacks on the Memoirs, and a more complex reappraisal of Wollstonecraft's radical philosophy enabled by Godwin's Romanticised representation of his wife. Each novelist sought alternative routes out of the deadlock between the private sphere of the family and the public spheres of literary production and political action, grounded in their confrontations with Wollstonecraft's contentious reputation. In each case, these writers engaged in their own interpretation of Wollstonecraft's posthumous novel, The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria.

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<sup>37</sup> Showing how easily Godwin's texts can be made to fit existing reactionary paradigms, Edmund Du Bois, St. Godwin: a Tale of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries by Reginald de St. Leon, ed. Adriana Craciun, Anti-Jacobin Novels, vol 9, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), parodies Godwin's writing style; recasts some of St. Leon's misadventures, sometimes more entertainingly; and reconfigures Godwin's interest in the domestic affections into reactionary misogyny. For example, Marguerite's death is cruelly reworked in the demise of Du Bois' Margery. St. Godwin discovers her tomb after escaping from the Inquisition: 'I could have wept, but casting my eye by chance on the words written thereon, I read that she had died in childbed, according to the date, two years after I left her' (188, emphasis in original). Du Bois realigns Godwin's Marguerite with the anti-Jacobin portrayal of Wollstonecraft as a promiscuous prostitute in this misogynistic passage.

**III: Rewriting The Wrongs of Woman: The Death of the Feminist in Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray, Elizabeth Hamilton's Modern Philosophers and Maria Edgeworth's Belinda**

**1) Introduction: Reading The Wrongs of Woman**

Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria was published by Godwin in his Posthumous Works by the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, to coincide with the publication of his Memoirs in early 1798. Set in the Gothic location of a lunatic asylum, the novel tells the story of Maria, imprisoned by her perfidious husband in order to extort her inheritance, narrated both in third person in the prison house and in first person in a memoir addressed to Maria's baby daughter. The novel is presented as a series of interlocking narratives; so, alongside Maria's struggles, Wollstonecraft allows Darnford, the novel's ambiguous hero, Jemima, a prison warden and former prostitute, and various women from different social strata to tell their own stories.

Maria is Wollstonecraft's most radical attack against the network of sexual, social, political and economic systems which combine to imprison women. Read as the continuation of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman promised at the end of Wollstonecraft's feminist polemic, but in fictional form, the novel shares structural parallels with Godwin's own novelised interpretation of Political Justice, Caleb Williams. There is a wealth of critical material on the novel, analysing its Gothic trappings, radical politics, the semiotics of mother-daughter relationships,

psychological undercurrents, and contemporary reception.<sup>1</sup> Godwin's publication of Maria alongside his Memoirs fuelled the Anti-Jacobin campaign besmirching Wollstonecraft's reputation, allowing a reactionary reading of the text as advocating sexual promiscuity. Conservative critics thus conflated Wollstonecraft's radical social critique with a dangerous form of libidinal libertinism which they sought to confine and control. The responses of the women writers I study in this chapter, Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Hamilton and Maria Edgeworth, to Wollstonecraft's feminist thought is filtered through both Godwin's Memoirs and Wollstonecraft's final, unfinished novel – its fragmentary conclusion offering the possibility of rewriting and reimagining it in these women's texts. Each of these writers struggled to develop aspects of Wollstonecraft's philosophical thought, whilst disavowing the elements of her biography which attracted reactionary abuse, in the years immediately after Godwin's publication of his biography and Wollstonecraft's Posthumous Works. Opie accomplished this by appropriating Wollstonecraft's social critique to unmask the hypocrisy underpinning bourgeois society's treatment of her Wollstonecraftian heroine. Both Hamilton and Edgeworth negotiated Wollstonecraft's posthumous reputation by creating feminist caricatures who act as scapegoats, allowing these writers to sympathise with Wollstonecraftian arguments more freely. Furthermore, their caricatures of the female philosopher figure are based more on Mary Hays's

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<sup>1</sup> See the first chapter of Eleanor Ty, Unsex'd Revolutionaries (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 31-45, for an analysis of Wollstonecraft's use of Gothic tropes in the novel; Tilottama Rajan, 'Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel' Studies in Romanticism 27.2 (Summer 1998), 221-51, for the novel's engagement with radical politics; Laurie Langbauer, 'An Early Romance: Motherhood and Women's Writing in Mary Wollstonecraft's Novels' in Romanticism and Feminism, ed. Anne Mellor (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988) on mother-daughter relationships, Mary Poovey's chapters on Wollstonecraft in The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 48-113, for an analysis of the psychological pressures at work in the novel, and Vivien Jones, 'Placing Jemima: Women Writers of the 1790s and the Eighteenth-Century Prostitution Narrative' Women's Writing 4.2 (1997), 201-20, for an examination of Wollstonecraft's intervention in the discourse about prostitution in Maria and the ways in which her work is developed by other women writers.

self-representation as a feminist, her writing, and her contemporary reception, than on Wollstonecraft herself. Although these writers approach Wollstonecraft's feminist legacy from different social, political and literary positions, they are each connected by their desire to appropriate elements of her revolutionary philosophy for a post-revolutionary Britain suspicious of 'Jacobin' ideas, sharing a Post-Jacobin desire for moderate social reform and a critical stance towards the loyalist position.

In the first issue of the Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine, Maria is interpreted as 'intended to illustrate the doctrines which Mrs W. had attempted to establish in her "Rights of Woman"',<sup>2</sup> linking Wollstonecraft's 'doctrines' with Godwin's. The reviewer sees 'a very great coincidence' between Wollstonecraft's beliefs and 'those inculcated by the philosopher himself, in that part of his "Political Justice" in which he describes the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, as one of the highest improvements to result from political justice!' (91). The Anti-Jacobin subordinates Wollstonecraft's feminist critique of the tyrannies of marriage in Maria to Godwin's anti-authoritarian arguments in Political Justice, eliding the differences between the couple's political philosophies in order to caricature both as advocating 'the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes'.

The review of Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel pinpoints Maria's 'injudicious choice of a husband' as the cause of her incarceration in a madhouse by him, ridiculing her imputation that the wrong pertains to 'the unequal state of women in society' (92). The depiction of Jemima is ridiculed, as the 'occupations' of thief and prostitute 'had sharpened and invigorated her understanding, in such a degree, indeed, as to make her a political philosopher, without the advantage of any other

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<sup>2</sup> The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine; or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor 1 (July 1798) (London: J. Plymsell et al., 1799), 91, parentheses in original. Hereinafter, Anti-Jacobin. Subsequent references, in-text.

education' (92). The Anti-Jacobin presents Wollstonecraft's rights of woman as the right to promiscuous intercourse, concluding with an analysis of Maria's trial scene: 'On the trial, the judge [England being the scene] retains the old system of morals, and does not admit Maria's plea of her feelings as a vindication of her adultery, however conformable it may be to the new philosophy' (93, parentheses in original). The review's description of Jemima as a 'political philosopher' and sarcastic swipe at 'the new philosophy' clearly aligns it with the counter-revolutionary attack on the female philosopher, and more broadly against the network of radicals the Anti-Jacobin defines itself against. This review leads directly into the savage critique of Godwin's Memoirs, linking Wollstonecraft's perceived immorality in print with her private behaviour: 'Godwin has laboured to inform the world, that the theory of Mrs Wollstonecraft was reduced to practice, that she lived and acted, as she wrote and taught' (93).<sup>3</sup> The Anti-Jacobin's attack on Wollstonecraft's theory and practice foreshadows the way in which the three novels studied in this chapter interrogate the theoretical framework and practical application of Wollstonecraft's radical politics.

Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Maria Edgeworth have all been positioned as Anti-Jacobin writers, although recent criticism has challenged this placement, particularly in Opie and Edgeworth's case. Each writer's political position remains open to interpretation, both in relation to the particular text under discussion here and over the course of their career, although I argue that they all occupy a position on the liberal spectrum, from progressive to moderate. Norwich-born Amelia Opie (1769-1853) took on a range of roles over her long life, from society hostess with her shorter-lived husband, the Cornish painter John Opie (1761-1801), to poet

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<sup>3</sup> See my analysis of the reception of Godwin's Memoirs in chapter 2, above.

and novelist, to Quaker. Over the course of her life, she shifted from a position sympathetic to, if somewhat sceptical of, the radicalism of Wollstonecraft, Godwin and other English Jacobins, to one which Anne McWhir argues was closer to evangelical reformers such as Hannah More. McWhir describes Opie's movement 'away from Revolution-era radicalism... towards quieter values, belief in social consensus, and an emphasis on personal religious conviction as a motivation for reform',<sup>4</sup> perhaps explained by Opie's slow conversion to Quakerism. Opie finally joined the Society of Friends in 1825, but was closely involved with them throughout her adult life, corresponding with several prominent members of the group in Norwich, and showing their influence in the character of Mrs Pemberton in Adeline Mowbray. However, her status as a poet and novelist clashed with the religious beliefs of the Quakers, who discouraged imaginative endeavour – perhaps explaining the hesitancy of Opie's conversion. I describe the developing interest in consensus and reform, shared by Opie, Hamilton, Edgeworth, and other writers in the early nineteenth century as Post-Jacobin, differentiating it from the Anti-Jacobin emphasis on patriotic loyalty and submission. Elizabeth Hamilton (1756-1816) was born in Ireland but brought up, after the death of her father, in Scotland. Clare Grogan describes Hamilton as 'a liberal writer who sits midway between the two positions [of loyalist Anti-Jacobin and radical English Jacobin]',<sup>5</sup> although Memoirs of Modern Philosophers is the closest to conservative of the three novels discussed here, including straightforward defences of British military and imperial policy and advocacy for women's domestic role within the private sphere. Hamilton's satirical first novel, Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah (1796), uses the perspective

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<sup>4</sup> Anne McWhir, 'Introduction' to Adeline Mowbray (Ontario: Broadview, 2010), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Clare Grogan, 'Introduction' to Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (Ontario: Broadview, 2000), 12.

of an Indian tourist in Britain to both criticise British morals at home and defend orientalist policy abroad. Modern Philosophers (1800) attacks works by Godwin and Hays, whilst briefly defending Wollstonecraft's writing. Her last novel, The Cottagers of Glenburnie (1808) argues for the improvement of working and living conditions in working-class Scotland. She also published a range of educational treatises. Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was a prolific Anglo-Irish novelist, who also published poetry, short stories, children's fiction, and educational treatises, sometimes in collaboration with her polymath father Richard Lovell Edgeworth. She was one of the most popular writers of the early nineteenth century, her work easily eclipsing both sales and the critical reception of the lesser-known Jane Austen and inspiring the historical fiction of Walter Scott. Like Austen, she has been categorised as a conservative, if not simply Anti-Jacobin, writer, most influentially by Marilyn Butler, although twenty-first century criticism, especially Cliona Ó Gallchoir's definitive critical biography, has repositioned her as more liberal, challenging and subversive.<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, I position these three writers, coming from different backgrounds and on different political trajectories, as Post-Jacobin: that is, balancing between English Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin positions in order to argue for moderate social reform, appropriating aspects of Wollstonecraft's radical philosophy for their post-revolutionary context.

All three writers are mentioned in Matthew Grenby's The Anti-Jacobin Novel as examples of authors of conservative texts. He argues that 'however ambiguous

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<sup>6</sup> See Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) for Butler's influential positioning of Edgeworth as a conservative writer, heavily influenced by the politics of her father, and Cliona Ó Gallchoir, Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment, Nation (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005), for an analysis of Edgeworth's more complex relationship both to contemporary political movements in Ireland, Britain and the wider world, and her father's ideas.

the political stance of its author, [Adeline Mowbray] could only have been interpreted by the majority of her contemporaries as an inquest into both the practicalities and morality of cohabitation without marriage', stating that 'the novel itself returned a decisive [conservative] verdict on both counts'.<sup>7</sup> Although Grenby adds a qualifier about Opie's own ambiguous position, he situates her novel as straightforwardly Anti-Jacobin. He also describes Hamilton as an author of novels with 'an anti-Jacobin tendency' (The Anti-Jacobin Novel, 184) and positions Edgeworth's work as 'broadly Anti-Jacobin' (212). I argue that Opie and Edgeworth's politics are much more complex, as they critique both radical and conservative positions, revealing the impracticality of the former and the hypocrisy of the latter, aligning them with the Post-Jacobinism of Godwin and Austen (discussed in chapters 2 and 4). Hamilton's position may be more conservative, at least in Modern Philosophers, but she is the only one of the three to directly defend Wollstonecraft's writing, if only briefly and in a deliberately limited fashion. I argue that this defence of Wollstonecraft is enabled, even as it is curtailed, by her more explicitly conservative politics.

Each of these authors were writing in a post-revolutionary context, at the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars, when the Pitt government was again cracking down on dissent, and at a time when loyalist publications such as the Anti-Jacobin were at the forefront of demands for patriotic compliance. Their engagement with Wollstonecraft's politics and philosophy is, of necessity, circumspect, as the more conservative climate, of which the Anti-Jacobin was an extreme manifestation, discouraged active support for radicalism, now linked to both the revolutionary violence of 1790s France and the more immediate military enmity with Napoleon.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Grenby, The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89.

Nevertheless, Opie's Adeline Mowbray (1805), Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800) and Edgeworth's Belinda (1801) each represent an attempt to respond to Maria, as well as Wollstonecraft's theory and practice, life and writing. These responses needed to negotiate the reactionary response to Wollstonecraft which troped her life as prostituted and writings as politically and socially dangerous, at the same time as each author strove to utilise Wollstonecraft's thought to inform their own feminist aims. Opie, Hamilton and Edgeworth's novels, therefore, seem suspicious of putting theory into practice, and hinge on the difficulties inherent in interpretation.

This suspicion of theory seems to align these writers with Edmund Burke's critique of the speculative nature of proponents of the rights of men. In Reflections on the Revolution in France, Burke warns:

Against these their [the French revolutionaries'] rights of men let no government look for security in the length of its continuance, or in the justice and lenity of its administration. The objections of these speculatists, if its forms do not quadrate with its theories, are as valid against such an old and beneficent government as against the most violent tyranny, or the greenest usurpation.<sup>8</sup>

He argues that the theoretical nature of the rights of men can be used to attack legitimate as well as illegitimate government, going on to redefine the rights of men as the right to defend property, inheritance and wealth because 'all men have equal rights; but not to equal things' (Reflections, 59). However, Opie, Edgeworth, and, to a lesser extent, Hamilton, each critique the 'old and beneficent' government of Britain, revealing the damage done to women and other marginalised social groups by this Burkean defence of inequality.

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<sup>8</sup> Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France [1790], ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2009), 58. Subsequent references, in-text.

## 2) 'What Charming Things Would Sublime Theories Be': Adeline Mowbray

Adeline Mowbray has been read since its publication as Opie's fictionalised analysis of both the relationship between her former friends Wollstonecraft and Godwin and of the interconnection of Wollstonecraft's philosophical principles with her life and death.<sup>9</sup> With the notable exception of Matthew Grenby, discussed above, there is a growing critical consensus in feminist literary criticism that the novel, whilst gesturing towards the conventions of the Anti-Jacobin novel, presents a much more nuanced, psychologically and socio-politically astute understanding of the difficulties of contravening conventional mores as a woman; a literary position I align with the Post-Jacobinism of Godwin's St. Leon and Austen's Sense and Sensibility. Eleanor Ty pioneers this interpretation of Adeline Mowbray, arguing that Opie's novels are deliberately 'ambiguous and open to dialogical readings'.<sup>10</sup> I argue that the ambiguity Ty perceives in the novel is part of Opie's Post-Jacobin position, balanced between her sympathy for the radicalism of her friends' Wollstonecraft and Godwin and her more pragmatic concern for social stability. Focussing on the colonial implications of Opie's social satire, Katie Trumpener argues that Adeline Mowbray 'strives to link the causes of gradual abolition and moderate feminism and to disengage both causes from a Jacobinism that has, among its other misdeeds, betrayed abolitionist and

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<sup>9</sup> Contemporary reviews noted Opie's allusions to Wollstonecraft's biography in her novel, reading them approvingly as critical of radical politics. For example, the Monthly Review 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 51 (Nov 1806), 320-21, reads the novel as portraying 'the lamentable consequences, which would result from an adoption of some lax principles relative to a rejection of matrimonial forms, which have been inculcated by certain modern writers'. Roxanne Eberle traces the changing appreciation of Opie's allusions to Wollstonecraft in 'Diverting the Libertine Gaze; or, The Vindication of the Fallen Woman' Studies in the Novel 26 (1994), 121-52.

<sup>10</sup> Eleanor Ty, Empowering the Feminine (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 9. See also her chapter on the novel, 145-60.

feminist interests'.<sup>11</sup> I focus on the way in which Opie adapts Wollstonecraft's earlier feminism, rather than disengaging from it, in order to develop her own critique of societal hypocrisy, including the treatment of colonial possessions, such as slaves and black servants. I am therefore building on Roxanne Eberle's contention that Opie undercuts the seemingly conservative didacticism of Adeline's dying moments by stressing Adeline's innate virtue as opposed to the vicious social hypocrisy surrounding her.<sup>12</sup> The novel's publication in 1805 accounts for its categorisation as an Anti-Jacobin novel, reading its satirical account of Adeline and Glenmurray's courtship in the context of the conservative backlash against Wollstonecraft and Godwin; its subversive rewriting of Wollstonecraft's work positions it as Post-Jacobin: engaged as it is with debating the opportunities offered by Wollstonecraft's writing on women's rights, at the same time as tracing the limits placed on these ideals by post-revolutionary politics and propaganda.

Opie traces the personal and public costs of living on the margins of society at the same time as utilising Wollstonecraft's critique of socio-sexual hypocrisy to reveal the ways in which patriarchy marginalises women in the first place. In this way, Wollstonecraft's eccentric life story is abjured whilst Opie struggles to justify her own interpretation of Wollstonecraft's radical critique of social mores. Throughout Adeline Mowbray, Opie focuses on the difficulties inherent in interpretation itself: her characters make various misjudgements when reading texts, other characters and social situations; they struggle to remain true to their interpretative theories in practice, faced with hypocrisy, double-dealing and deceit; and Opie makes reading

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<sup>11</sup> Katie Trumpener, Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 181.

<sup>12</sup> Roxanne Eberle, Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897 (London: Palgrave, 2002), 133.

the relationship between theory and practice a serious interpretative issue for her contemporary readers, and for critics today.

Of the three novelists studied in this chapter only Opie knew Wollstonecraft personally, becoming close friends after the latter's return from Scandinavia. Upon the publication of Wollstonecraft's Letters from Sweden, the young Amelia Alderson, later Opie, wrote to her: 'I remember the time when my desire of seeing you was repressed by fear – but as soon as I read your letters from Norway, the cold awe which the philosopher has excited, was lost in the tender sympathy called forth by the woman'.<sup>13</sup> Alderson responds to Wollstonecraft's authorial persona here in much the same way as Godwin would do in his Memoirs: expressing anxiety over Wollstonecraft's self-construction in her Vindication but seduced by the mature self-presentation of her travelogue. In this letter, she also separates Wollstonecraft's status as a philosopher from considerations of her gender, revealing her anxieties about the term 'female philosopher' expressed in more detail in Adeline Mowbray.

Only one letter from Wollstonecraft to Alderson survives, from a version published in Cecilia Brightwell's ultra-conservative biography of Amelia Opie. Brightwell describes Wollstonecraft as a 'strange incomprehensible woman'<sup>14</sup> and does her best to distance Opie from the Jacobin friends of her youth. I argue that Opie was closer to Wollstonecraft and Godwin than Brightwell allows, although she maintained a characteristically satirical distance to her friends' political principles, as evidenced in her letter about their marriage (discussed further below).

Wollstonecraft's letter is particularly revealing in the light of Opie's later novel as

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Claire Tomalin, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft [1974] (London: Penguin, 2004), 239.

<sup>14</sup> Cecilia Brightwell, Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie (London: Fletcher and Alexander, 1854), 59. Subsequent references, in-text, as Brightwell.

Wollstonecraft details in it the growing social difficulties she faced in her marriage to Godwin, which made it obvious that her earlier relationship with Gilbert Imlay had been conducted out of wedlock, revealing their daughter to be illegitimate. These included sneers from the actress and playwright Elizabeth Inchbald who promised to send congratulations ‘the next time he [Godwin] was married’, alluding to the abrupt break with Godwin’s previous anti-marital philosophy, and the end of her friendship with the Twisses who broke off the relationship upon Wollstonecraft’s marriage to Godwin. Wollstonecraft dismisses Inchbald’s pointed comment as ‘Nonsense!’, but is saddened by the Twisses’ decision to break off their relationship.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Godwin ridicules the pettiness of these and other social snubs in his Memoirs, Opie makes them the focus of Adeline’s relationship with Glenmurray in her novel.

Opie also uses Wollstonecraft’s forthright views in her letter about putting her theories into practice throughout Adeline Mowbray. Dismissing the Twisses’ painful rejection, Wollstonecraft writes: ‘my conduct in life must be directed by my own judgement and moral principles’. She states that ‘it is my wish that Mr. Godwin should visit and dine out as formerly, and I shall do the same; in short, I still mean to be independent, even to the cultivating sentiments and principles in my children’s minds, (should I have more,) which he disavows’ (Collected Letters, 409).

Wollstonecraft’s focus on her own principles and independence inspires Opie’s characterisation of Adeline, at least in the early sections of the novel.

In a letter to a friend musing on Wollstonecraft and Godwin’s recent marriage, Opie makes this cheerfully cynical comment: ‘Heighho! what charming things would sublime theories be, if one could make one’s practice keep up with them; but I am

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<sup>15</sup> The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, ed. Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 2004), 408-9. Subsequent references, in-text.

convinced it is impossible, and am resolved to make the best of everyday nature' (Opie, quoted in Brightwell, 59). Her teasing focus here on the difficulty of aligning theory with practice, against 'everyday nature' is subjected in her second novel to a much darker and more ambiguous treatment. The Wollstonecraftian Adeline Mowbray and Godwinian Glenmurray's 'sublime theories' are tested to absolute destruction by the worst of 'everyday nature': societal hypocrisy, sexual innuendo and abuse. Playing theory off against practice seems to align Opie with Anti-Jacobin attacks which viewed Wollstonecraft and Godwin's sexual practices, depicted as wanton, promiscuous and socially destructive in the reactionary press, as stemming from their radical political and philosophical theories. However, Opie complicates her critique of Wollstonecraftian theory and practice by contrasting Adeline's virtuous interpretation of Glenmurray's theories throughout her life with the duplicitous immorality of both theory and practice in England's high society.

Adeline's single-minded pursuit of her radical philosophy in favour of libertarian equality alienates her jealous mother, subjects her to lewd sexual advances, contributes to the miscarriage of her first child, and weakens her ailing lover, leading to his early death. On the other hand, her marriage to Berrendale, Glenmurray's brutish cousin, sinks her into depression and indirectly leads to her own death. Berrendale, who has already in his earlier life absconded with a West Indian plantocratic heiress, runs away from the ever more angelic Adeline into the arms of another colonial beauty in Jamaica. Adeline's legal pursuit of legitimacy for her abandoned daughter leads to her unhappy reunion with the venal servant Mary, now the mistress of Adeline's lascivious lawyer, who infects her with smallpox. Adeline later dies from complications relating to the disease, although her death is at least partly self-willed.

Opie begins the novel with an account of Adeline's erratic education, remodelling Godwin's account of Wollstonecraft's haphazard childhood by adding to it a Sterne-like comic twist. Adeline's mother, like Walter Shandy, is engaged in writing an educational treatise, which, in her case, she hopes will make her 'a pattern of imitation to mothers'.<sup>16</sup> Opie satirises Mrs Mowbray's decision to restrict Adeline's diet to 'pudding without butter [and] potatoes without salt' whilst 'her own table was covered with viands fitted for the appetite of opulence', by having her servants feed Adeline 'some of the good things set by from Mrs Mowbray's dinner' (Adeline Mowbray, 44). Mrs Mowbray's dietary theory might be virtuous, but her practice is hypocritical, and her servants' disobedience is only revealed by Adeline's blushes when her mother boasts of the 'excellent effects of a vegetable diet!' (44). The first chapter closes with Mrs Mowbray's decision to buy Adeline shoes in spite of conflicting theoretical opinions on the matter. She is decided less by sympathy for Adeline holding up her bleeding toes and crying bitterly than the sight of blood on the 'new Turkey carpet', concluding that 'a little experience is better than a great deal of theory' (45). Even here, Mrs Mowbray only becomes pragmatic in order to care for her fashionable furniture rather than her daughter.

Mrs Mowbray takes the first fifteen years of her daughter's life to perfect her educational theories. Meanwhile, Adeline is fed by her servants and taught lessons in domestic housework and economy by her grandmother, Mrs Woodville. Opie emphasises the practical nature of Adeline's maternal grandmother against the theoretical interests of her mother, having Mrs Woodville school Adeline in domestic affairs from making pastry to giving alms to the poor to taking care of the household

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<sup>16</sup> Amelia Opie, Adeline Mowbray [1805], ed. Anne McWhir (Peterborough: Broadview, 2010), 44. Subsequent references, in-text.

accounts: all of which are ignored by Mrs Mowbray. After her grandmother's death, Adeline is left at liberty to engage in the philosophical studies which have exalted her mother's reputation for genius but rendered her all but useless in the everyday running of her household. Adeline decides to pursue her mother's 'passion for abstruse speculations', but with a crucial difference: whereas 'these new theories... only served to amuse Mrs Mowbray's fancy, her more enthusiastic daughter resolved to make conscientiously the rules of her practice' (52). Opie complicates the usual Anti-Jacobin critique of radical theory and practice here by making it clear that Mrs Mowbray's interest in philosophy is merely an affectation, whereas Adeline attempts to honestly engage with these new ideas in her everyday life.

Rather than getting carried away by tales of romance and chivalry, Adeline quixotically decides to base her behaviour on the works of one philosopher, Glenmurray, who:

attacked the institution of marriage; and after having elaborately pointed out its folly and its wickedness, he drew so delightful a picture of the superior purity, as well as happiness, of an union cemented by no ties but those of love and honour, that Adeline, wrought to the highest pitch of enthusiasm for a new order of things, entered into a solemn compact with herself to act, when she was introduced into society, according to the rules laid down by this writer. (52)

In this roman à clef on Wollstonecraft's life and work, Opie subordinates her Wollstonecraftian character's philosophy to her Godwinian character's style of writing: Adeline is seduced by 'the fatal fascination' of Glenmurray's style, conveying her 'from the world as it is, into a world as it ought to be' (52).

This depreciation of Adeline's principles as an intellectually inferior offshoot of Glenmurray's stylish radicalism links Opie's heroine to the Anti-Jacobin representation of Wollstonecraft as an unthinking follower of Godwin's political

philosophy, as in the Anti-Jacobin magazine's review of her posthumous novel, Maria. On the other hand, after Adeline meets Glenmurray, the couple fall in love and run away to Europe, it is Adeline who remains true to her philosophical beliefs, maintaining that her contempt for marriage in favour of 'free love' is entirely rational against Glenmurray's hypocritical recantation of his principles, in favour of a more socially acceptable marriage to Adeline. In a complex volte face, Opie presents Glenmurray's Godwinian principles as lacking a firm basis in contrast to the Wollstonecraftian Adeline's continuing fidelity to her radical philosophical system.

Upon Glenmurray's unexpected proposal after the couple's flight to Lisbon, Adeline asks her lover 'whether he had convinced himself that what he had written against marriage was a tissue of mischievous absurdity', to which Glenmurray 'blushing, with the conceit of an author replied "that he still thought his arguments unanswerable"' (102). Adeline then remonstrates with him, 'if you still are convinced that your theory is good, why let your practice be bad?' To which Glenmurray replies that he would rather save Adeline the hurt of being thought a kept mistress than remain true to his principles. Adeline retorts with a common trope in Anti-Jacobin mock-Godwinian debate: 'I... am entirely out of the question: you are to be governed by no other law but your desire to promote general utility, and are not to think at all of the interest of an individual' (102). Adeline's defence of 'general utility' against 'the interest of an individual' aligns her with the Anti-Jacobin reading of Godwin's Political Justice: she denigrates the domestic affections in favour of a more abstract understanding of justice and morality, defined as 'modern' or 'new' by its critics. Like other satirists of Godwin's writing, Opie focuses on the original edition of Political Justice, ignoring his recalibration of his views on private life in his Memoirs of Wollstonecraft, and later editions of his political polemic. However, Opie subtly plays

off Adeline's principles against Glenmurray's sense of propriety, revealing both Adeline's Jacobin-inspired prejudices and the hypocritical sense of social convention underlying her erstwhile philosopher's pretentious theories. Opie's satire is double-edged here, levelled against both Godwin's abstract theories and societal double standards.

Adeline, however, remains true to her principles, even after she is confronted by the full weight of social convention in her treatment at the hands of Glenmurray's friends and relations, who all assume Adeline is his corrupt mistress. After Glenmurray's cousins snub her whilst visiting the philosopher out of titillated curiosity, Adeline retires to her room to brood over his behaviour: 'he had never once expressed a desire of combating their prejudices... he was contented to do homage to "things as they are", without an effort to resist the prejudice to which he was superior' (157), demanding, 'Alas!... when can we hope to see society enlightened and improved, when even those who see and strive to amend its faults in theory, in practice tamely submit to the trammels which it imposes?' (158). With complex irony, Opie makes Adeline act as a mouthpiece for her suspicions about the practicality of 'sublime theories', by mimicking revolutionary arguments in favour of enlightenment against prejudice. At the same time, she voices a genuine concern for the upholding of principles in the face of social propriety, revealed to be venal prejudice. Opie's satire on radical theory and practice is directed more towards Godwin than Wollstonecraft here, with a deft allusion to his novel Things As They Are; or, Caleb Williams, and a critique of subordinating radical principle to socially acceptable practice, developed from her letter spoofing the Godwins' marriage.

In a narratorial aside, Opie reveals to her readers, but not to Adeline or Glenmurray, that both cousins live more sinfully than Adeline, whom they have snubbed, but conceal their behaviour under a veil of social acceptability:

One of them was married, and to so accommodating a husband, that his wife's known gallant was his intimate friend; and under the sanction of his protection she was received every where, and visited by every one, as the world did not think proper to be more clear-sighted than the husband himself chose to be. The other lady was a young and attractive widow, who coquetted with many men, but intrigued with only one at a time; for which self-denial she was rewarded by being allowed to pass unquestioned through the portals of fashionable society. (158)

Opie's careful irony in this episode balances sympathy for Adeline's distress at being scorned by Glenmurray's relations, her own scorn for Glenmurray's failure to defend his lover, and a searing criticism of fashionable society's hypocrisy. This society's treatment of the two sisters reveals its problematic relationship towards propriety: the refusal of 'the world' to be more clear-sighted than the first sister's husband is only 'proper' in the sense that it upholds the appearance of decorum at the expense of its reality; the second sister's 'self-denial' is Opie's scornful code for her immorality, her reward reveals high society's imbrication in vice.

This sequence, in which Opie contrasts Adeline's real virtue, even though she lives outside of society's mores, with the disguised vice of Glenmurray's relations, supported by social hypocrisy, has a direct precursor in Wollstonecraft's Maria. After Maria and Darnford have escaped from the lunatic asylum and taken a lodging together, Maria discovers on a visit to 'some ladies with whom she had formerly been intimate' that she is refused admittance because of her new living arrangements. Wollstonecraft adds:

Among these ladies there were some, not her most intimate acquaintance, who were generally supposed to avail themselves of the cloke of marriage, to conceal a mode of conduct, that

would ever have damned their fame, had they been innocent, seduced girls. These particularly stood aloof.<sup>17</sup>

In her later novel, Opie combines Wollstonecraft's own painful experiences of social exclusion after her marriage to Godwin with Wollstonecraft's angry fictionalised satire on socially sanctioned vice to create Adeline's sense of exile.

Adeline's beliefs are sorely tested by her mother's disavowal of their relationship, her own miscarriage, and society's dismissal of her as Glenmurray's kept mistress. They begin to break down when Glenmurray, on his death bed, extracts a promise from Adeline to marry his cousin, Berrendale. This mismatched marriage not only deconstructs Adeline's belief in her egalitarian system but acts as Opie's subtly modulated critique of the system of marriage in the late eighteenth century, which strips women of their independence and agency, and leaves them at the mercy of their husbands for social recognition and individual meaning. As Eleanor Ty points out (Empowering the Feminine, 155), Opie reverses Wollstonecraft's disastrous extra-marital affair with Gilbert Imlay and more successful married experiment with Godwin in Adeline's happy although unmarried relationship with the philosophical Glenmurray and painfully troubled marriage to the brutish Berrendale. By reversing Wollstonecraft's real life experiences in the fictional world of Adeline Mowbray, Opie problematises her seeming condemnation of Wollstonecraft's life by presenting Adeline's extra-marital relationship as more successful than her marriage, using this later relationship with Berrendale to criticise the social institution of wedlock.

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria [1798], 176, in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol 1, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989). Subsequent references, in-text as Maria.

Opie uses her own early experience of marriage with the Cornish painter John Opie to depict Adeline's with Berrendale. In her biography of John Opie, Ada Earland reports that the painter 'exercised the most rigid economy in his household', suggesting that tensions arose due to Amelia Opie's fondness for 'dress and gaiety' and concluding that these were resolved by John Opie encouraging her literary ambitions.<sup>18</sup> Opie's novel contains a dark reflection of this situation. For the first six months, Adeline and Berrendale's marriage seems to be a success:

But Berrendale awoke from this dream of bliss, on finding to what a large sum the bills for the half-year's housekeeping amounted. Adeline, more eager to gratify Berrendale's palate than considerate as to the means, had forgotten that she was no longer at the head of a liberal establishment like her mother's, and had bought for the supply of the table many expensive articles.  
(Adeline Mowbray, 205)

Adeline's attempts to economise by going without herself, whilst providing her husband with the rich foods to which he had become accustomed, pass unobserved by the gluttonous Berrendale. Furthermore, he refuses to introduce her to his friends, preferring to leave her at home with her faithful servant, Savanna, and child. It later transpires that he has passed her off to his friends and family as his kept mistress. In despair, Adeline's only refuge is to begin to write hymns. Opie's use of her own marital difficulties in Adeline Mowbray complicates the simplistic reduction of the novel to a roman à clef about Wollstonecraft, underscoring the authorial sympathy directed towards her protagonist.

This marriage affords Opie the scope to analyse a (mis)match in which incommensurability of character turns the man into a tight-fisted brute and the woman into a resigned wretch. Musing on how the dead Glenmurray could ever have

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<sup>18</sup> Ada Earland, John Opie and His Circle (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1911), 131.

thought Berrendale a match for Adeline, Opie ironises: 'Adeline forgot that the faults of her husband were such as could be known only by an intimate connexion, and which cohabitation could alone call forth...' (209). This passage shows her debt not only to Wollstonecraft but also to Godwin's Political Justice in which he argues that cohabitation renders men and women feeble, jealous and irrational.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after her marriage, Adeline realises that she 'is united for life to a being whose sluggish sensibilities could not understand, and consequently not soothe, the quick feelings and jealous susceptibility of her nature' (214). In despair, the more and more angelic Adeline falls at the feet of bestial Berrendale, an action which this unlikely hero thinks is 'a confession of her weakness and his superiority' (214). Berrendale's brutishness does not take the form of physical violence towards his wife; instead, he inflicts a subtler and perhaps more soul-destroying punishment on Adeline: his callous indifference to her thoughts and feelings being felt as an emotional and psychic attack on his wife's sensibilities.

Adeline Mowbray may be Opie's 'treatise against free love'<sup>20</sup> but it also functions in a much more subversive way to undermine the institution of marriage. When Berrendale departs for Jamaica, Adeline tries to feel 'such sorrow as the tenderness which he had expressed at the moment of parting seemed to make it her duty to feel' but 'morning came, and with it a feeling of liberty and independence so delightful, that she no longer tried to grieve on speculation as it were' (217). Those revolutionary terms, liberty and independence, so important to Opie's old friend Wollstonecraft, underscore the delicate nature of Opie's examination of love and

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<sup>19</sup> See the Appendix 'Of Co-operation, Cohabitation and Marriage' in William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice [1793], vol. 3. The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993) .

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Neill Cameron, ed. Romantic Rebels: Essays on Shelley and His Circle, vol. 2 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1961), 840.

marriage in the early nineteenth century. Marriage is revealed to be at least as destructive to Adeline's happiness as living outside society's conventions turned out to be for Glenmurray's health.<sup>21</sup>

The conclusion of the novel is taken up with two recantations of Adeline's anti-marital philosophy, both to her well-meaning, if sinful, suitor Colonel Mordaunt.

The first is half-hearted to say the least:

‘I have no doubt that there is a great deal of individual suffering in the marriage state, from contrariety of temper and other causes; but I believe that the mass of happiness and virtue is certainly increased by it. Individual suffering, therefore, is no argument for the abolition of marriage, than the accidental bursting of a musket would be for the total abolition of fire-arms.’ (Adeline Mowbray 238)

Adeline's half-hearted recantation here connects the institution of marriage to the possession of fire-arms, linking marriage to something potentially dangerous and life-threatening, however difficult to abolish. In answer to Mordaunt's 'What can have so completely changed your opinions on this subject?' Adeline answers, 'Not my own experience... for the painful situations in which I have been placed, I might attribute, not to the fallacy of the system on which I have acted, but to those existing prejudices in society which I wish to see destroyed' (238). In this statement, Adeline defends her philosophical principles in favour of equal relations between men and women against contemporary standards of feminine propriety which subordinate women to men, characterising this false sense of decorum, just as Wollstonecraft did, as societal prejudice. Adeline's second recantation totally rejects these equivocations. Now, she argues that without marriage 'unbridled licentiousness would soon be in general practice' (256), and that children would therefore either 'die

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<sup>21</sup> See my 'Beauties and Beasts: Alderson, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, Opie' Royal Institution of Cornwall Journal 2009, 41-50, for a more detailed account of Opie's blend of autobiography and biography in Adeline Mowbray.

the victims of neglect, and the very existence of the human race be threatened; or, without morals or instruction, they would grow up to scourge the world by their vices, till the whole fabric of civilized society was gradually destroyed' (256). She wants to die in order to become 'an awful warning' to her daughter, 'a melancholy proof of the dangers which attend a deviation from the path of virtue' (256).

Adeline dies, and seems to redeem with her providential final words, 'I thank thee, gracious Heaven!' (283), the more secular manner of Wollstonecraft's death as told in Godwin's Memoirs: 'during her whole illness, not one word of a religious cast fell from her lips'.<sup>22</sup> Like Hays in her 'Memoirs' of Wollstonecraft, Opie recasts Godwin's secular portrayal of his wife's fate with a more religious conclusion to her Wollstonecraftian heroine's life. Opie also rewrites Godwin's suggested conclusion to The Wrongs of Woman, in which Maria is interrupted by Jemima in a suicide attempt and reunited with the daughter she thought was dead. Maria embraces the child and 'then exclaimed: "The conflict is over! I will live for my child!"' (Maria, 184). Opie contrasts this possible conclusion to Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel with Adeline's determination to die, in order to act as a warning for her daughter on the consequences of choosing to live outside society's boundaries.

Adeline dies surrounded by what Anne Mellor describes as her 'reconstituted family of choice, composed of an upper class British woman, a middle class Quaker woman, and a working class freed African slave woman' ('Were Women Writers "Romantics"?', 403). Roxanna Eberle also sees the utopian possibilities of the feminine space constructed by Opie at the end of Adeline Mowbray, but concludes her article on a much more sceptical note. For Eberle, Rosevalley's feminotopia

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<sup>22</sup> William Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol. 1, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), 138.

signifies a retreat into domesticity, easily co-opted into a narrative cementing women's position in the private sphere of hearth and home. Moreover, Opie, and Mellor's, proto-feminist utopia depends for its construction on the death of the novel's female philosopher and central protagonist, Adeline – further, it hinges on Adeline's explicit repudiation of her feminist philosophy on her deathbed.

Unfortunately for Mellor's utopian reading of the novel, the feminist space that she sees in the ending of Adeline Mowbray is founded on the protagonist's death. Adeline's death not only obviously curtails her Jacobin philosophy but also brings into question the possibilities for moderate feminism in a world marked by spite, hypocrisy and brutality. Rather than embodying the future salvation of the British political public sphere, this exclusionary utopia questions its lasting legitimacy. Remodelling Wollstonecraft's radical life and thought into the tragic Adeline's quixotic pursuit of her feminist principles at the expense of feminine propriety enables Opie to explore the costs of living a life outside of social conventions, at the same time as analysing the way in which society mobilises itself against such destabilising forces. Adeline's death not only questions her own impractical theories but also critiques the prejudices which excluded her from social interactions, including Mellor's unlikely feminotopia. Opie's engagement with Wollstonecraft's radical social critique in a post-revolutionary perspective, whilst satirising elements of Wollstonecraft's life story, also allows her to explore the difficulties society places in the way of progressive change. The resulting satire is pointedly double-edged: it exposes radical, 'Jacobin' social theories as incapable of offering practical reform, at the same time as attacking the existing social structures which stood in the way of the reform which radical theory had revealed was necessary.

### 3) 'Here is the Age of Reason Exemplified': Memoirs of Modern Philosophers

Adeline Mowbray shares its narrative structure with Elizabeth Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, which, as Gary Kelly argues, 'switches from one principal story to another or stops for one of the insets, creating for the reader the impression of a loose, complex, but interconnected structure of stories'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, both novels reflect upon Wollstonecraft's earlier novel, which they seek to remodulate for the reactionary political atmosphere of the early nineteenth century, presenting a more moderate brand of feminism based on their interpretations of Wollstonecraft's feminist thought. The two later novels are further connected by their author's suspicion of putting 'sublime' theories into everyday practice and their anxieties about reading and misreading texts, characters and social situations. Both novels strive to separate Wollstonecraft's infamous biography from her radical philosophy, in order to offer apologies for aspects of Wollstonecraft's social critique whilst rejecting her scandalous life story. Whereas Adeline Mowbray focuses on the collision of Wollstonecraft's life and text in the tragic trajectory of the novel's main character, Hamilton's novel divides its focus by following the fates of three female protagonists, none easily identifiable with Wollstonecraft's life but each inflected with a reading of Wollstonecraft's work.

In Modern Philosophers, Hamilton combines a critique of Jacobin theory and practice, its implications for a moderate interpretation of feminist arguments, and the

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<sup>23</sup> Gary Kelly, Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790-1827 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 148-9.

dangers involved in any act of interpretation.<sup>24</sup> As in Opie's Adeline Mowbray, Hamilton's novel focuses on the dangers involved in female reading. The anti-heroine of Modern Philosophers, Bridgetina Botherim, misreads both the modern philosophy of Godwin's Political Justice as a reliable guide with which to critique modern society and Hays' Memoirs of Emma Courtney as a reliable guide on how to conduct a love affair. Bridgetina's misreading is played as comic farce for much of the novel. Hamilton's tragic heroine, Julia Delmond, is manipulated into social disgrace and personal disaster by her misreading of both the character of her perfidious lover, Vallaton, and of the modern philosophy satirised in Bridgetina's case. Harriet Orwell, the third heroine of the novel, has been taught how to read 'properly' by her father, although, as Claire Grogan argues, her narrative most closely resembles, ironically, the vapid romances which have waylaid Bridgetina and Julia. Whilst Harriet's narrative concludes with the traditional marriage and Bridgetina's consigns her to domestic spinsterhood, Julia's, like Adeline's in Opie's novel, ends with her death and recantation of female philosophy. This conclusion seems to provide didactic closure to the novel: the death of the attractive female

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<sup>24</sup> In his chapter on Hamilton, Gary Kelly characterises Julia and Bridgetina as 'female Quixotes' (Women, Writing, and Revolution 145) satirised by Hamilton throughout the novel, arguing that, through such satire, the reader is asked to 'become counterpart to author... detached and superior in relation to the characters in the story' (159). Although Eleanor Ty notes Hamilton's complication of her Anti-Jacobin didacticism by her questioning of parental authority in the figures of Mrs Botherim and the Delmonds, she dismisses Hamilton's caricatured Bridgetina as 'a masculine means of controlling a disruptive female figure' (Unsex'd Revolutionaries, 26) and Julia as 'the clichéd seduced victim whose only possible end is death' (27). Katherine Binhammer compares Mary Hays and Elizabeth Hamilton's methods of governing female reading in their fictionalised Memoirs, arguing that Hamilton's novel depends for its success on a close reading of Hays' revolutionary feminist text ('The Persistence of Reading: Governing Female Novel-Reading in Memoirs of Emma Courtney and Memoirs of Modern Philosophers' Eighteenth-Century Life 27.2 (Spring 2003), 1-22). Claire Grogan analyses Hamilton's colonial anxieties, arguing that she conflates the figures of the novel's Modern Philosophers with a racist vision of the primitive, sexualised bodies of the Hottentots in 'Identifying Foreign Bodies: New Philosophers and Hottentots in Elizabeth Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers' Eighteenth-Century Fiction 18.3 (Spring 2006), 305-27, 315. Katie Trumpener and Nigel Leask, among others, focus on Hamilton's other novels, particularly engaging with the colonial allegories in Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah, giving little or no attention to Modern Philosophers.

philosopher figure, the reinscription of Bridgetina into domestic discourse, and the apotheosis of Harriet's domestic femininity all seem to dismiss Wollstonecraft's radical philosophy. However, Hamilton's overt conservatism within the novel enables her to explicitly defend Wollstonecraft's political philosophy, in a way which seemed impermissible in Opie's text. She accomplishes this by siphoning off the female philosopher's revolutionary energy into the grotesque body of Bridgetina Botherim, based on a crude caricature of Mary Hays, creating a space for a moderate rereading of Wollstonecraft's philosophy as having practical use in the post-revolutionary era.

Hamilton's Modern Philosophers originates in an argument between Hamilton and Mary Hays focusing on their interpretation of Godwinian theory and practice. Hamilton confronted Hays, at first in person and then in an angry letter, about a review attributed to Hays of Hamilton's first novel Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah (1796). Hays had at first denied that the review was hers, then later admitted it.<sup>25</sup> Hays's review begins condescendingly by stating that 'we have received entertainment from the perusal of this lively and amusing little work',<sup>26</sup> praising Hamilton's knowledge of Indian affairs throughout the text. Hays questions Hamilton's colonial apologia for British rule in India, however, arguing that 'these injured people have merely changed masters, and one species of oppression for another', particularly disagreeing with Hamilton's 'compliments' to Warren Hastings.<sup>27</sup> Hays praises Hamilton's critique of women's education in Britain, but

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<sup>25</sup> Gina Luria Walker, Growth of a Woman's Mind, 174.

<sup>26</sup> [Mary Hays], 'Review of Memoirs of Modern Philosophers', Analytical Review; or, History of Literature, Domestic and Foreign, vol. 2 (London: Johnson, 1796), 429. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>27</sup> Warren Hastings returned from his extensive engagements in colonial projects in India, including acting as Governor-General of Bengal, to be impeached for gross misconduct in 1787. His trial lasted

again takes issue with her satire of Jacobin philosophy. Hays argues that 'railing is substituted for reasoning' in these sections of the novel, advocating instead: 'Candid and calm discussion, not abuse, [as] the proper method of making rational converts: if conscious of the justness of our cause, we surely injure it by having recourse to calumny' ('Review', 431). Hays sums up her criticism of Hamilton's satire by suggesting that 'little knowledge and great assumption are manifested' by it. She concludes on a more positive note that the novel in general reveals 'a cultivated understanding and benevolent affections... calculated to undermine and destroy the barbarous, sensual prejudices, which have hitherto been indulged respecting the female mind' (431).

Hamilton's letter attacks Hays for her 'treachery, or malevolence'<sup>28</sup> in publishing such a critical review. She cites Hays's own confession to her of 'how severely you had felt the slight animadversions that had been made upon your first performance in one of the reviews' (Correspondence, 313-14) as hypocritical given that she has now 'inflict[ed] similar pains upon the mind of that unsuspecting friend' (314). Hamilton criticises Hays for obfuscating the specific passages from the novel which displeased her, accusing her of attacking the novel 'in the dark, and with a muffled dagger' (314), besmirching Hamilton's 'fame and character'. Hamilton defends her book as containing 'no accusation against any sect or party; throwing out no aspersions upon any character. No personal reflections. No invidious remarks upon the conduct of any

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from 1788-95 when he was finally acquitted. The trial grabbed public attention, and formed part of a wider debate about Britain's imperial ambitions. Hamilton, who had familial links to Hastings and the East India Company, supported Hastings' Orientalist interest in Indian society and culture. Hays criticised Hastings' imperialist project as perpetuating oppression. See Peter James Marshall, The Impeachment of Warren Hastings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

<sup>28</sup> The Correspondence of Mary Hays (1779-1843), British Novelist, ed. Marilyn L. Brooks (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 313. Subsequent references, in-text.

individual' (314). Hamilton's repeated denials in this passage seem disingenuous given the resemblance between the speech of one of the novel's characters, Mr Vapour, to Godwin's writing style in Political Justice.

Mr Vapour's philosophy certainly has several echoes of Godwin's:

The age of reason is thought, by Mr. Vapour, to be very near at hand. Nothing, he says, is so easy, as to bring it about immediately. It is only to persuade the people in power to resign its exercise; the rich to part with their property; and with one consent, to abolish all laws, and put an end to all government.<sup>29</sup>

Hamilton has speeded up Godwin's arguments for gradual reform here, but Vapour recognisably parrots a parodic form of Godwin's philosophical anarchism. Vapour also wants to rid the world of gratitude and filial affection, arguing: 'By destroying the domestic affections, what an addition will be made to human happiness!' Hamilton's satire seems to aim at several of Godwin's arguments in Political Justice, particularly his infamous depreciation of the 'domestic affections' which he would later problematically retract in his Memoirs of Wollstonecraft, and later works (see chapter 2). Hamilton's heroine, Miss Ardent, takes issue with the position of women in Vapour's philosophy, asking the philosopher how women will feed and clothe themselves after he exclaims, 'What is necessary, every individual may, without difficulty, do for himself' (Hindoo Rajah, 260). Vapour contemptuously replies to her challenge, 'Women! ... we shall not then be troubled with – women. In the age of reason, the world shall contain only a race of men!' (261). Ardent contradicts Vapour with her own opinion that in the age of reason 'the perfection of the female understanding will then be universally acknowledged' (261), an assertion with clear echoes of Wollstonecraft's arguments about the necessity for improving women's

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah [1796], eds. Pamela Perkins and Shannon Russell (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004), 260. Subsequent references, in-text.

education in her Vindication. This passage is strikingly similar to Hays' critique of the masculine bias in Godwin's political philosophy in the exchanges between Emma and Mr. Francis in her own first novel (see chapter 1), making the disagreement between Hamilton and Hays more about style than substance. Hamilton finishes her letter to Hays by ridiculing her defence of Godwin in their private correspondence: 'it is a strange sort of compliment you pay your friend Mr Godwin, in taking it for granted that he has made a monopoly of all the absurdity, and extravagance in the world; and that it is impossible to laugh at any thing ridiculous without pointing to him' (314), concluding by insisting that she wrote Letters of a Hindoo Rajah before reading Political Justice.

Hamilton's response to Hays's review reveals her own underlying anxieties about authorship, worrying that Hays's criticisms could blight her 'fame and character'. They also obfuscate her actual attacks on Godwinian theory and practice in the novel, which Hays had only touched on in her review. Hays criticised Hamilton's portrait of a 'sceptic... who confounds all distinction between virtue and vice, and preaches profligacy and suicide as conducive to general utility' ('Review', 430). Hamilton's repeated denial that she has attacked specific individuals or used particular events in her satire also paves the way for her highly particularised caricature of Hays herself in the figure of Bridgetina Botherim in Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, along with her detailed attacks on Political Justice and Godwin himself, in the figure of Mr. Myope. Hays's critical review of Hamilton's first novel frees Hamilton to savage Godwin and Hays, in particular, in her second.

The gloriously named Bridgetina Botherim is figured as a grotesque gargoyle, spouting incomprehensible Jacobin jargon which, it is strongly suggested, she fails to fully understand herself. She is, however, capable of manipulating Godwin's

necessitarian philosophy for her own selfish ends. In order to justify her desire to leave her mother's party for one amongst her philosopher friends, Bridgetina indignantly asks, 'And do you think I am at liberty to remain here? ... Have I not told you again and again, that I am under the necessity of preferring the motive which is most preferable?'<sup>30</sup> Bridgetina deploys the words 'liberty' and 'necessity' from Godwin's political philosophy in order to justify her selfish desires. Not only that, but the garbled tautology, 'preferring the motive which is most preferable', is a confused interpretation of Godwin's arguments about necessity in Political Justice.<sup>31</sup>

Hamilton frequently has Bridgetina quote large sections from Godwin's works, both to show the girl's lack of understanding of them, but also to make Godwin's reasoning seem as specious and absurd as Bridgetina's. In order to justify her rebuke to a kindly domestic servant who has embarrassed her by returning her dishevelled wig in front of company, Bridgetina criticises her mother's lack of philosophical rigour:

It is a strange thing, mother, ... that you never will learn to generalize your ideas. The boy may take very good care of your cow... but if he derives this benefit, not from a clear and distinct perception of what it is in which it consists, but from the unexamined lessons of education, from the physical effect of sympathy, or from any species of zeal unallied to and incommensurate with knowledge, can this desire be admitted for virtuous? If your prejudices were not invulnerable, you would not hesitate to acknowledge that it ought not; and if his actions cannot be admitted for virtuous, how can he be called good? (Modern Philosophers, 97, emphasis in original, indicating a quotation from Political Justice)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, Memoirs of Modern Philosophers [1800], ed. Claire Grogan (Peterborough: Broadview, 2000), 46. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>31</sup> See William Godwin, Political Justice in The Political and Philosophical Works of William Godwin, vol. 3, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 168-74, for his account of the doctrine of necessity and its consequences for free will, rendering men essentially passive.

<sup>32</sup> See William Godwin, Political Justice, 143, for the passage Bridgetina repeats here for her own ends.

Bridgetina's harangue renders Mrs Botherim silent. By coupling together Bridgetina's mean-spirited attack on the servant with Godwin's intellectualised definitions of goodness and virtue, Hamilton reveals the girl's spitefulness and the philosopher's elite snobbery: Godwin's high valuation of knowledge in defining virtue excludes uneducated servants, and other socially marginalised groups from being able to have such qualities. Hamilton also has Bridgetina attack soldiers, the clergy and lawyers using Godwin's criticisms of these professions, usually as virtuous exemplars of these men are present and able to rebut her.

Bridgetina's encounter with two lawyers, during her pursuit of Henry Sydney to London in a stagecoach, reveals her dependence on the simple repetition of Godwin's arguments. At first, her travelling companions 'were not a little astonished to hear such a stream of eloquence flow from so unexpected a source':

They for some time thought it inexhaustible, but on putting some pertinent queries to the fair orator, they discovered that her eloquence, like the little coach and horses to be seen in a shew-box at the fair, ran always in the same round. In vain did they endeavour to make it trace a wider circle; it could neither stop, nor turn, nor go strait forwards, nor move in any other direction than that in which it had first attracted their curiosity. (237)

Although Bridgetina is able to dominate her domestic circle with her false shows of erudition, her encounters with genuine learning reveal her lack of understanding.

Bridgetina's unrequited love for Sydney allows Hamilton to quote from, and mock mercilessly, Hays' revolutionary novel Memoirs of Emma Courtney – at least partially in revenge for Hays' poor review discussed above. Hamilton, along with Bridgetina herself, models the girl's pursuit of Sydney on Emma's desire for Augustus Harvey, as Hamilton makes clear in a footnote explaining a quotation from

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Emma Courtney, 'to which Miss Botherim seems indebted for some of her finest thoughts'. Bridgetina's relation to Julia of the manner in which she fell in love with Sydney closely echoes Emma's first encounter with Augustus: Bridgetina reads a letter from Sydney to his sister; Emma views Augustus' picture at his mother's house. This slight change underscores the literary nature of Bridgetina's desire. Bridgetina's justifications for her continuing passion for Sydney borrow their pseudo-philosophical underpinnings from Emma's 'methodising principles'.

So widespread are Bridgetina's, and Hamilton's, borrowings from Hays' novel that Katherine Binhammer argues: 'The female reader of Hamilton's novel is warned against reading Emma Courtney as Bridgetina does, but they are also both explicitly directed to the novel and given excerpts from it so that, for all intents and purposes, they read Emma Courtney' ('The Persistence of Reading', 16). Binhammer reveals one of the ironies of socially conservative novels of the period here, as extensive quotation of revolutionary philosophical arguments serves to broadcast principles which reactionary authors would prefer to repress. However, the key phrase in Binhammer's argument is that Hamilton warns against reading Hays' novel 'as Bridgetina does'. Hamilton includes detailed quotations from radical material in order to teach her audience how to read appropriately. Hamilton's inclusion of large sections of Godwin's philosophical work and Hays' novel reveals their 'self-evident absurdities' when placed into the context of the novel's conservative satire.

The ridicule Hamilton pours on the Haysian Bridgetina Botherim allows her to rescue Wollstonecraftian feminism from the reactionary opprobrium directed towards Wollstonecraft's life and work after her death. In an early discussion about Rousseau, Bridgetina chastises him for being 'a stranger to the rights of woman' (101). Hamilton's rational hero Henry Sydney agrees:

The inconsistency and folly of his system... was, perhaps, never better exposed than in the very ingenious publication which takes the Rights of Woman for its title. Pity that the very sensible authoress has sometimes permitted her zeal to hurry her into expressions which have raised a prejudice against the whole. To superficial readers it appears to be her intention to unsex women entirely. But- (101)

At which point, Bridgetina interjects: 'And why should there be any distinction of sex?' underscoring her threateningly unfeminine philosophy. Hamilton ventriloquizes male approval for Wollstonecraft here, declining to have any of her female characters defend Wollstonecraft's principles in preference to Henry's balanced account of her Vindication. Nevertheless, through Henry, Hamilton manages to defend Wollstonecraft's arguments, characterising the Vindication as the best response to Rousseau's sexism. Bridgetina's interruption of Henry also leaves Wollstonecraft's attack on gender distinctions tantalisingly open to interpretation. Hamilton's defence of Wollstonecraft's radical philosophy here is enabled, although it is also cut short, by her conservative attack on Hays's distinct form of feminism elsewhere. Hamilton's curtailed defence of Wollstonecraft supports her critique of Rousseau's sexualised education for girls in the Vindication, connecting Hamilton's arguments for improved female education to Wollstonecraft's. At the same time, Hamilton distances both her own work and Wollstonecraft's from revolutionary feminism, by depicting Wollstonecraft's attack on gendered distinctions as part of her rushed enthusiasm and diverting her own critique of female philosophy onto Bridgetina Botherim, based on Hays not Wollstonecraft.

Bridgetina continues by attacking female propriety: 'Ah! wretched woman, restrained by the cruel fetters of decorum! Vile and ignoble bondage... a tyranny whose remorseless cruelty assigns to woman the care of her family! But the time will come when the mind of woman will be too enlightened to submit to the slavish talk

[sic]!' (102). To which, Harriet Orwell – domestic woman, dutiful daughter, the actual love interest of Henry Sydney, and Hamilton's alternative model of female behaviour – replies:

Indeed, Miss Botherim... I do not think that there is any thing slavish or disagreeable in the task: nor do I think a woman's energies, as you call them, can possibly be better employed. Surely the performance of the duties that are annexed to our situation, can never be deemed mean or ignoble? For my share, so far from feeling any derogation of dignity in domestic employment; I always feel exalted from the consciousness of being useful. (102)

Harriet quietly refutes Bridgetina's clamorous declarations, stressing her own sense of duty, dignity and practicality. Claire Grogan notes that Harriet's arguments chime with Hannah More's domestic feminism ('Identifying Foreign Bodies', 311). Her calm rationality makes Bridgetina's impetuous arguments against domesticity seem lazy rather than ideological. Bridgetina is not allowed to reply to Harriet's arguments; Harriet is instead praised by her father for her properly religious sentiments.

Hamilton's defence of Wollstonecraft comes as something of a surprise in a novel so concerned with satirising examples of revolutionary philosophy, quoting extensively from Godwin's Political Justice and Hays' Emma Courtney in order to render their more avant garde theories absurd. Hamilton does not quote from any of Wollstonecraft's texts. Although this means that she also does not defend Wollstonecraft's arguments in much detail, it is still significant that Hamilton decides to defend them at all, in a novel which otherwise attacks revolutionary writing in detail, and at a time when Wollstonecraft had become the focus for such counter-revolutionary arguments. Instead, Henry Sydney's brief defence of Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau shows Hamilton appropriating elements of Wollstonecraft's

arguments, particularly on female education and women's duties and responsibilities, in order to develop her own, more moderate feminism.

Furthermore, Hamilton's mockery of Bridgetina's Godwinian mentor, Mr Myope, has a precursor, rather unexpectedly, in Wollstonecraft's Maria. Whilst recounting her narrative, Jemima complains that, after the death of her philosophical lover has left her destitute once again, his friends proved decidedly unhelpful. Requesting advice from 'an advocate for unequivocal sincerity... [who] had often, in my presence, descanted on the evils which arise in society from the despotism of rank and riches' (Maria, 87), she receives in reply 'a long essay on the energy of the human mind, with continual allusions to his own force of character', concluding 'That the woman who could write such a letter as I had sent him, could never be in want of resources, were she to look into herself, and exert her powers' (88). Wollstonecraft seems to me to be mocking distinctly Godwinian ideals in this episode: sincerity, the evils of rank and riches, the energy of the human mind, force of character and exertions of 'powers'. The 'continual allusions' to himself seems a particularly pointed dig at Godwin's self-absorption, picked up by Hays, Opie and Hamilton and developed in their own confrontations with Godwin's masculinist political philosophy.

Hamilton's three heroines represent three different approaches to reading: 'If Julia reads the text as her self and Bridgetina reads the self as her text, the third protagonist – the virtuous and unsatirised Harriet – has no self at all and is, paradoxically, the protagonist most like the conventional heroine' ('The Persistence of Reading', 16). Harriet's selflessness, compared to the different literary selfishnesses of Julia and Bridgetina, stems from her reading practice, which 'has been rational, restrained and regulated' (17). Binhammer distinguishes between Julia and Bridgetina by arguing that Julia imagines herself to be the heroine of a

novel whereas Bridgetina uses the experiences of Hays's heroine, Emma Courtney, as a template for her own life story: 'Whereas Julia understands herself through the novel, Bridgetina's plot writes the opposite relation in that she understands novels through the self' (15). Harriet's 'selflessness' could be more sympathetically interpreted as Hamilton's developing investment in domestic ideology; although she also fulfils a literary stereotype of the generous, giving – selfless – heroine.

Julia labours under the delusion that the world functions as a romance – so she believes Vallaton's romanticised tale of his mysterious birth and assumes the nearest nobles are his parents, and responds to her mother's reasonable demands in the manner of a misunderstood, and unjustly tyrannised, heroine. Bridgetina responds to the split between text and world, romance and reality, under a different delusion: that novels like Emma Courtney procure for their readers an unproblematic understanding of real people's emotions. She uses the novel to rationalise Henry Sydney's real lack of interest in her as undisclosed, but definite, passion for her, in the manner of Augustus Harley's amour for Emma. Hamilton reveals that Julia's delusion is the more desperate, as her romanticised responses to the real world lead to the betrayal of her hopes, and those of her parents, and the deaths of all of them; Bridgetina's delusion is played more broadly for comedy, and ends in her disillusionment: Henry is not in love with her, nor is she a tragic heroine in the Emma Courtney mould, destined instead for a life of domesticity at home with her mother.

Harriet's selflessness allows Binhammer to position Hamilton's third protagonist as 'most like a conventional heroine' – in other words a fictional creation in a traditional marriage plot. Although Harriet's progress through the novel towards her marriage with Henry is basically unimpeded by dramatic incident, Binhammer's assessment obscures her more philosophical function in the novel. As in her reply to

Bridgetina quoted above, Harriet becomes Hamilton's mouthpiece for a more sympathetic, domesticated philosophy for women, based on a religious sense of duty and a pragmatic approach to women's situation in society. With Harriet, Hamilton depicts her own romanticised role for women: practical, deferential, and religious; able to debate complex moral and political points whilst remaining humbly aware of her own intellectual weakness. In an unfortunately interrupted conversation between Harriet and Julia, while Julia is recovering from an injury sustained after one of her misinformed misadventures, Harriet easily convinces Julia of the intellectual vapidness of Bridgetina's plagiarised philosophy:

Do you not think... it would be better for poor Miss Botherim to have a memory rather less retentive than to give you out, as she does, speech after speech from the author she has last read, without alteration or amendment... [S]o many are found capable of retaining the exact words of a well-sounding author, while to the few is confined the more estimable power of impressing the sense and substance in the mind. (Modern Philosophers 166-7)

Able to impress on Julia's mind both sense and substance, Harriet is well on the way to convincing her of the foolishness of the rest of her philosophical system when she is called away to attend to her aunt on her deathbed, leaving Julia in the care of the rather less dependable Bridgetina, which paves the way towards her fateful decision to abscond with Vallaton.

Bridgetina, firmly persuaded Henry Sydney is in love with her, also decides to pursue him to London, in order to persuade him to join her scheme to emigrate to live amongst the Hottentots with her faux-philosophical friends. This ridiculous scheme originates from Mr. Glib's reading of François Le Vaillant's Voyage Dans L'Interieur de L'Afrique (1790), a French travelogue available in various English translations which valorised the 'noble savagery' of African society, drawing connections between

African sexual, social and cultural practices and Revolutionary ideals. To Bridgetina, Mr. Myope and the Goddess of Reason, Glib exclaims:

See here! ... all our wishes fulfilled! All our theory realised! Here is a whole nation of philosophers, all as wise as ourselves! All enjoying the proper dignity of man! Things just as they ought! No man working for another! All alike! All equal! No laws! No government! No coercion! Every one exerting his energies as he pleases! Take a wife today; leave her again to-morrow! It is the very essence of virtue, and the quintessence of enjoyment! (141)

Glib's reading of Le Vaillant's analysis of Hottentot society stresses his own utopian beliefs in anti-authoritarian equality and libertarian sexual practices. Hamilton uses his excitement to underscore both Glib's laziness – he stresses the Hottentots lack of useful employment – and his appetite for sexual promiscuity. Glib's excited description of the 'Gonoquais horde' as 'a whole nation of philosophers, all as wise as ourselves!' works in a particularly double-edged way in Hamilton's text: Glib is excited because his utopian desires seem to have a real outlet amongst the Hottentots; Hamilton is suggesting that the modernity of Glib's philosophy has as its precedent what she sees as the primitive and uncivilised sexuality of African society.

By quoting from Le Vaillant's descriptions of Hottentot marriage, work, and religion, or lack thereof, Hamilton has her modern philosophers make explicit the links between Hottentot primitivism and Godwin's political philosophy. Bridgetina declares: 'It is evident... that the author of our illustrious system is entirely indebted to the Hottentots for his sublime idea of the Age of Reason. Here is the Age of Reason exemplified; here is proof sufficient of the perfectibility of man!' (142). Hamilton confirms this exclamation with a footnote directing her reader to compare particular sections of Political Justice with her quotations from Le Vaillant. By doing so, she explicitly links Godwin's perceived Jacobinism with colonial preconceptions of African society and sexuality.

Julia's death convinces Bridgetina to give up her scheme to emigrate, with her band of Jacobin philosophers, to live amongst the Hottentots. Julia dies from the after-effects of the poison she took in despair in order to terminate both her pregnancy and her own life. She also dies from a broken heart – a heart fragmented by her lover Vallaton's desertion, leaving her destitute, pregnant and prostituted to a villainous acquaintance; by her own betrayal of her father's hopes, hastening his early death; and by her belated realisation of the vacuity of her philosophical ideals.

Julia's final words to Bridgetina fully endorse the status quo, in a way in which Adeline's equivocations in Opie's novel never do: 'Those prejudices [of society] become 'a salutary fence', the girls' transgression of which threatens the moral fabric of society (382-3). She concludes by telling Bridgetina to 'Go home to your mother, my Biddy; and in the sober duties of life forget the idle vagaries which our distempered brains dignified with the name of philosophy' (383). The total dismissal of 'philosophy' here marks Hamilton's novel as much closer to the Anti-Jacobin tradition than Opie's more equivocal text, in spite of Hamilton's more sympathetic account of Wollstonecraft earlier in the novel. Indeed, Hamilton's more explicit sympathy with Wollstonecraft is only possible in the context of her much more conservative defence of social and moral norms, contrasting sharply with Opie's questioning, subversive narrative. Hamilton is sympathetic to Wollstonecraft's plan for improved female education, which Modern Philosophers modulates into moderate reform, at least in the private sphere, through its depiction of the domestic heroine, Harriet Orville. She remains suspicious of Wollstonecraft's radicalism, depicting it as rushed enthusiasm and exploring the dangerous consequences of such in the trajectories of Bridgetina and Julia. In her novel, she co-opts aspects of

Wollstonecraft's Vindication into a more conservative narrative of gradual social improvement.

Bridgetina returns to her mother, a movement which reinscribes Hamilton's anti-heroine into the domestic sphere that her actions have threatened. Claire Grogan argues that 'Bridgetina is reclaimed because the greater fear is not perhaps that the New Philosophers will emigrate to the interior of Africa, but that they will bring the Hottentots to English shores', concluding that:

Bridgetina's story [acts] as a timely warning to the female reader of how to avoid being the wrong kind of spectacle by arguing that there is no real power to be garnered by being either a female New Philosopher or English Hottentot if it reduces you to a pitiful and easily abused sexual creature. Thus the female philosopher, like the female Hottentot, comes to an early and tragic end, abused by a patriarchal society that can only see her as a sexual creature. ('Identifying Foreign Bodies' 327)

Grogan makes clear that Hamilton uses racial anxieties surrounding the perceived primitive sexuality of the Hottentots to comment on the much more threatening phenomenon of a rampant female sexuality at home, combined with Jacobin-inspired libertarian philosophy. She also focuses on Hamilton's use the conservative interpretation of the female philosopher, viewing the figure as imbricated in dangerous, self-destructive sexuality. This focus on the reactionary iteration of the figure allows her to develop the more pragmatic, domestic figure of Harriet, who is nevertheless tinged with romance by fulfilling the terms of the traditional marriage plot, critiqued elsewhere in Hamilton's novel.

In an obituary of Elizabeth Hamilton in The Gentleman's Magazine (December, 1816), which is attributed to Maria Edgeworth, Modern Philosophers is sympathetically reviewed as exposing 'those whose theory and practice differ; to point out the difficulty of applying high flown principles to the ordinary but necessary

concerns of human life; and to show the danger of bringing every man to become his own moralist and logician'.<sup>33</sup> In this obituary, Edgeworth notes the critique of revolutionary theory and practice linking the novels of Opie, Hamilton and Edgeworth herself under discussion in this chapter. Edgeworth describes how the character of Bridgetina Botherim 'became a standing jest, a proverbial point in conversation', reducing 'to measure and reason those who, in the novelty and zeal of system, had overleaped the bounds of common sense' ('Character and Writings', 623). Like Hamilton in her letter to Hays, Edgeworth obfuscates the personal attack in Hamilton's caricatured female philosopher by stating that Modern Philosophers 'avoids all satire of individuals' (623), even though Bridgetina was clearly linked in the novel's reception with a satire on Mary Hays and her revolutionary novel.<sup>34</sup> However, the measured tone of the obituary distinguishes itself, and Hamilton's character and writings, from Anti-Jacobin attacks on sexual immorality and its paranoid defence of the existing social order, by stressing Hamilton's common sense rationality. This chimes with Grogan's positioning of Hamilton as balanced between the excesses of Anti- and English Jacobin positions, which I describe as Post-Jacobin.

Hamilton deflects criticism of Wollstonecraft's feminist philosophy by overtly attacking Hays and the sexual politics of Emma Courtney in the caricatured female philosopher figure, Bridgetina; in doing so, she is able to explicitly defend some of Wollstonecraft's arguments in her own novel: separating what she sees as Wollstonecraft's valid political and philosophical aims, particularly for improved

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<sup>33</sup> [Maria Edgeworth], 'Character and Writings of Mrs Elizabeth Hamilton', The Gentleman's Magazine Supplement 86.2 (December, 1816), 623-4, 623. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>34</sup> For example, the Anti-Jacobin identifies Bridgetina's conversation as 'an excellent imitation of that vicious and detestable stuff which has issued from the pen of M---y H---s. Indeed the whole character of Bridgetina so strongly resembles that of this impassioned Godwinian, that it is impossible to be mistaken' (Anti-Jacobin 7 (1801), 370).

female education, which Hamilton also argues for in her later work, from the spurious goals of her *Modern Philosophers*. Edgeworth's obituary concludes with a celebration of Hamilton's 'example... of that uniform propriety of conduct, and of all those domestic virtues; which ought to characterise the sex, which form the charm and happiness of domestic life' (334). In her own novel, Belinda, Edgeworth would test just such a 'uniform propriety of conduct' against competing standards of female behaviour.

#### 4) 'Apropos, Have You Read St. Leon?': Belinda

Belinda does not end with the death of a female philosopher. In Edgeworth's original sketch of the novel, entitled 'Abroad and at Home', Lady Delacour was scheduled to die from cancerous complications relating to her breast, injured in an Amazonian duel, which would have presented 'female philosophy' as damaging to female nature.<sup>35</sup> Many of Lady Delacour's planned Jacobin tendencies are placed in the finished novel onto the character of Harriet Freke. Freke is a pseudo-Wollstonecraftian caricature used by Edgeworth to explore anxieties surrounding female philosophy; also, like Hamilton's Bridgetina Botherim, she is based more on Mary Hays than Wollstonecraft. Freke fiercely debates the rights of woman with men

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<sup>35</sup> 'Original Sketch of *Belinda: Abroad and at Home*' was published in Frances Edgeworth, A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth, with A Selection from Her Letters, vol. 3 (London: Joseph Masters and Son, 1867), 269-76. The sketch is dated May 10, 1800. Frances Edgeworth prefaces the sketch with the following information: 'Several of the sketches which Maria made for her stories have been preserved, and as they show the pains she took with her design, and are curious from the alterations which occurred in the writing out of the story, I subjoin a specimen of them. They were written in small, narrow books, shaped like a cheque-book, and, indeed, often sewed into the empty cover of a cheque or stamped receipt-book', 269. In the original sketch, not only does Lady Delacour have some of the personality traits later grafted onto the new character of Harriet Freke in the published novel, but Clarence Hervey has character flaws which are shifted onto Mr Vincent. Lord Delacour is also much more of a brute in the sketch than in the finished text.

and women, cross-dresses and flirts with Lady Delacour. These indecorous activities – Freke views all delicacy as false – combine intellectual exertion considered foreign to women with threateningly masculine behaviour, such as encouraging Lady Delacour to fight the duel which climaxes in her seemingly fatal, self-inflicted wound to the breast. Even so, Edgeworth removes this threatening female figure from the narrative by having Freke mutilated, with rather malicious irony, in a man-trap, rather than resorting to the hackneyed tropes of seduction and death.<sup>36</sup>

Edgeworth's resistance to the clichéd seduction plot culminating in the death of the fallen woman, which reaches its classic apogee in Samuel Richardson's Clarissa in the mid-eighteenth century, leads her to write a distinctly metatextual novel, seemingly self-aware of the given destiny of its characters. Susan Egenolf also reads Belinda's metatextuality as indicative of Edgeworth's personal involvement in politically charged polemic, arguing that the artistic glosses in the novel reveal political manoeuvres by which women can maintain control over their lives.<sup>37</sup> I argue that Opie and Hamilton's interest in challenging the confusions inherent in revolutionary theory and practice is modulated in Edgeworth's novel into a critique of the theory and practice of novel writing itself. The focus on reading in both Adeline

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<sup>36</sup> Critical attention on Edgeworth's oeuvre has effectively rescued her from Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace's accusations of 'patriarchal complicity' in Their Fathers' Daughters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), by focussing on Edgeworth's assured control of the complex ambiguities running throughout her Irish and society novels. Interest in Edgeworth's writing has accelerated in the twenty-first century with a series of studies analysing her work. Cliona Ó Gallchoir's magisterial Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005) contextualises Belinda by reading it alongside Edgeworth's pedagogical tracts and short stories and comparing it to Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan's The Wild Irish Girl. Belinda receives attention in several essays in Julie Nash, New Essays on Maria Edgeworth (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), including Joanne Cordon, 'Why Maria Edgeworth Did Not Write Castle Belinda' (131-60), which argues that Edgeworth divided her analyses of class, race and gender between her Irish and society novels in order to give greater focus to her critique, and Nash's own study on the role of servants in the novel, developed in her monograph Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Susan Egenolf, The Art of Political Fiction in Hamilton, Edgeworth and Owenson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 73-104.

Mowbray and Modern Philosophers is sharpened in Belinda in order to challenge readers' expectations not only of reading in general but of reading this novel in particular. Lady Delacour takes on a more and more explicit role in guiding the novel to her desired conclusion, climaxing in her deliberate orchestration of the novel's finale to mimic a conventional happy ending. The difficulties of interpretation, of reading texts, other people, the self and the world, which defines each of these novels, is turned inwards in Belinda to challenge readers' approaches to Edgeworth's own writing. Edgeworth contrasts the interpretative habits of Harriet Freke, Lady Delacour, and Virginia St. Pierre, with Belinda's reading of books, individuals and the world of the novel, revealing the inconsistencies and blindnesses of each woman's approach. Given this range of interpretative strategies within the novel, Edgeworth demands that her readers reconsider and recalibrate their own critical strategies.

In the chapter entitled 'Rights of Woman', Belinda is suddenly confronted by Harriet Freke. Freke tells Belinda that she has come to rescue her from the Percivals, describing Belinda as a 'distressed damsel'.<sup>38</sup> Belinda refuses what she calls Freke's 'knighterrantry' (Belinda, 176), underscoring Freke's gender-bending antics. Their conversation turns to reading, in one of the novel's many metatextual turns. Freke attempts to seduce Belinda away from the domestic happiness of the Percival family, first by complimenting her beauty, then, when this fails, her spirited nature:

'For my part... I own I should like a strong devil better than a weak angel.'

'You forget,' said Belinda, 'that it is not Milton, but Satan, who says, "Fallen spirit, to be weak is to be miserable".'

'You read I see! I did not know you were a reading girl. So did I once! but I never read now. Books only spoil the originality of genius. Very well for those who can't think for themselves – but

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<sup>38</sup> Maria Edgeworth, Belinda [1801], ed. Siobhán Kilfeather. *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, vol. 5 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), 175. Subsequent references, in-text.

when one has made up one's opinions, there is no use in reading.' (177)

Freke's admiring reference to Satan aligns her with English Jacobins like Wollstonecraft, who notes her preference for Milton's Satan over Eve, deconstructed as a male fantasy figure, in her second Vindication.<sup>39</sup> Freke's dislike of reading, however, already suggests her lack of philosophical understanding, especially as a character in a novel which both explicitly refers to a wide range of literature (including poetry, plays, travelogues, letters, memoirs, religious, moral and philosophical tracts, and other novels) and explicitly draws attention to itself as a work of fiction. Freke argues that 'Conversation is worth all the books in the world' but is unable to respond to Belinda's reply, 'And is there never any nonsense in conversation?' (177).

In her argument with Mr. Percival on the rights of woman, Freke reveals her dependence, like Bridgetina Botherim in Hamilton's novel, on repeated slogans above genuine understanding. Freke and Percival argue over Freke's generalisations that 'all politeness [is] hypocrisy' and 'shame is always the cause of women's vices'. Percival calls the first claim contradictory and asks whether Freke means false shame, to which she replies, 'All shame is false shame'. Belinda blushes, and this response enters the argument: Mr. Vincent argues that Belinda's blushes 'speak for her'; Freke retorts, 'Against her... Women blush because they understand'. Percival then asks, 'And you would have them understand without blushing? ... So would I: for nothing can be more different than innocence and ignorance. Female delicacy-' (179). At which point, Freke interrupts:

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<sup>39</sup> Wollstonecraft contrasts Adam and Eve to Satan in a footnote, stating that 'instead of envying the lovely pair, I have, with conscious dignity, or Satanic pride, turned to hell for sublimer objects' (Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol 5, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 94).

‘This is just the way you men spoil women... by talking to them of the delicacy of their sex, and such stuff. This delicacy enslaves the pretty delicate dears.’

‘No, it enslaves us,’ said Mr. Vincent.

‘I hate slavery! Vive la liberté!’ cried Mrs. Freke – ‘I’m a champion for the Rights of Woman.’ (179)

Freke repeats Wollstonecraft’s arguments against the imposition of a male ideal of propriety on women, and, like Wollstonecraft, links this to colonial prejudice, particularly slavery. However, her conversation reveals her lack of any real feminist principles to replace either propriety or prejudice. She fails to pick up on Vincent’s Rousseauvian retort that female delicacy ‘enslaves’ men more than it does women – the kind of gallant male hypocrisy so carefully deconstructed by Wollstonecraft in her Vindication – and is unable to respond to Percival’s argument that delicacy ‘conduces to their [women’s] happiness’, except by repeating that she is ‘an enemy to delicacy’.

It is Belinda who brings this more and more nonsensical conversation to a climax by pointing out that Freke has failed to ‘prove the hypocrisy’ in female delicacy (179). This leads to Freke specifying indelicately that a woman is a hypocrite when she does not ‘go and tell’ a man ‘honestly’ that she likes him (179). This embarrasses Belinda into silence and ends the conversation at an impasse with Freke characterising female delicacy as cunning and Percival characterising it as prudence. Unable to reply, Freke exclaims: ‘You may say what you will, but the present system of society is radically wrong: whatever is, is wrong’ (179). Her suggestion to improve society is ‘by tearing away what has been called the decent drapery of life’ (180), at which point Edgeworth has her anti-heroine ‘getting up and stretching herself so violently that some part of her habiliments gave way’ (180), forcing her to withdraw from male company in order to set her own drapery to rights.

Freke's desire to tear away 'the decent drapery of life' is an allusion to Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) in which he complains that 'All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of her naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion'.<sup>40</sup> Burke's defence of traditions in his appeal for 'decent drapery' is replayed as farce in Edgeworth's novel, revealing the revolutionary Freke to be ridiculous and absurd. By tearing away Freke's drapery, Edgeworth playfully connects her satirical representation of the radical iteration of the female philosopher with Burke's wider critique of revolutionary fervour. Her playfulness here contrasts with Burke's serious intentions in the passage she alludes to, distinguishing her more moderate political position from the politician's. Edgeworth reveals Freke's lack of systematic thinking in her exclamatory, and increasingly repetitive, conversation and her own hypocrisy in retreating from male company in order to restore her costume.<sup>41</sup>

After Freke has left, having failed to persuade Belinda to leave with her, Mr. Vincent compares her to Creole women, first by alluding to her role as obeah-woman in frightening his servant, and then by contrasting Freke's outspoken demeanour with the 'softness, grace, delicacy' of 'our creole ladies', to which list Mr. Percival adds 'indolence' (182). The Percivals, Vincent and Belinda then have a conversation on

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<sup>40</sup> Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France [1790], ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2009), 77.

<sup>41</sup> Colin and Jo Atkinson argue that Freke resembles Mary Hays, aligning her with Hamilton's satire of Hays in *Bridgetina Botherim*, in 'Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, and Women's Rights' *Eire-Ireland* 19 (1984) 94-118, 110-11. Their argument does not really distinguish between Wollstonecraft and Hays' positions, however, leading to a rather simplistic analysis of revolutionary feminism in the novel.

whether 'ignorance, as well as indolence, [is] an amiable defect essential to the female character' (182), challenging Vincent's self-proclaimed 'prejudices' (182) on whether the principle of a rational, well-educated woman would square with the demands of female propriety. The conversation ends with everyone pleased with Vincent's humility, protesting that he wished to have more knowledge and that Belinda had taught him to become aware of his prejudices.<sup>42</sup>

Whereas Deborah Weiss debates Belinda and Harriet's position as 'true' and 'false' female philosopher in 'The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda', I focus on Lady Delacour's role as Godwinian mentor, like Glenmurray in Adeline Mowbray or Mr. Myope in Modern Philosophers, marked by her scattered references to Godwin's texts and her status as unreliable role model for Belinda.<sup>43</sup> Weiss argues that Freke takes on all of the negative associations of the counter-revolutionary iteration of the female philosopher figure which allows Edgeworth to portray Belinda sympathetically as an Enlightenment-style female philosopher, shorn of the figure's threatening

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<sup>42</sup> A growing number of studies explore the links between Edgeworth's critique of the hypocritical standards of female propriety and colonial anxieties about race, miscegenation and imperial rule explored in Belinda. Susan Greenfield, "'Abroad and at Home': Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth's Belinda" PMLA 112.2 (March 1997), 214-28, Andrew McCann, 'Conjugal Love and the Enlightenment Subject: The Colonial Context of Non-Identity' NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction 30.1 (Autumn 1996), 56-77, and Kathryn Kirkpatrick, "'Gentlemen Have Horrors Upon the Subject": West Indian Suitors in Edgeworth's Belinda' Eighteenth-Century Fiction 5.4 (July 1993), 331-48, each add to the debate about the significance of Edgeworth's colonial concerns to her feminist argument in Belinda. Harvey argues that Edgeworth parallels the position of women in English society with the position of slaves and Creoles under imperial rule in the West Indies. Greenfield's analysis pulls in another direction, arguing that Lady Delacour, reinscribed at the novel's conclusion as a 'proper lady', acts as guarantor of colonial advantage and gender difference (219). McCann complicates this reading by focussing on the differences between 1801 and 1810 editions of the novel, arguing that the earlier edition questioned both colonial advantage and gender difference, especially in the marriage of Mr. Vincent's black slave Juba to a working class white woman. Kirkpatrick analyses the reasons behind this change, focussing on the equivocation of Edgeworth's explanation for the revision: 'My father says that gentlemen have horrors upon this subject, and would draw conclusions very unfavourable to a female writer who appeared to recommend such unions: as I do not understand the subject I trust I trust to his better judgement.' Kirkpatrick argues that Edgeworth has shown a very precise understanding of the conflation of sexual and racial anxieties in her novel. Therefore, her lack of understanding focuses on the personal horrors of the gentlemen rather than any horror towards the subject of interracial marriage.

<sup>43</sup> See Deborah Weiss, 'The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda: Maria Edgeworth's Female Philosopher' Eighteenth-Century Fiction 19.4 (Summer 2007), 441-461.

revolutionary overtones. I agree with Weiss's argument, which further works for the way in which Hamilton depicts Bridgetina in opposition to Harriet, discussed above, and also for the way in which Austen depicts Mary Crawford against Fanny Price in Mansfield Park, discussed in my next chapter. My focus on Lady Delacour shows how Edgeworth reintroduces subversive elements of revolutionary philosophy into the novel, which she elsewhere sanitises with her characterisation of Belinda as a 'safe' female philosopher.

Lady Delacour refers to Godwin's writing explicitly at two points in the novel, both moments of crisis in her relationship with Belinda. The first appears at the end of the chapter entitled 'Jealousy', concluding in Belinda's decision to leave the Delacour household and take up her invitation to stay with the Percivals. Belinda decides to leave her friend after Lady Delacour accuses her of seducing Lord Delacour in an attempt to become his second wife after Lady Delacour's death. In order to conceal her real pain at Belinda's departure, Lady Delacour appears 'Fresh rouged, and elegantly dressed... performing her part to a brilliant audience in the drawing room, when Belinda entered' in order to leave the house. Lady Delacour, 'turning carelessly towards her', asks Belinda:

Miss Portman... where do you buy your rouge? – Lady Singleton, would you rather at this moment be mistress of the philosopher's stone, or have a patent for rouge that will come and go like Miss Portman's? – A propos, have you read St Leon?' Her ladyship was running on to a fresh train of ideas, when a footman announced the arrival of lady Anne Percival's carriage; and miss Portman rose to depart. (165)

Seeing that Belinda is really going to leave, Lady Delacour's performance breaks down and she begs her to stay; Belinda is only capable of repeating 'Adieu!' before hurrying out of the house 'with the strongest feeling of compassion for this unhappy woman, but with an unaltered sense of the propriety and necessity of her own

firmness' (165). Lady Delacour's speech plays upon Belinda's real blushes, deliberately mistaking them for a make-up which gives the appearance of eternal youth, before noticing that Belinda's blushes 'come and go'. Lady Delacour's reference to St Leon signifies at once her movement onto a different set of ideas and suggests to the reader a set of connections between her character and Godwin's flawed narrator: personal nobility corrupted by social mores – St. Leon is nearly destroyed by gambling, Lady Delacour by fashion; and their egotism fractures the family unit.

Lady Delacour's use of St. Leon further complicates Edgeworth's exploration of female nature versus artifice. By teasingly misreading Belinda's real blushes as make-up, Lady Delacour ironically connects Belinda's youthful inexperience with not only St. Leon's more cynical pursuit of the philosopher's stone but her own jaded concern to disguise the aging process. Her comments to Lady Singleton hint at women's worries about aging, and also suggest Lady Delacour's, and Edgeworth's, critique of societal double standards: society demands that women conform to an image of youthful naturalness which becomes more and more untenable with age, finally depending on the artifice it seems to scorn. Edgeworth's intertextual allusion to Godwin's 1799 novel forges connections between the two writers in a distinctly Post-Jacobin context, using Godwin's critique of the way in which social pressures fracture individual relationships with families to explore a more feminine quandary. Both St. Leon and Belinda partake in liberal political and aesthetic strategies seeking to remodulate revolutionary philosophy in a post-revolutionary context, which I have described as Post-Jacobin. Both texts aim to reform reading habits, social norms and, in Edgeworth's novel especially, gendered preconceptions to a progressive

agenda against conservative demands for unquestioning loyalist obedience in the context of the Napoleonic wars.

In the chapter called 'Reconciliation', Edgeworth reunites Lady Delacour with both Belinda and her estranged husband, and Lady Delacour struggles to reconcile Belinda with Clarence Hervey, particularly his mysterious relationship with Virginia St. Pierre. Lady Delacour shows Belinda the letters she has received from Clarence during his equally mysterious journey through Dorset and Devonshire. Focusing on his description of a happy marriage, designed to encourage Lady Delacour's rapprochement with her Lord, she comments that:

I take it all in good part, because, to do Clarence justice, he describes the joys of domestic Paradise in such elegant language, that he does not make me sick. In short my dear Belinda, to finish my panegyric, as it has been said of some other epistles, if ever there were letters calculated to make you fall in love with the writer of them, these are they. (211)

These last lines deliberately echo Godwin's assessment of Wollstonecraft's Letters from Sweden: 'If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book'.<sup>44</sup> Edgeworth plays with gender categories here, allowing Lady Delacour to perform Godwin's role of seduced critic and placing Hervey in Wollstonecraft's position as seductive letter writer. Edgeworth's playful, literary allusions to Godwin here differentiate her from both Hamilton's critique of Godwinian political philosophy as dangerous and damaging to established social structures in Modern Philosophers and Opie's satire of Godwin's anti-marital arguments in Adeline Mowbray. Aligning Lady Delacour with Godwin reveals her radical inheritance, underscoring her threat to social structures of stability and making Edgeworth's decision to redeem her at the end of the novel intriguing. On the other

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<sup>44</sup> Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol 1, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), 122.

hand, Lady Delacour seems distinctly anti-Godwinian. Godwin argued for sincerity, candour and a strict adherence to truth throughout his writing career, whereas Lady Delacour seems to value artifice above nature: throughout the novel, Lady Delacour argues for the importance of keeping up appearances and maintaining a fashionable façade. In the end, what Edgeworth offers in *Lady Delacour* is her reimagining of the Godwinian hero, unreliable, complex, and conflicted, as heroine – reenergising the revolutionary nostalgia in Godwin’s portrait of Marguerite de Damville in the more active, compelling and finally elusive Lady Delacour.

Although Edgeworth reveals the social costs of this artificiality – Lady Delacour’s happy exterior belies a profoundly miserable woman – the novel remains as suspicious as Lady Delacour is of naturalness. Clarence Hervey’s desire to educate his ward, Virginia St Pierre, as a natural woman is revealed to be wishful thinking – a male sexual fantasy. First of all, Hervey changes his ward’s name from Rachel to Virginia after an exemplary fictional woman, which, as Edgeworth makes clear, reveals the fictive nature of Hervey’s enterprise. Secondly, Hervey refuses to educate Virginia about the fashionable world, keeping her in splendid isolation. In this isolation, Virginia reads romances which encourage her febrile imagination to invent her own sexual fantasy, then feel guilty for not being attracted to the neglectful Hervey. Finally, by explicitly referring to Hervey’s Rousseauvian antecedents, including the Edgeworths’ family friend Thomas Day’s experiments with creating ideal women, Edgeworth shows up Hervey’s desire to create a natural woman to be following just the sort of fashion he sought to avoid.

Lady Delacour takes on an explicitly metatextual role in the novel’s final scenes, asking the other characters, the reader of the novel, and perhaps Edgeworth

herself: 'shall I finish the novel for you?' (Belinda, 364), and concluding by manipulating the various characters into a deliberately staged tableau:

'Yes,' said her ladyship; 'it is so difficult, as the critic says, to get lovers off upon their knees. Now I think of it let me place you all in proper attitudes for stage effect. What signifies being happy, unless we appear so? – Captain Sunderland – kneeling with Virginia, if you please, sir, at her father's feet – You in the act of giving your blessing, Mr. Hartley – Mrs. Ormond clasps her hands with joy – Nothing can be better than that, madam – I give you infinite credit for the attitude – Clarence, you have a right to Belinda's hand, and may kiss it too – Nay, miss Portman, it is the rule of the stage. Now, where's my lord Delacour? – He should be embracing me, to show that we are reconciled. Ha! here he comes – Enter lord Delacour, with little Helena in his hand – Very well! a good start of surprise, my lord – Stand still, pray, you cannot be better than you are – Helena, my love, do not let go your father's hand – There! quite pretty and natural! – Now, lady Delacour, to show that she is reformed, comes forward to address the audience with a moral – a moral! – yes,  
Our tale contains a moral, and, no doubt,  
You all have wit enough to find it out.' (365-6)

As Egenolf points out, although Lady Delacour gestures towards her new, willing subordination to her husband, she actually commands him to stay with his daughter, remaining centre stage herself. By doing so, she 'avoids the controlling domestic structure of the scene and unsettles the familial stability of this tableau vivant' (The Art of Political Fiction, 102). Contrary to Greenfield's reading of Lady Delacour as inhabiting the role of 'proper lady' in this conclusion, she escapes from the domestic plot of Edgeworth's finale, leaving the text's anxieties open to the reader's own interpretation. Belinda and Harriet, as contrasting representations of the female philosopher figure, are sidelined in this final scene in favour of Lady Delacour, offering Edgeworth's alternative reading of the thinking woman, dominant, contradictory, and performative.

Claudia Johnson concludes her analysis of Frances Burney's 1814 novel The Wanderer by stating that Burney 'attempts to rewrite The Wrongs of Woman by

vindicating those wrongs, by upholding traditional notions of gender even as her own novel protests them, and by deferring our happiness to another time; but it finally succeeds only at witnessing the unnegotiable DIFFICULTY of gender itself'.<sup>45</sup> Opie, Hamilton and Edgeworth's novels, which Johnson sees as precursors of Burney's belated entry into the troubled genre of Wollstonecraft reception studies, each struggle to rewrite not only the revolutionary feminism of Wollstonecraft's last novel but also the reactionary response to Wollstonecraft herself. The unfinished nature of Maria opens the novel to various interpretations: radical critique of socio-sexual hypocrisy, psychological exploration of the networks of feeling between communities of women, or dangerously erotic apologia for adultery. The interpretative freedom of Wollstonecraft's text results in a hermeneutics of suspicion in Opie, Hamilton and Edgeworth's novels. All of which strive to show the difficulties inherent in any act of interpretation, whilst at the same time being fissured with contradictory impulses themselves. These novelists both condemn and sympathise with Wollstonecraft's troubled life and struggle with the legacy of her radical philosophy. They are split between upholding traditional socio-sexual hierarchies and challenging their claims to virtue, propriety and decorum.

In these early nineteenth century, post-revolutionary novels, the female philosopher figure from the 1790s, with her sexually and socially destabilising revolutionary background, is neutralised by either being killed off, disfigured, forced back into domesticity, or represented in a deliberately domestic manner. These sanitising strategies allow for the subtle reintroduction of Wollstonecraft's political and philosophical arguments in each of these novels, driving forwards their informed

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<sup>45</sup> Claudia Johnson, Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 188.

social critiques of the hypocrisies at the heart of the marriage market and of the burgeoning consumer society. In Edgeworth's Belinda, the rehabilitation of Lady Delacour also offers a way out of the dilemma of representing the female philosopher, by granting agency to a woman who remains tantalisingly outside traditional categorisations of domesticity: she gestures towards her new roles of devoted wife and doting mother while commanding them to remain in their places, staying centre stage herself.

#### IV: England in Eighteen Hundred and Fourteen: Jane Austen and Frances Burney's Post-Jacobin Novels

##### 1) Introduction: 'Our Tempestuous Day'

Published nearly twenty years after Mary Wollstonecraft's death, Jane Austen's Mansfield Park and Frances Burney's The Wanderer (both 1814) engage with the textual legacy of Wollstonecraft's revolutionary life and work in the 1790s and with the post-revolutionary context of the 1810s in which they were written. Austen and Burney both utilise and disavow Wollstonecraft's radical analysis of the cultural forces which shape individual character in society in order to create a space in their texts for societal critique. They focus on the psychological costs of social inclusion, whilst stressing the need for national stability in the closing stages of war with Napoleonic France. Burney's novel explicitly distances her own writing from Wollstonecraft's by including a partially caricatured pseudo-Wollstonecraftian anti-heroine, Elinor Joddrel, who serves a similar function to characters in earlier texts, such as Bridgetina Botherim in Hamilton's Modern Philosophers and Harriet Freke in Edgeworth's Belinda. The Wanderer's engagement with earlier stereotypes contributes to its contemporary – and modern – critical reception as an anachronism. Austen implicitly distances herself from Wollstonecraft's political philosophy by not only refraining from reference to Wollstonecraft's life and work in any of her novels but also taking a deliberately ambiguous stance towards both politics and philosophy throughout her writing career. Nevertheless, both novels reveal the way in which Wollstonecraft's radical analysis of the impact of deficient education on women's character and opportunities permeated early nineteenth-century women's writing, as

Austen and Burney draw on her ideas and develop them for the post-revolutionary context of England in 1814.

The year 1814 is of literary and historical significance to my thesis, firstly, as it represents the previously acknowledged limit of the influence of the female philosopher on women's writing<sup>1</sup>; secondly, as several works by women writers are published in the year, sharing a set of similar concerns; and thirdly, as the historical settings of Burney and Austen's novels allow them space to comment on contemporary political, social and cultural issues. Alongside Austen and Burney's novels, 1814 saw the publication of Mary Brunton's Discipline and Maria Edgeworth's Patronage, each novel sharing with the others a concern for women's role in society, anxieties about the limits of female performance, and an engagement with the political, social and cultural context within which these texts were written. The publication of Walter Scott's Waverley also obviously makes 1814 a richly literary year, connecting historical concerns with the contemporary situation of Scotland in the novel's subtitle 'Tis Sixty Years Since. Like Scott, Austen and Burney use the historical settings of their novels, explicit in Burney and deliberately vague in Austen, to comment on contemporary concerns.

In 1814, England was still a year away from winning the war with Napoleonic France; this long war, spanning from the late 1790s until Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo, had far-reaching consequences on life in Britain. The government tightened regulations on freedom of expression, with party-led propaganda machines, such as The Anti-Jacobin Review, linking obedience to patriotism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Claudia Johnson, Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>2</sup> See Kevin Gilmartin, Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism, 1790-1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) for an analysis of the reactionary print culture of the early

Growing concerns about the war's high military and economic costs were treated as unpatriotic dissidence. Social unrest, amongst working class and radical factions, protesting against high taxes, low living standards, and an electoral system which excluded them, was policed increasingly violently.<sup>3</sup> The conflict's high military and monetary costs for Britain prompted Barbauld's apocalyptic vision of the ruins of a bankrupt country, haunted by its war-dead, in her satirical poem Eighteen Hundred and Eleven (1812). The poem opens with a vision of continental Europe falling under the yoke of tyranny:

Colossal Power with overwhelming force  
Bears down each fort of Freedom in its course;  
Prostrate she lies beneath the Despot's sway,  
While the hushed nations curse him—and obey.<sup>4</sup>

Barbauld's confrontation between tyranny and liberty, envisaged on a continental scale, echoes in Burney's attempt to connect an individual woman's desire to live independently with the terrifying exigencies of the French Revolution and in Austen's smaller scale focus on an individual woman's hushed obedience to a power experienced as colossal. Barbauld's poem was harshly reviewed for its lack of patriotism, amounting to disloyalty in time of war. John Wilson Croker, in his review of the poem for the Quarterly, explicitly attacked Barbauld as a woman writer straying into the 'male' genre of historical poetry.<sup>5</sup> Women writing about the historical moment were seen as overstepping an implicit political boundary, troubling the

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nineteenth century, and its strategies to bolster a patriotic sense of nationhood against revolutionary concerns.

<sup>3</sup> For the impact of the Napoleonic wars on English society, see, for example, E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London: Penguin, 1991) for a seminal analysis of the development of radical and artisan movements after the French Revolution.

<sup>4</sup> Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Eighteen Hundred and Eleven in The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, with a Memoir by Lucy Aiken, ed. Lucy Aiken. Vol. 1 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), 232, lines 7-10.

<sup>5</sup> See James Chandler, England in 1819 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) for a detailed analysis of the reception of Barbauld's poem, 114-15.

reception of Burney's novel which explores the personal and political repercussions of the French Revolution on Britain and prompting Austen to leave the chronology of Mansfield Park deliberately vague, although events clearly occur around the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>6</sup> The abolition movement, although hailed as a moral success, had economic implications for English estates dependent on the free flow of slave labour, explored in Austen's treatment of the moral and economic failings of the Bertram family.<sup>7</sup> The financial aftershocks of war also threatened social stability, with the late 1800s and early 1810s seeing the rise of radical protest amongst the working classes. Working class radicalism triggered military violence, culminating in the Peterloo massacre of 1819. This event is protested against in Percy Bysshe Shelley's sonnet 'England in 1819', sharply criticising the royal dissolution, political stagnation and police violence of 'our tempestuous day'.<sup>8</sup> Although Austen and Burney are both more conservative than either the explicitly radical Shelley or the challenging, dissenting Barbauld, their novels share elements of the poets' trenchant

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<sup>6</sup> R. W. Chapman, in his 1923 edition of the works of Jane Austen, dates the action of the middle section of Mansfield Park from Fanny Price's coming-out ball on 22 December, with the calendar of 1808-9. Brian Southam has argued that the later dates of 1812-3 are more likely, based on a reference to 'Crabbe's Tales', referring to George Crabbe's Tales in Verse, published 1812. See John Wiltshire, 'Introduction' to Mansfield Park, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xliii-xlv, for a discussion of these issues. Wiltshire sides with Chapman's views, but concludes 'It is certainly after the abolition of the slave trade, but I do not believe that Jane Austen meant the reader to recognise that the action took place in a precise year or years', xlv.

<sup>7</sup> Criticism analysing Austen's position in relation to abolition forms a subset in the vast body of research on the social, political, economic and cultural repercussions of the slave trade and the abolition movement. For Austen's position on this issue, discussed in more detail below, see, for example, Edward Said, Katie Trumpener, and the collection, The Post-Colonial Jane Austen, eds. You-Me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004). For the wider implications of slavery and abolition, see, for example, Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (London: André Deutsch, 1944) and more modern responses, such as Seymour Drescher, Capitalism and Antislavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). For feminist criticism analysing the intersection of abolitionist and feminist concerns in the eighteenth century, see, for example, Deirdre Coleman, 'Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women's Protest Writing in the 1790s' ELH 61.2 (1984), 341-62 and Felicity Nussbaum, Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'England in 1819' in The Poems of Shelley, vol. 3: 1819-20, eds. Jack Donovan et al. (Harlow: Longman, 2011), 192, line 14.

social criticism, revealing the striking continuities between writers of different political persuasions in the ways in which each of these distinct writers negotiated the post-revolutionary landscape of early nineteenth-century politics, social reform and generic limitations.

Peter Knox-Shaw's connection between Austen's earlier novel Sense and Sensibility (1811) and William Godwin's 1799 novel St. Leon as Post-Jacobin texts (see chapter 2, above) draws out the two authors' shared concerns over the development of the individual in relation to society and for social stability in the post-revolutionary era. Knox-Shaw argues that Austen is influenced more by the sceptical tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment than the Anti-Jacobin writing with which Marilyn Butler influentially aligns her. He uses the term Post-Jacobin to align Austen's seemingly conservative concerns with Godwin's, read as dangerously radical at the time, in order to 'point to the moderate, even liberal character of Jane Austen's stance among her contemporaries'.<sup>9</sup> In my view, Post-Jacobinism includes a variety of writers on a liberal spectrum, from a progressive position aligned with radicalism against reaction, for example Godwin's St. Leon, to a moderate one, which is more conservative, which includes works by Opie and Hamilton discussed in my third chapter, and I argue, Burney and Austen's novels. I suggest that the lack of critical consensus over the political allegiances expressed in Burney's The Wanderer and Austen's Mansfield Park, in which both novels have been positioned as sympathetically radical or satirically conservative, can, to some extent, be resolved by describing them as Post-Jacobin, containing an uneasy mixture of radical sympathy and conservative satire, held in suspension within a liberal

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Knox-Shaw, Jane Austen and the Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 130.

solution.<sup>10</sup> Both Austen and Burney, like Godwin in St. Leon and the authors studied in my last chapter, struggle to utilise revolutionary arguments critiquing existing social structures in order to articulate the need for gradual reform in a post-revolutionary political environment which remained highly suspicious of ‘Jacobin’ philosophical ideals.

## 2) ‘FEMALE DIFFICULTIES’: The Wanderer

Burney’s critical account of the French Revolution, her inclusion of a satirically pseudo-feminist anti-heroine, and her explicit interest in hierarchy, status and wealth in The Wanderer seem to align the novel with Grenby’s account of Anti-Jacobin fiction.<sup>11</sup> Rather than reading the novel as explicitly Anti-Jacobin, Claudia Johnson attacks the novel as a muddle-headed conservative apologia for social inequality, displaying ‘a wish to protest the effects of social injustice while making sure that the social structures, customs, and attitudes that produced them remain intact’.<sup>12</sup> I argue that Burney’s desire to preserve the ‘social structures, customs, and attitudes’

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<sup>10</sup> Contemporary reviews of The Wanderer expressed uneasiness about its political engagement with the French Revolution, with the Critical Review, for example, situating the novel as an anachronism: ‘the sympathy excited by this order of incident is gone by’ (Critical Review, 4<sup>th</sup> series, 5 (April 1814), 408). The modern reception of Mansfield Park, in particular, struggles over the novel’s political orientation, as discussed further below. See Vivien Jones, ‘Post-feminist Austen’ Critical Quarterly 52.4, 65-82, for her opening comparison of The Wanderer with Mansfield Park and her thought-provoking categorisation of Austen as post-feminist, which shares elements of my Post-Jacobin analysis of the novel, but concludes that Austen is essentially a conservative satirist, whereas I argue that her satire is considerably more double-edged and less conservative, particularly when contrasted with the concerns of her much more obviously conservative contemporary, Hannah More.

<sup>11</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, Matthew Grenby distils three rhetorical strategies shared by Anti-Jacobin writing from his overview of conservative fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: firstly, to ‘display the Revolution in France in all its horror’; secondly, ‘to caricature the ‘new philosophy’ of the British radicals, to show their utopian schemes as, first, chimerical and second, productive only of evil’; and thirdly, to ‘appeal directly to the fears of their overwhelmingly middle- and upper-class readers, possessive of their property and jealous of their social standing, by exposing Jacobinism as a ruthless assault on hierarchy, status and wealth’, (The Anti-Jacobin Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11-12).

<sup>12</sup> Claudia Johnson, Equivocal Beings Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170. Subsequent references, in-text.

alongside her critique of social injustice can be construed more generously as the tension produced by conflicting desires – for stability and reform. This tension is a product of the novel's Post-Jacobinism: although the novel is set in the French Revolution, that era of unprecedented movement within seemingly solid social structures, it was published at a time which greatly felt the need for increased, even rigid, social stability. Burney's conservative desire to preserve social structures certainly differentiates her politics from Shelley's radicalism, intent on overturning existing culture, but, I argue, does not mark her out as a straightforwardly Anti-Jacobin writer. Post-Jacobinism is in some respects a more conservative discourse than the English Jacobin ideology it supersedes, but it is also concerned about the costs of conservatism. Its focus on gradual reform also allows for a more liberal position than Anti-Jacobin ideology allows. Indeed, The Wanderer analyses not only the costs of political upheaval in the form of the French Revolution but the related costs of greater social cohesion – the paranoid demand for unquestioning patriotism – within island Britain in response to continent-wide disturbance. The novel's interest in tracing the costs of this inclusivity aligns it with Godwin's Post-Jacobin novel, St. Leon, discussed in chapter 2, revealing the damage done by institutions to individual consciences and suggesting methods for gradual reform.

Burney grounds her evaluation of the social consequences of Britain's troubled response to the French Revolution on the level of an individual woman's experience of suspicion, gossip and ignorance, particularly within the realm of paid labour. Opposing Johnson's frustrated criticism of The Wanderer, Margaret Anne Doody defends Burney's novel, arguing that its 'detailed presentation of the life of the working woman was at the end of the century associated with liberal or radical women writers such as Inchbald, Hays, and Wollstonecraft. In undertaking the

subject, Burney was... entering the domain of the radical women and in effect allying herself with them'.<sup>13</sup> Doody emphasises what Johnson neglects: Burney's radical representation of women's work, tracing her heroine's descent from the relatively bourgeois occupation of lady's companion, through the ambivalent social position of (unwilling) actress, poorly paid music teacher, singer, into the lower class jobs of milliner and mantua maker, concluding with her itinerant status amongst rural labourers. Far from a conservative celebration of existing social structures, Burney explores the deadening effects of women's work, not simply as offensive to the actually aristocratic Juliet Granville's sensibilities but on the various female workforces Ellis meets on her way down the social strata, in what Doody claims is a prophetic analysis of workers' 'alienation' (356).<sup>14</sup> Doody's attempt to claim Burney as a radical writer is somewhat undermined in The Wanderer by the imposition of Ellis's happy ending on the narrative: recognised by her aristocratic family, married to her somewhat ambivalent lover, and returned to her position as lady of leisure. Ellis's banishment of the female furies who have hounded her steps through post-revolutionary Britain provides a satisfying conclusion to her personal trials but not to the wider social ills trenchantly diagnosed by Burney throughout the rest of the novel. Burney struggles to connect Ellis's immediate experience of oppression with the paranoid malaise characterising the response to revolution across the British public sphere. Johnson complains that the novel's 'ambition is to bring the heroine's

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret Anne Doody, Frances Burney: The Life in the Works (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 351. Subsequent references in-text.

<sup>14</sup> Burney's heroine, nameless at the beginning of the narrative, called Ellis after some confusion about her enquiry concerning a missing letter addressed to L.S., and finally revealed to be Juliet Granville several hundred pages into the novel, presents a deliberate difficulty as to how to name her. To avoid the awkwardness of 'Ellis / Juliet', and to stress the artificial quality Burney suggests is already inherent in women's names, I will use 'Ellis' throughout this chapter, unless quoting material which refers to her differently, or discussing her contested aristocratic origins as 'Juliet Granville'.

tribulation into conjunction with the upheaval of the French Revolution and its aftermath in England. Its failure is that it cannot finally determine a consistent basis on which to do so' (Equivocal Beings, 166). The drive to incorporate the tumultuous events of the Revolution into a coherent narrative, based on an individual's experience of historical change, characterises the Post-Jacobin literature I discuss. That Burney, ultimately, does not succeed in determining a consistent basis on which to balance these issues does not lessen her aims to do so. In my reading of The Wanderer, I focus on Burney's problematic bridging of the personal and the political, arguing that her political allegiances are less clear cut than either Johnson, who would pin her down as essentially conservative, or Doody, who wants to make her radical, allow.

Johnson's problem with The Wanderer, which is really Burney's problem, and Doody's as well, is the gap between the huge political events alluded to in the novel and Ellis's smaller personal problems, which Burney wants to use to comment on these wider political concerns. Burney is unable to 'determine a consistent basis' on which to bridge the gap between the generic plot of the eighteenth-century novel of courtship and marriage on one side and the aftermath of the French Revolution on the other. This is not just Burney's problem, but an aesthetic question facing novelists at the beginning of the nineteenth century, particularly women writers, including Austen, to whom the courtship plot is the permissible expression of female desire within the public sphere. In other words, Burney, along with other women writers of the early nineteenth century, is struggling to enunciate the crucial feminist argument that the personal is political, at a time when the personal and political were

increasingly divided into separate private and public spheres.<sup>15</sup> Burney's awareness that the personal is political clashes with Britain's post-revolutionary desire to separate the personal from the political, marking the personal as safely domestic and feminine. This gap between the private sphere and the public sphere of political action, and women writers' aesthetic strategies for dealing with it, creates the uncertain space in women's writing of the early nineteenth century, in which accusations of subversive radicalism in contemporary reviews and satirical conservatism in modern criticism can be levelled at the same writers about the same novel.

The fissure between private and public in The Wanderer is both alluded to and rejected in Burney's prefatory dedication to her father. Burney plays down the difficulty she had in travelling with the manuscript of her novel from France to England, instead celebrating 'the honour and liberality of both nations' for allowing her papers's safe passage 'upon my given word that the papers contained neither letters, nor political writings; but simply a work of invention and observation'.<sup>16</sup> Burney explicitly rejects the idea that her manuscript would constitute 'political writings' at the same time as making the implicitly political point, at a time when England was engaged in a bloody war with France, that both nations are honourable and liberal. Her disingenuous appeal to readers 'who expect to find here materials for political controversy; or fresh food for national animosity; must turn elsewhere

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Michael McKeon, The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private and the Division of Knowledge (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007) for a detailed reading of the shifting significance of public and private spheres throughout the long eighteenth century. In his analysis of Austen's Pride and Prejudice, McKeon argues that 'the vexed relationship between family and the state... has been decisively internalized and privatized within the realm of the family' (692), a rhetorical strategy Austen further explores and problematizes in Mansfield Park. Arguably, the distinction between Burney and Austen is that Burney foregrounds these issues in the external world of work, with a heroine forced outside of the family environment.

<sup>16</sup> Frances Burney, The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties (1814) (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1991), 5. Subsequent references in-text.

their disappointed eyes' seems to reject the political element of her novel. However, her description of The Wanderer as 'a composition upon general life, manners and characters; without any species of personality, either in the form of foreign influence, or of national partiality' (The Wanderer, 5) implicitly reintroduces political argument to the novel: a work which rejects 'national partiality' along with 'foreign influence' is already making a political point, laying the groundwork for Burney's critique of Britain's paralysed social hierarchy.

The Wanderer begins in revolutionary France, 'During the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre' (11), on board a ship of English passengers escaping to England. Reluctantly rescuing a nameless, disguised, seemingly black (and injured) woman with a French accent, they embark – rudely discussing the identity of their uninvited guest. Burney focuses on questions of identity at the opening of her novel, by withholding the names of the English passengers, all of whom will become central characters in the unknown woman's life in England, until they are revealed in dialogue. This innovative technique stresses the lack of fixed identity of the woman Elinor Joddrel calls the Incognita: Ellis remains incognito, even to the reader, for the majority of the novel. Later, Ellis herself, in a rare moment of complaint, although silent and private, pinpoints the difficulties inherent in women's lack of fixed identity. She exclaims:

how insufficient... is a FEMALE to herself! How utterly dependant upon situation – connexions – circumstance! how nameless, how for ever fresh-springing are her DIFFICULTIES, when she would owe her existence to her own exertions! Her conduct is criticised, not scrutinized; her character is censured, not examined; her labours are unhonoured, and her qualifications are but lures to ill will! Calumny hovers over her head, and slander follows her footsteps! (The Wanderer, 275)

Burney seeks to generalise Ellis's particular lack of identity here into one of the FEMALE DIFFICULTIES of the novel's subtitle: any female, not just Ellis, is insufficient to herself because she depends for her identity on her social context: her 'situation – connexions – circumstance!' Her difficulties are not only 'nameless' but circle around her namelessness. In Ellis's complaint, Burney also suggests the moral direction of her novel: as readers, unlike the characters in the novel, we are expected to scrutinise Ellis's conduct, examine her character and honour her labours, independent of her actual status as the aristocratic Juliet Granville.

Burney's withholding of her heroine's name forces her reader to consider Ellis's individual actions within society, implying support for Ellis and criticism of that society's hypocrisy. Katharine Rogers notes that 'calling these difficulties "female" suggests some inherent weakness in woman; but both content and context show that they are caused by social attitudes and conditions'.<sup>17</sup> Ellis clearly separates ideas of women's weakness from these FEMALE DIFFICULTIES, helpfully emphasised by Burney here. Ellis's 'situation – connexions – circumstance', or lack thereof, each collude to obstruct her own exertions. She makes clear that her conduct, character, labour and qualifications would allow her to exert herself for her own good, but each trait is liable to social abuse. This is the closest Ellis gets to complaining in the novel, and even on her own feels she must check herself: 'candour, the reigning feature of her mind, repressed her murmurs. Involved as I am in darkness and obscurity, she cried, ought I to expect a milder judgement? No! I have no right to complain. Appearances are against me; and to appearances are we not all either victims or dupes?' (*The Wanderer*, 275). Whereas Ellis struggles to repress her complaint,

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<sup>17</sup> Katherine Rogers, *Frances Burney: The World of 'Female Difficulties'* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 136.

Burney allows her readers to see the justness of her heroine's reasoning. Even if Ellis is involved in darkness and obscurity, her arguments that her conduct should be scrutinized not criticised, and so forth, still hold true. Ellis's analysis of the importance of appearance, therefore, is undercut by her earlier complaint: society's focus on appearance is figured as one of the female difficulties with which she has to contend.

Burney confronts the feminist implications of the contradictions inherent in the gendered expectations of female behaviour directly in her exploration of Wollstonecraft's life and work throughout The Wanderer. Jennifer Golightly, Tara Ghoshal Wallace, and Jodi Wyatt each argue that Burney divides her treatment of Wollstonecraft into a focus on her notorious life, through Elinor's radical arguments and hysterical behaviour, and a more sympathetic use of her textual arguments, through Ellis's experiences descending through the English class structure, encountering bias and prejudice at every turn.<sup>18</sup> This develops Doody's contention that Elinor resembles Hays' Emma Courtney more than Wollstonecraft (Frances Burney, 337-8), allowing a freer movement of Burney's appropriation of Wollstonecraft's ideas over the whole text of the novel. In any case, Elinor voices Wollstonecraftian arguments in the text when Ellis remains stoically, perhaps stubbornly, silent; further, many of Elinor's points are left unanswered, her fervour for revolutionary ideals allowed a remit for criticism of English inequalities. Burney criticises Elinor's behaviour and lack of religious feeling, but many of her political arguments are allowed to stand unchallenged. Indeed, Elinor's arguments, separated

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<sup>18</sup> Unpublished papers given at the ASECS 2010 panel, 'The Contrary Marys: The Fictionalizing of Wollstonecraft': Jennifer Golightly: 'Where in The Wanderer is Wollstonecraft? Radicalism, Feminism, and Jacobinism in 1814'; Tara Ghoshal Wallace: 'Self and Text: Wollstonecraft in Burney's The Wanderer'; Jodi Wyatt: 'Re-making Mary: Figuring "Female Difficulties" in Frances Burney's The Wanderer'.

from her self-destructive desire for Albert Harleigh, are often indirectly proved by Ellis's experiences.

Burney satirises the way in which Elinor co-opts revolutionary feminism as a rationalisation for her desire, aligning the novel with Hamilton's critique of Hays' Emma Courtney. However, Burney moves beyond Hamilton's satire, firstly by making Elinor a more complex and sympathetic character than Bridgetina Botherim, and secondly, by privileging several of Elinor's political points through Ellis's experiences. For, example, in her revolutionary rationalisation of her illicit desire, she accuses Harleigh that he has 'long since, in common with every man that breathes, wished exploded, the Rights of woman', which she goes on to defend: 'Rights, however, which all your sex, with all its arbitrary assumption of superiority, can never disprove, for they are the Rights of human nature; to which the two sexes equally and unalienably belong' (The Wanderer, 175). Burney's satire here is double-edged: Elinor's coupling of women's rights to her explicitly sexual desire for Harleigh foregrounds her link to Anti-Jacobin caricatures of Wollstonecraft and Hays; the way in which she extends her discussion of women's rights to human rights ties into one of Burney's serious points in the novel, turning the satire which seems to be directed at Elinor onto men like Harleigh, and onto the social system which legitimises men's 'arbitrary assumption of superiority'.

Elinor's discussion of women's rights marks her first gesture towards committing suicide. She has demanded an audience with both Albert Harleigh, the object of her affections, and Ellis, whom she suspects is in turn the object of Harleigh's. Her intention is to announce her love for Harleigh and also to discover if her suspicions are correct, carrying a poniard to threaten suicide if her hopes are dashed. Burney's coupling of feminist arguments with the threat of suicide is more

melodramatic than satirical here, tracing the personal costs of political engagement: Elinor's radical politics are coupled with her revolutionary desires in a way which makes both self-destructive, but only in terms of the existing separation between private and public spheres in society. Elinor's suicide attempts, which punctuate the narrative of The Wanderer, can be read as an allusion to Wollstonecraft's own despairing attempts to take her life. However, Burney stresses the theatrical, performative element in Elinor's gestures towards suicide, distinct from Godwin's serious treatment of Wollstonecraft's decisions in his Memoirs.

Elinor complains about the social restrictions placed on women which degrade them, rendering them 'sleepy, slavish, uninteresting automatons' (177) rather than companionate wives or useful mothers. In a long harangue, Elinor challenges Harleigh with a series of questions duplicating revolutionary arguments about the position of women in society, asking, firstly, why men alone have 'been supposed to possess, not only force and power for action and defence, but even all the rights of taste', secondly, 'Why... not alone to be denied deliberating upon the safety of the state of which she [woman] is a member... must even her heart be circumscribed by boundaries as narrow as her sphere of action in life'; and concluding, with the exclamation: 'And do you, even you, Harleigh, despise unbidden love!' (177). Elinor makes a series of linked arguments here: first she attacks men's assumption of force in general but especially in relation to the marriage market, then she critiques the political inequality inherent in women's lack of suffrage, coupling these to the implicit policing of women's desire in society, particularly the prohibition on women's language itself: 'Must every thing that she says, be limited to what has been said before?' (177). In response to Elinor's expression of her revolutionary desires, Harleigh responds, 'No, Elinor, no! – if I durst tell you what I think of it – ' / He stopt,

embarrassed' (177). Elinor's arguments are allowed to stand; Harleigh's stuttering reply acquiesces to her points, shows exactly his lack of daring, and ends on his embarrassing inability to reply to Elinor's revolutionary language.

Elinor's political arguments for women's rights are undermined by her treatment of Ellis in her stage-managed suicide attempt. After declaring her revolutionary passion to Albert Harleigh, as Hays' Emma Courtney had to her Augustus Harley<sup>19</sup>, Elinor (rightly) suspects Harleigh's lukewarm response means that he is already in love with Ellis. She manipulates Harleigh into revealing his unspoken desire for Ellis, embarrassing both of her friends into blushes which she reads as recriminatory. Haranguing Harleigh, she abuses Ellis: 'Oh, Harleigh! Harleigh! ... to what a chimera you have given your heart! to an existence unintelligible, a character unfathomable, a creature of imagination, though visible!' continuing, 'Oh, Harleigh! how is it you thus can love all you were wont to scorn? double dealing, false appearances, and lurking disguise! without a family she dare claim, without a story she dare tell, without a name she dare avow!' (181). Elinor cruelly pinpoints not only the difficulties which beset Harleigh's relationship with Ellis, but Ellis's dilemma in relation to her situation in Britain: nameless and without story or family. Her focus on Ellis's lack of social position, having neither a name nor a family she can avow, shows Elinor's investment in the social structures her revolutionary ideals ought to reject. Elinor's emotional blackmail of Harleigh and Ellis, climaxing in her threatening to kill herself, which Ellis avoids by promising that she can never marry Harleigh, reveals the selfishness underneath her revolutionary

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<sup>19</sup> Doody notes the seemingly deliberate similarity in the names of Hays's and Burney's ambivalent heroes, *Frances Burney* 337.

polemic: she is not campaigning for the rights of woman, but only for her rights as a woman.

Elinor's second suicide attempt emphasises the staginess, selfishness and scorn for Ellis of the first. Elinor interrupts Ellis's benefit concert, meaning to disrupt Ellis's big moment although it actually saves her from the humiliation of the event, by stabbing herself in the breast. She had disguised herself as a mute gentleman, flinging off this disguise to reveal herself 'in deep mourning' (359), calling to Harleigh and cursing Ellis, and refusing medical attention. Burney underscores both Elinor's desperation and her theatrical performance, in some sense wanting to outdo Ellis, throughout this scene. Nora Nachumi analyses the way in which The Wanderer 'dramatizes the performative nature of female experience, and in doing so, denaturalizes simple equations between the heroine's essential self and how she appears'.<sup>20</sup> She reads Ellis's performances as showing that her 'ability to act like a lady in a theatrical sense consequently collapses the difference between on stage and off, suggesting that one is every bit as much of a stage as the other' (Acting Like a Lady, 140). This underplays Burney's, and her heroine's, anxieties surrounding female performance: their awareness of the performativity of female nature sits uncomfortably with their desire for their audiences to see beyond social construction to inner character. Nachumi argues that Burney's focus on appearance urges her readers to realise that Ellis 'is a heroine because of her character rather than by virtue of her family and name', although she also points out that Burney fails to realise this concept fully, due to her 'inability to accurately represent the inner life of [her] heroine' (142). I argue that Burney's focus on appearance is an attempt to

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<sup>20</sup> Nora Nachumi, Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-Century Theater (New York: AMS Press, 2008), 137. Subsequent references, in-text.

bridge the personal and political, by forcing her individual heroine into public space, divided from her family and name. Burney's focus on Ellis's public reception, rather than revealing her 'inner life' asks her readers to receive Ellis in a different way from how the characters in the novel read her character and actions.

When Ellis visits Elinor during her somewhat unwilling convalescence, Elinor denigrates Ellis's pleading the 'severe DIFFICULTIES of a FEMALE, who, without fortune or protection, had her way to make in the world' (397). Elinor derides this: 'Debility and folly! Put aside your prejudices, and forget that you are a dawdling woman, to remember that you are an active human being, and your FEMALE DIFFICULTIES will vanish into the vapour of which they are formed' (397). Elinor's attack on FEMALE DIFFICULTIES ironically anticipates Hazlitt's review of The Wanderer in which he describes them as 'created out of nothing' (see below). Burney ironises Elinor's criticisms here, suggesting Elinor's hypocrisy through her own debility and folly as she is recuperating from her suicide attempt. It is Ellis who is active throughout The Wanderer, and Elinor who seems to dawdle, and it is Ellis who discovers that her humanity is always subordinated to her womanhood in her experience of British society in the 1790s. Burney's ironic stance towards Elinor also suggests the limits of the revolutionary politics she espouses. Elinor's seemingly feminist arguments often depend for their rhetorical power on denigrating other women. Instead of ameliorating the position of women in society, Burney suggests through Elinor's facile assumption that the opportunities given to her as a leisured woman are open to everyone that such class bias disrupts feminist goals.

Elinor's final suicide attempt is theatrically gothic. She again manipulates Harleigh and Ellis to meet with her, this time at a church, complete with her own headstone, proclaiming that, as she is 'sick of Life, of Love, and of Despair, / Dies to

moulder, and be forgotten' (579). This third attempt, including Elinor dressed in a shroud, a scuffle between her and Harleigh over a pistol, and Elinor's flight in mingled embarrassment and despair, takes up only a few pages of this immense novel, highlighting the way in which Burney has subordinated Elinor's grand moments to Ellis's more practical trials. Indeed, Burney uses Elinor's first attempt on her life to comment upon the difficulties in the relationship between Ellis and Harleigh, the second extricates Ellis from the humiliation of performing in public, which also involved Harleigh's threat that the act was immodest and would result in a decisive split between them, and the third takes place as Ellis makes the decision to leave Mrs. Ireton's service. It again comments ironically on Ellis and Harleigh's relationship, as Ellis has misread Elinor's forged note, thinking it from Gabriella and not from Harleigh, as Elinor intended. Ellis is shocked that Harleigh, on the other hand, has assumed his forged note to be from her. In this misrecognition, Burney punctures Elinor's jealous sense of the romance between Ellis and Harleigh: for Ellis, Harleigh is more and more of an obstruction, even as, or because, she struggles to deny her feelings for him.

If both Elinor and Harleigh are unhelpful to Ellis in various ways, Burney shows the value of female friendship through Ellis's relationship with Gabriella. Burney's innovation is to show the strength and depth of this relationship in French, translating the women's conversations in a series of lengthy footnotes. Burney's inclusion of the warmest, most supportive friendship, based on an equal footing, and expressed in the French language, challenges her disclaimer of any 'foreign influence' in her prefatory address. It also belies modern accusations of straightforward conservatism. Anti-Jacobin novels laboured to show the insidious effects of French sensibility on English patriotism, for example Julia's relationship with Vallaton in Hamilton's Modern

Philosophers. Here, Burney shows the strength of friendship in French in sharp contrast to the shallowness of the English relationships represented in the novel. Ellis and Gabriella work together, first in Brighthelmstone, then in London, after Gabriella is forced to move there to search for news of her husband.

After the drudgery of work in the milliner's shop and at the mantua-maker's, and the continual humiliation of working for Mrs Ireton, Ellis and Gabriella's collaboration seems at first to offer a refreshing alternative: 'Juliet, by the side of Gabriella, thought every employment delightful; Gabriella, in the society of Juliet, felt every exertion lightened, and every sorrow softened' (624). Ellis and Gabriella's collaboration is beset, however, by fraudulent customers, financial demands, and their own inexperience of business, and later on by the agents of Ellis's brutal French husband in his own collaboration with Lord Denmeath. Doody argues that 'By showing her two émigrées keeping a haberdasher's shop, Burney deliberately divests them of some of the glamour that could still hang about a heroine doing embroidery' (Frances Burney, 358). Burney strips away the glamour surrounding many instances of labour in the novel. However, she shows this work in the haberdasher's shop to be full of revolutionary potential, even as it is beset by both prosaically financial and more narrative-driven difficulties. Gabriella both laments and defends her work to the curious Sir Jaspar Herrington:

Ah, Sir, the French Revolution has opened our eyes to a species of equality more rational, because more feasible, than that of lands or of rank; an equality not alone of mental sufferings, but of manual exertions. No state of life, however low, or however hard, has been left untried, either by the highest, or by the most delicate, in the various dispersions and desolation of the ancient French nobility. (639)

Underneath Gabriella's bitter irony in this passage, there is a realisation that the acquisition of lands and rank is neither a rational nor a feasible route to equality. Her

complaint – ‘Alas! whence I come, all that are greatest, most ancient, and most noble, have learnt that self-exertion can alone mark nobility of soul; and that self-dependence can only sustain honour in adversity’ (639) – also includes a celebration of those Burneyan virtues of self-exertion and self-dependence. Gabriella laments the passing of the ancien régime at the same time as seeing the potential, however costly, of post-revolutionary life and work. Her comment on the ‘dispersions and desolation of the ancient French nobility’ also functions as a commentary on her friend Ellis’s trajectory through British social strata.

Burney’s third reiteration of female difficulties comes at the point in the novel when Ellis has fallen through the strata of English society and has been literally reduced to itinerant wandering. She meets a group of young women and enlists them to gain her a room in their parents’ house. Burney comments on the employment of these girls: ‘There was nothing in these young persons of sufficient “mark or livelihood” to make them attractive to Juliet; but she was glad to earn their good will; and not sorry to learn what were their occupations; conscious that a dearth of useful resources was a principal cause, in adversity, of FEMALE DIFFICULTIES’ (The Wanderer, 693). One of Burney’s feminist arguments in the novel focuses on the lack of opportunities for women to earn their own subsistence, and the concomitant injustices of working women’s treatment by both upper and lower class society. This section of the novel muses on the hard life of the farmer, the pleasures and perils of poaching, and on the terrible contingency of working women’s lives.

Ellis is finally tracked down by her brutal French husband and humiliated in front of Harleigh, who is paralysed by propriety into doing nothing to aid her obvious distress. Rescued instead by Sir Jaspar, Burney finally reveals the history of Ellis’s marriage: she has been coerced into a forced marriage in order to save her guardian

and protector the Bishop from the guillotine. The final section of The Wanderer anxiously works out ways for Ellis to escape this forced marriage and to marry instead Albert Harleigh. Johnson is scathingly critical of Burney's treatment of Ellis's first marriage:

We are assured, first, that her nuptial ceremony was secular, rushed, and curtailed; second, that she was forced into it; third, that she never consented to it even under compulsion; fourth, that the union was never consummated; and fifth, that her 'husband' is dead anyway. A textbook study in overdetermination, this surplus of explanation only confirms what the novel elsewhere challenges: a husband's right over the person of his wife. (Equivocal Beings, 168-9)

Johnson focuses on the narrative strain Ellis's forced marriage exerts on the rest of the novel, frustrated at Burney's need to exculpate her heroine. On the other hand, Burney encodes in this overdetermined textual strategy the strain on women in society to give in to sexual mores. The Admiral, revealed to be Ellis's uncle, tells her bluntly: 'For all I have no great goust to your marrying in that sort, God forbid I should uphold a wife in running away from her lawful spouse, even though he be a Frenchman!' (The Wanderer, 842). The Admiral's bluff Englishness has been lightly satirised by Burney throughout, but he remains a voice, however gently ridiculous, of patriarchal authority in the novel, and his blunt enforcement of marital hegemony explains the extremity of Burney's surplus excuses for Ellis's first marriage.

The happy conclusion to the novel depends upon this husband's death and the release and escape of the Bishop to Britain, circumstantially to the very shore Ellis had been on the point of embarking from for France. Relying heavily on coincidences, Burney makes the Admiral, as Ellis's uncle, demand a copy of the will legalising Granville's first marriage, legitimising Ellis. Ellis, now recognised as Juliet Granville, is able to marry Harleigh freely. Even so, she expresses concern over the

fate of her friend Elinor. Harleigh reassures his lover: 'Fear her not! ... She has a noble, though, perhaps, a masculine spirit, and she will soon, probably, think of this affair only with pique and wonder' (862). Through the use of the word 'masculine' to describe Elinor, Harleigh emphasises Elinor's resemblance to female philosopher figures of the 1790s, and also highlights his similarity to the men who attacked women like Wollstonecraft and Hays as 'masculine' women, or unsex'd females. Specifically addressing her philosophy, he contends that Elinor has the intellectual capacity to see 'the fallacy of her new system', predicting that 'she will return to the habits of society and common life' (863). Harleigh seems to voice Burney's Post-Jacobin concern for social stability here: he allows for Elinor's quality of mind to see beyond her revolutionary ardour and return to tried and tested social structures. He also recognises the performativity of Elinor's role in the novel: she has 'acted some strange and improbable part' – revolutionary politics as social performance. However, Burney herself concludes Elinor's story on a more ambivalent note. Informed by a letter from Harleigh of his marriage to Ellis, Elinor sinks into despair. Although Burney suggests that pride and time, 'the healer of woe', 'moderated her passions, in annihilating her expectations', she leaves Elinor 'in the anguish of her disappointment', her final words in the novel being:

'Alas! alas!' she cried, 'must Elinor too, – must even Elinor! – like the element to which, with the common herd, she owes, chiefly, her support, find, – with that herd! – her own level? – find that she has strayed from the beaten road, only to discover that all others are pathless!' (873)

Elinor's story concludes with her still in a despair which mingles her class bias – her horror at finding herself 'with the common herd' – with existential dread. Far from returning her to 'the habits of society and common life', as Harleigh predicts, Burney leaves Elinor as another wanderer in a pathless desert.

The final reiteration of Burney's leitmotif closes the novel: 'Here, and thus felicitously, ended, with the acknowledgement of her name, and her family, the DIFFICULTIES of the WANDERER' (873). Burney goes on to characterise Ellis, the Wanderer, as 'a being who had been cast upon herself; a female Robinson Crusoe, as unaided and unprotected, though in the midst of the world, as that imaginary hero in his uninhabited island' (873). By stressing that a woman alone in the midst of the world is 'as unaided and unprotected' as a man on a desert island, Burney deepens her earlier social criticism, by connecting Ellis's alienation to Crusoe's loneliness. She makes it clear throughout the novel that Ellis's difficulties stem from the way in which her desire for independence is stymied by the actions of others. In her next paragraph, she lists the ways Ellis's endeavours have been subject to abuse and misapprehension throughout by the other characters in the novel: 'Her honour always in danger of being assailed, her delicacy of being offended, her strength of being exhausted, and her virtue of being calumniated!' (873). Burney's final paragraph ends optimistically by arguing that these difficulties 'are not insurmountable, where mental courage, operating through patience, prudence, and principle, supply physical force, combat disappointment, and keep untamed spirits superiour to failure, and ever alive to hope' (873). A hint of darkness returns in the choice presented by the narrator between sinking 'through inanition, to non-entity' or relying independently on one's own resources. As Ellis's experiences have shown the dangerously fragile nature of women's independence, there is a real fear of non-entity in this conclusion. This complicates William Hazlitt's criticism of Burney's novels and their focus on female difficulties: 'The difficulties in which she involves her heroines are indeed too much

“Female Difficulties”; – they are difficulties created out of nothing’.<sup>21</sup> Hazlitt’s condemnation of Burney’s obsessive testing of her heroines’ propriety as ‘difficulties created out of nothing’ is only half-true. Burney’s novels, particularly The Wanderer, are driven by a fear of nothingness: that without the recognition of her character, family and name, a woman is literally a non-entity.

Burney’s treatment of the female philosopher figure remains uncertain throughout The Wanderer, depending upon her ambivalent engagement with Wollstonecraft’s life and work. In Elinor, she fuses elements of Wollstonecraft’s biography, particularly her suicide attempts but also Godwin’s representation of his wife’s religious scepticism, together with a caricatured version of the female philosopher, more consonant with the attacks on Mary Hays led by Elizabeth Hamilton. However, she also allows Elinor to voice trenchant social criticisms of women’s position in society which go unchallenged in the novel, and her satire is undercut with real sympathy for Elinor’s plight. Elinor’s partially caricatured personality allows Burney to depict Ellis much more sympathetically, accessing Wollstonecraft’s arguments to present the costs of social exclusion on Ellis’s character. However, the contrived happy ending for Ellis undermines Burney’s earlier social critique, leaving the female philosopher figure, Elinor, lost in the wilderness.

### 3) ‘Edward Admired Fanny – George Disliked Her’: Mansfield Park

The Wanderer engages with Post-Jacobin concerns over a woman’s place in society, alternately challenging and acceding to a complex series of demands shaping women’s personality and behaviour. Burney’s novel strives to make sense

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<sup>21</sup> William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Comic Writers [1819] in Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, vol. 5, ed. Duncan Wu (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), 113.

of the violence of the French Revolution and reclaim its harsh lessons about the levelling qualities of revolutionary égalité, the deadening effects of women's labour and the complexities of gender relations for a post-revolutionary world. It explicitly alludes to Wollstonecraft's life and work, revealing Burney's sympathy for and anxiety about her feminist arguments: making her heroine Ellis, and later even Elinor, painfully aware of revolutionary feminism's limitations in the face of the increasingly strict enforcement of social obedience. Austen's Mansfield Park, also a Post-Jacobin, and a post-abolition novel, explores the psychological costs of demands for social stability in a post-revolutionary world, encompassing in its uncompromising remit the complex pressures involved in female performance, the propriety or otherwise of bourgeois social mobility, and new pressures on plantation owners after the banning of the slave trade, with each distinct element used by Austen to comment obliquely on the others.<sup>22</sup> Austen's engagement with Wollstonecraft, in this text, and throughout her work, remains circumspect, implicit and obfuscated. However, the ghosts of competing representations of the female

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<sup>22</sup> Critical attention on Mansfield Park has circled round Austen's engagement, or lack thereof, in contemporary debates around the slave trade and its abolition ever since the publication of Edward Said's influential essay, 'Jane Austen and Empire', arguing that Austen is implicated in the colonial underpinnings of the Bertrams's world. You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, The Postcolonial Jane Austen devotes significant space to Mansfield Park, with essays by Donna Landry, Jon Mee, and Clara Tuite reading the novel as looking forward to 'Victorian notions of gender difference' ('Learning to ride at Mansfield Park' in Park and Rajan, 56-73, 70), as sharing clear parallels with Hannah More's writing over Wollstonecraft's ('Austen's treacherous ivory Female Patriotism, Domestic Ideology, and Empire' in Park and Rajan, 74-92, 80), and as 'conservative satire' ('Domestic retrenchment and Imperial Expansion: The Property Plots of Mansfield Park' in Park and Rajan, 93-115, 96-7), respectively. Katie Trumpener critiques Said's analysis of Mansfield Park as 'a remarkable, even prophetic, anticipation of imperial false consciousness' which misreads Austen's more liberal politics, (Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 162). Mansfield Park's moment of silence over the slave trade, then, functions as a microcosm of the wider debate over where to situate Austen's writing politically. Reading the Bertrams's silence as Austen's silence too collapses the novel into a conservative retrenchment of domestic values; reading it as her pointed comment on the moral vacuity of the Bertram family suggests a more radical critique of patriarchal society.

philosopher figure, and therefore, metonymically, Wollstonecraft herself, can be found in the contrasting characters of Fanny Price and Mary Crawford.

It remains uncertain how much, if any, of Wollstonecraft's work Austen had read. There are no references to Wollstonecraft in Austen's surviving letters and no explicit references to Wollstonecraft's infamous biography or radical philosophy in the novels. The letters censored by Cassandra Austen may have included references to Wollstonecraft's writing, but Austen's published novels seem to have gone through a process of self-censorship, refraining from either satirising or defending Wollstonecraft's feminist philosophy. Johnson argues that 'Wollstonecraft remained an unmentionable throughout Austen's career' (Equivocal Beings, 192), although she, and other critics, have read an engagement with Wollstonecraft running through Austen's work. Diane Hoeveler contends that 'Northanger Abbey fictionalises the major points in Wollstonecraft's treatise [Vindication of the Rights of Woman], showing that women who are given inadequate educations will be victims of their own folly as well as of masculine hubris, lust, and greed'.<sup>23</sup> Knox-Shaw reads Sense and Sensibility together with St. Leon to draw out parallels between Godwin's progressive liberalism and Austen's liberal scepticism. In Pride and Prejudice, Austen's satirical presentation of Mr. Collins' reading Fordyce's Sermons implicitly alludes to Wollstonecraft's deconstruction of the sexual hypocrisy at work in eighteenth-century conduct book literature. According to Johnson, Emma 'actually succeeds at

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<sup>23</sup> See Diane Hoeveler, 'Vindicating Northanger Abbey: Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, and Gothic Feminism' in Jane Austen and the Discourses of Feminism, ed. Devoney Looser (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 117-35, 120. This interesting thesis is undermined by Hoeveler's bizarre claims, such as: 'If patriarchy did not exist, Wollstonecraft would have had to invent it to make her case for women' (120) and that Austen 'wants to be one of the boys' (133) by privileging Henry Tilney's sexist perspective at the conclusion of the novel. Her first claim is simply absurd: Wollstonecraft analysed patriarchal restrictions on women and campaigned against them; her second claim misreads Catherine Morland's identification with Henry for Austen's more questioning, even satirical, presentation of the novel's hero.

Wollstonecraft's grand aim better than Wollstonecraft did: diminishing the authority of male sentimentality, and reimmasculating men and women alike with a high sense of national purpose' (Equivocal Beings, 191). Knox-Shaw contrasts Austen's achievement in Persuasion with Wollstonecraft's radical feminism. In his view, Austen avoids Wollstonecraft's imbrication in the dialectic of enlightenment which forces her into a 'virtually total abrogation (at the level of polemic) of existing womanhood' (Jane Austen and the Enlightenment, 241). Unlike Wollstonecraft, in his view, Austen 'insists on the value of strong feelings, on the excitement of sexual attraction, and on the dignity of those who show power to endure' (241). Knox-Shaw's comparison depends, as he concedes in a footnote, on contrasting Austen's successful defence of female desire with Wollstonecraft's failure to do so in her Vindication, ignoring the development of Wollstonecraft's ideas in her Letters from Sweden and Maria. Austen's success as a novelist is much more dependent than Knox-Shaw allows on Wollstonecraft's earlier work: that Austen manages to uphold 'women's active participation in the public world [at the same time as she] celebrates men's domestic activities in the private one' develops out of Wollstonecraft's textual legacy.

Mansfield Park shares with Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman an interest in the widest possible sense of female education – eschewing the shallow learning of Maria and Julia Bertram, Austen considers education as the way in which familial, social and cultural institutions combine to construct a human character, an insight she shares with Wollstonecraft. In her Vindication, Wollstonecraft analyses how social constraints on women sexualise them: literary, conduct-book representations of female inferiority combine with political legislation limiting a girl's access to education and opportunities to subordinate women's intellectual, physical and spiritual growth in relation to men's. For example, after

analysing the representations of femininity in conduct-book literature, Wollstonecraft demands: 'Educated in the enervating style recommended by the writers on whom I have been animadverting; and not having a chance, from their subordinate state in society, to recover their lost ground, is it surprising that women every where appear a defect in nature?'<sup>24</sup> In *Fanny Price*, Austen both uses Wollstonecraft's critique of these conduct-book idealisations of femininity, by tracing the costs of this image on Fanny's physique and emotional development, and accesses positive representations of the female philosopher figure from 1790s debates in order to depict Fanny's intellectual growth, separate from revolutionary political concerns. In *Mary Crawford*, Austen utilises the negative representation of the female philosopher, again emptied of explicitly political content, in order to examine the sexualisation of Mary's character, also consonant with Wollstonecraft's arguments. Both women, therefore, act as contrasting iterations of the female philosopher figure, as well as being formed as characters by feminist debates of the 1790s.

Fanny's character is the focus of a sharply contested critical debate on whether she should be viewed as the moral centre of the novel, its subject, or the object of Austen's critical enquiry, and the implications for this on the novel's politics. Positioning Fanny as the text's moral arbiter tends to result in a conservative reading of the text;<sup>25</sup> positioning her as the object of Austen's moral vision leads to a more

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 5, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 185. Subsequent references, in-text. Wollstonecraft's representation of women as 'a defect in nature' riffs on Milton's characterisation of Eve in *Paradise Lost* as 'This fair defect / Of nature' (X. 891-92). She earlier attacks this phrase, asking, 'as a moralist, ... what is meant by such heterogeneous associations, as fair defects, amiable weaknesses, etc?' (*Vindication*, 103).

<sup>25</sup> Conservative readings of the text often conflate what are seen as Fanny's character weaknesses with failings in Austen's novelistic aesthetics. Kingsley Amis pinpoints many critics' personal animus against Fanny when he writes, 'Fanny's [feelings] are made odious by a self-regard utterly unredeemed by any humour' ('What Became of Jane Austen?' in *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park Casebook*, ed. B.C. Southam (London: Macmillan, 1976, 243-6, 243).

radical reading.<sup>26</sup> My Post-Jacobin reading sees Fanny as slipping between subject and object in the text: her often clear-sighted analysis of the moral failings of others is played off by the novel's narrative voice against the way in which Fanny's own fears, desires and sexual jealousies pervert her vision. This slippage explains the oblique, paradoxical nature of Austen's engagement with the figure of the female philosopher. Fanny is in part modelled on positive, Enlightenment versions of the female philosopher: firstly, she grows up to be a self-educated woman, guided by a male mentor in the ambivalent form of Edmund Bertram; secondly, she is able to generalise the ideas found in her reading into insightful statements, even if only addressed to herself and sometimes Edmund, about her position in the world; and, thirdly, she has a profound feeling of religious duty. Although she is crucially lacking a sense of political engagement, Austen uses her to make a subtly political point by also modelling her in part on the conduct book idealisations of femininity critiqued by female philosophers such as Wollstonecraft and Hays. The resulting mixture disguises the extent to which Austen engages with the tradition of the female

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Amis argues that Fanny's failings as a woman – selfishness, pathological passivity and aggressive piety – are also Austen's as a novelist, rather than seeing them as part of Austen's exploration of the societal inter- and intrapersonal pressures placed on Fanny by her subservient position within the text. Other critics follow Amis by reading Fanny's weaknesses as coextensive with Austen's aesthetics, rather than as part of Austen's social critique. For example, Landry reads Fanny's ill-health as 'the fatal weakness to which her proper – and dangerously rare – femininity is pathologically prone' ('Learning to ride', 70), making Fanny's passivity part of her proper feminine subjectivity. Tuite goes even further, imagining Fanny as a figurehead of Austen's 'Tory feminism of upward bourgeois female mobility' ('Domestic retrenchment', 96), missing in her pointed valorisation of Fanny's upward trajectory Austen's darker social commentary.

<sup>26</sup> For an example of a more radical reading, see Margaret Kirkham, Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction (London: The Athlone Press, 1997). Kirkham usefully questions Fanny's unappealing characteristics, pointing out that, in the context of the novel itself, her 'religiosity is an aspect of her sexiness'; whatever Amis and others make of her, Fanny is appealing to men in the novel: 'Fanny's physical fragility and her somewhat undeveloped, childish appearance contribute to making her seem close to the sentimental ideal of woman' (103). However, 'housed in the "beautiful little body", lurking behind the "soft light eyes", is a clear, critical, rationally-judging adult mind quite unlike the tractable, child-like mind of the true conduct-book heroine or sentimental novel' (105). In Kirkham's view, Austen has disguised an Enlightenment proto-feminist – connected, I argue, to earlier representations of the female philosopher as Enlightenment avatar – as an ideal conduct book heroine. Although this view is beguiling, it understates the extent to which Austen distances herself from Fanny's combination of disguise and self-deceit.

philosopher figure at the same time as it allows her to access Wollstonecraftian arguments about the effect of idealised femininity on women's personalities. In her apolitical female philosopher role, Fanny functions as the subject of Austen's moral vision; with her conduct book frailty, she works as its object.

Austen tracks the costs of Fanny's attempts to occupy the position of conduct-book heroine, at the same time aware of its psychopathological impact on the clarity of her critical, rationally-judging adult mind. Indeed, in the 'Opinions of Mansfield Park' which Austen collected and transcribed from various friends and family, the recurring differences of opinion – for example, 'Fanny is a delightful character! ... Edward admired Fanny – George disliked her... delighted with Fanny... could not bear Fanny... Thought Fanny insipid... Fond of Fanny...'<sup>27</sup> – suggests Austen's detached amusement: her friends and family, and her critics, have missed the point. Austen encourages her readers to empathise with Fanny at the same time as she demands a more impartial analysis of the forces which have formed her character. Fanny's double life as a conduct-book heroine, haunted by the spectre of the female philosopher, is particularly important in Austen's discussion of her education with the Bertrams, including her later monologue on memory; in her refusal to accept Henry Crawford's marriage proposal; and in her experiences when she is sent back to Portsmouth.

Austen's account of Fanny's education amongst the Bertram family portrays the costs on a young girl's physique and personality of living in a state of deliberate dependency. Fanny's painful feelings of alienation are exacerbated by Sir Thomas's haughty distance, Mrs Norris's bullying interference, and Maria and Julia's constant,

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<sup>27</sup> 'Various Opinions of Mansfield Park' in *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park Casebook*, ed. B.C. Southam (London: Macmillan, 1976), 200-5, 200-1.

subtle reminders of her inferiority. Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris discuss the manner in which Fanny should be educated when they are debating the propriety of inviting their niece to Mansfield Park. With dramatic irony, Mrs Norris reassures Sir Thomas that a relationship between Fanny and one of his sons would be 'morally impossible' as they would be brought up 'always together like brothers and sisters'.<sup>28</sup> She represents a characteristically mean and selfish view of the traditional aim of a girl's education when she argues: 'Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to any body' (Mansfield Park, 8). For Mrs Norris, female education is solely a means for 'settling well'. Her emphasis on avoiding 'farther expense' also sets up her character as a miser. Sir Thomas also worries about Fanny's effect on her cousins, but reasons himself out of his concerns: her probable 'gross ignorance', 'meanness of opinions' and 'very distressing vulgarity of manner' are deemed 'not incurable faults' and not 'dangerous for her associates' (11). Austen carefully reveals Sir Thomas's snobbery here: he automatically characterises his wife's poorer family as ignorant, mean and vulgar. Indeed, Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris complacently believe that Fanny's association with Maria and Julia will benefit their cousin: 'It will be an education for the child said I, only being with her cousins; if Miss Lee taught her nothing, she would learn to be good and clever from them' (11). This assertion is comically undermined by Lady Bertram's more directly selfish hope that 'she will not tease my poor pug... I have but just got Julia to leave it alone' (11). Far from being good and clever, Julia and her older sister Maria are both revealed to be arrogant and ignorant; their shallow accomplishments always contrasted with Fanny's deeper

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<sup>28</sup> Jane Austen, Mansfield Park (1814), ed. John Wiltshire in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8. Subsequent references, in-text.

understanding. Sir Thomas concludes contradictorily with the desire that his daughters and their cousin will be 'very good friends' although 'they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different' (12). Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris's discussion of Fanny's education concludes on this note of preserving the distinction between her and her cousins.

Wollstonecraft campaigns against these artificial distinctions in her Vindication, in which she argues that 'The preposterous distinctions of rank... render civilization a curse, by dividing the world between voluptuous tyrants, and cunning envious dependents' (Vindication, 215). She argues that these distinctions 'corrupt, almost equally, every class of people, because respectability is not attached to the discharge of the relative duties of life, but to the station' (179). Although Sir Thomas is hardly 'voluptuous', he tyrannises his family, cowing his daughters especially through fear rather than basing his relationship with them on respect. Again, Fanny hardly seems to be one of Wollstonecraft's 'cunning envious dependents'. However, Austen constantly shows Maria and Julia's relationship with each other and their father to be based on both cunning and envy, and traces the limitations of the Bertram family's 'discharge of the relative duties of life', their affections for each other, and their virtuous behaviour. Echoing Wollstonecraft, Austen shows how Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris's preservation of the distinction between Fanny and her cousins corrupts Maria and Julia as much as it oppresses Fanny. Austen accesses Wollstonecraft's critique of the way in which artificial distinctions corrupt the public sphere to show that it also functions in private, with distinctions imposed within families causing personal suffering and moral stagnation. Further, Claudia Johnson argues that Austen 'is at pains to employ the Burkean vocabulary of the political sublime in order to describe the sexually differentiated dynamics of the Bertram household' in order to show the

failure of the conservative description of paternal authority (Jane Austen, 97). I argue that Austen accesses Wollstonecraft's arguments to counter the artificial distinctions in personal and political life advocated by Burke. This makes Fanny's later conflict with Sir Thomas an echo of Wollstonecraft's confrontations with Burke in print.

Austen suggests that this oppression accounts for Fanny's lack of bodily strength and her painful shyness when she first arrives at Mansfield Park. In Portsmouth she 'had always been important as play-fellow, instructress, and nurse' (Mansfield Park, 16) to her brothers and sisters, suggesting a more active, playful childhood than the example of either Lady Bertram's passive existence or Mrs Norris's more laborious regime. She had also relied upon her elder brother William to be 'her advocate with her mother', suggesting that the meek obedience she displays towards the Bertrams has not always been her defining characteristic. Fanny's upbringing at Portsmouth, hinted at here, suggests an education more in line with Wollstonecraft's suggestion that girls and boys should be allowed to play and learn together than the more traditional pedagogy she experiences at Mansfield Park. Maria and Julia are scornful of Fanny's lack of a polished education, reporting to their mother and aunt that Fanny is deficient in geography, art, history, and science, remarking, 'How strange! – Did you ever hear any thing so stupid?' (20). Instead of rebuking Maria and Julia for their rudeness, Mrs Norris complacently praises their 'wonderful memories' in comparison to Fanny who 'has probably none at all' (21). She also insists on her earlier determination that it is better that the Bertram daughters acquire accomplishments which show the difference between them and Fanny's 'great want of genius and emulation' (21). Austen caustically comments:

Such were the counsels by which Mrs Norris assisted to form her nieces' minds; and it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and early information, they should be entirely

deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught. (21-22)

The distinctions insisted upon by Mrs Norris render Maria and Julia 'entirely deficient' in humanity towards themselves and others. Austen also questions 'their promising talents and early information' by underscoring that the Bertram daughters' accomplishments are learned by rote rather than understood or valued.

Both Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram are also implicated in the deficiencies of their daughters' education. Sir Thomas does not realise that their education is 'wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him' (22). Lady Bertram resembles Wollstonecraft's description of a rich woman who nurses her dogs 'with a parade of sensibility, when sick' but 'will suffer her babes to grow up crooked in a nursery' (Vindication, 244) when Austen writes: 'To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, ... thinking more of her pug than her children' (Mansfield Park, 22). Wollstonecraft's accusation that the 'wife, mother, and human creature, were all swallowed up by the factitious character which an improper education and the selfish vanity of beauty had produced' (Vindication, 244-5) is given a comic twist in Austen's presentation of Lady Bertram. In being 'guided in every thing important by Sir Thomas', Lady Bertram embodies Wollstonecraft's critique of the traditional, vacuous wife and mother.

Austen contrasts Maria and Julia's rote-learning with Fanny's more complex engagement with education and memory later in the novel. Commenting on Mrs Grant's shrubbery, Fanny wonders: 'Three years ago, this was nothing but a rough hedgerow along the upper side of the field, never thought of as any thing, or capable

of becoming any thing; and now it is converted into a walk, and it would be difficult to say whether most valuable as a convenience or an ornament' (Mansfield Park, 243).

Fanny's musing on the change in the shrubbery also seems to gauge changes in her own character, developing from a girl 'never thought of as any thing, or capable of becoming any thing' into a polished young woman. After exclaiming, 'How wonderful, how very wonderful the operations of time, and the changes of the human mind!'

(243), she continues:

If any one faculty of our nature may be called more wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. There seems something more speakingly incomprehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of memory, than in any other of our intelligences. The memory is sometimes so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient – at others, so bewildered and so weak – and at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond controul! – We are to be sure a miracle every way – but our powers of recollecting and of forgetting, do seem peculiarly past finding out. (243)

In this monologue, Fanny reveals her intelligence and abilities, at least to her readers; her auditor, Mary Crawford 'untouched and inattentive, had nothing to say' (243). Fanny is persistently underrated by the Bertram family and their circle, because they do not actually listen to her. She has not only caught up with Maria and Julia in terms of 'early information' but surpassed them in her ability to generalise her ideas. Her disquisition on memory here connects her to the eighteenth-century tradition celebrating the female philosopher discussed in my introduction: she combines intellectual sophistication with modesty and decorum. As with Mrs Grant's shrubbery, Fanny's dissertation on memory also seems to refer, perhaps unconsciously, to herself. Like memory, she is 'so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient' to the Bertrams's demands, as well as sometimes bewildered and weak. If she is herself neither 'tyrannic' nor 'beyond controul', she is painfully aware of both the difficult demands that are placed on her and on the related, equally damaging

freedoms of her cousins. The language Austen has Fanny use in her unheeded soliloquy on memory – inequalities, obedience, tyrannic, controul – seems also to comment obliquely on the post-revolutionary culture of Britain: encapsulating fears over social unrest, governmental heavy-handedness, and the developing discourse of polite decorum, particularly restricting women's expression. Like The Wanderer, Mansfield Park takes part in a Post-Jacobin reformulation of the lived experience of the French Revolution followed by the Napoleonic wars: a balancing of concerns for social stability with an analysis of the effects of this on an individual's psyche.

Whereas The Wanderer explicitly confronts the aftermath of the French Revolution in Britain, Mansfield Park approaches its historical context indirectly and allusively.

Austen contrasts the way in which Sir Thomas deals with his daughter Maria's engagement to Rushworth with his treatment of Fanny after Henry has proposed to her. These connected scenes allow Austen to make a modest feminist point through Fanny's refusal and a more satirical argument about the consequences of Maria's acquiescence. Sir Thomas's discussion with Maria about her impending marriage to Rushworth exposes both his own flaws as a parent and the forces at work leading Maria to misrepresent her views about the match. Sir Thomas observes that 'indifference was the most favourable state they could be in. Her behaviour to Mr Rushworth was careless and cold. She could not, did not like him' (233-4). He decides to question her about her feelings, arguing to himself: 'Advantageous as would be the alliance, and long standing and public as was the engagement, her happiness must not be sacrificed to it' (234). Austen shows how these noble intentions are subverted both by Sir Thomas's complacency and Maria's mixture of fear of him and unexpressed desire, partially for Henry but more specifically for independence. Maria responds after 'a moment's struggle... and only a moment's...

immediately, decidedly, and with no apparent agitation' that she had not 'the smallest desire of breaking through her engagement, or was sensible of any change of opinion or inclination since her forming it' (234).

Austen analyses Sir Thomas's reasons for accepting such obvious untruths and Maria's for giving them. Sir Thomas is 'satisfied; too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite so far as his judgement might have dictated to others' (234). He is too quick to be satisfied because relinquishing the alliance would lead to social embarrassment. He also decides that Maria's 'feelings probably were not acute' (234) and that a wife not in love with her husband 'was in general but the more attached to her own family' (235). Austen caustically dismisses Sir Thomas's casuistry as 'Such and such-like were the reasonings of Sir Thomas', concluding that he was 'very happy to think any thing of his daughter's disposition that was most favourable for the purpose' (235). Sir Thomas has wilfully misread Maria's real feelings to ensure an easy way out of a potentially difficult situation. The reasons behind Maria's deliberate deception hinge on spite towards Henry Crawford. By pledging herself to Rushworth, she 'was safe from the possibility of giving Crawford the triumph of governing her actions, and destroying her prospects' (235); he had 'destroyed her happiness, but he should not know that he had done it; he should not destroy her credit, her appearance, her prosperity too' (236). Ironically, her affair with Henry which acts as the novel's climax will destroy exactly these things. She also craves independence: 'more needful than ever; the want of it at Mansfield more sensibly felt'. Her marriage to Rushworth gives her an escape from 'the restraint which her father imposed' (236). This discussion between father and daughter reveals the bad faith between them: Sir Thomas complacently acquiesces to Maria's untruths to avoid embarrassment and increase his sense of social respectability

through the match, irrespective of his daughter's real happiness; Maria performs her part in the charade to escape Sir Thomas's stultifying presence and to pettily revenge herself on Henry. Austen sums up Maria's precipitate desire to marry Rushworth thus: 'In all the important preparations of the mind she was complete; being prepared for matrimony by an hatred of home, restraint, and tranquillity; by the misery of disappointed affection, and contempt of the man she was to marry. The rest might wait' (236). Austen ironically echoes Wollstonecraft's demands that women be intellectually and morally prepared for marriage by improved education in her subversive catalogue of Maria's preparations.

The dialogue between Sir Thomas and Fanny upon Henry's proposal to her reflects this earlier discussion between Maria and her father, underscoring the differences between Fanny and Maria, and explicating Maria's unwillingness to disappoint her father's expectations. Fanny honestly expresses her refusal of Henry's suit which leads to a shocked harangue from Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas, after reassuring himself, incorrectly, that Fanny is not in love with either of her cousins, demands: 'Have you any reason, child, to think ill of Mr Crawford's temper?' (366). Fanny replies 'No, Sir' but Austen continues: 'She longed to add, "but to his principles I have"' (366). She avoids doing so because a discussion of Henry's principles would lead to revelations about Maria and Julia's misconduct with him. In the absence of any explanation from Fanny, Sir Thomas attacks her own conduct: 'I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence' (367). Sir Thomas's accusation that Fanny is wilful, selfish, and independent exactly echoes Austen's characterisation of Maria's

decision to marry Rushworth. He is also treating Fanny as if she were behaving like a female philosopher figure such as Harriet Freke in Edgeworth's Belinda and Bridgetina Botherim or Julia Delmond in Hamilton's Modern Philosophers. Austen contrasts Sir Thomas's complacency at Maria's dishonesty with his outrage at Fanny's honest rejection of Henry here.

In her discussion with Edmund about her refusal of Henry, Fanny makes a considered statement of a moderate kind of feminism, referring to Mary and Mrs Grant's disbelief that she has rejected their brother:

I should have thought...that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man's not being approved, not being loved by some one of her sex, at least, let him be ever so agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not to be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself. (408, original emphasis)

Fanny is fighting for the right to say 'no', distinguishing her from both satirical versions of the female philosopher and from her revolutionary iteration in Hays' Emma Courtney, who struggle for the justification to pursue their own sexual partners. Still, she expresses herself in the considered, rational mode of an Enlightenment female philosopher, connecting her with each of these earlier traditions of female philosophy. Edmund misunderstands Fanny's arguments, deciding that it is Fanny's surprise at the 'novelty' (409) of Henry's suit rather than Fanny's disinclination towards him which explains Fanny's refusal, adding an encomium on Miss Crawford's 'liveliness' which pains Fanny further – her unexpressed desire for Edmund himself being one of the major reasons for her dislike of Henry.

Sir Thomas's decision to send Fanny back to Portsmouth in order to make her miss Henry and 'the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park' (425) completes Fanny's development into the novel's positive, if still partial, female philosopher figure.

Her initial horror at the confined space of her Portsmouth home, her uncouth father, neglectful mother and squabbling brothers leads her to conclude ‘that though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures’ (454), self-consciously echoing Samuel Johnson on matrimony and celibacy in Rasselas.<sup>29</sup> However, Fanny finds some consolations in Portsmouth, first of all her sister Susan, who she perceives is attempting to remedy their family’s chaotic lifestyle, in a manner at odds with Fanny’s more passive personality but agreeing with her moral certitude. Realising that Susan looks up to her, Fanny decides to resolve an argument between Susan and their other sister Betsey by giving the younger girl a knife – a rather sinister gift – to stop her coveting Susan’s and enjoys the sense of being useful ‘to a mind so much in need of help, and so much deserving it’ (460). Secondly, she subscribes to Portsmouth’s circulating library ‘amazed at being anything in propria persona, amazed at her own doings in every way; to be a renter, a chuser of books!’ (461). Finally, connecting the two, she decides to educate Susan, to ‘inspire a taste for the biography and poetry which she delighted in herself’ (461). Portsmouth gives Fanny a much needed sense of personal agency: she learns to take care of her sister, respecting Susan’s more active personality, and decides to improve her sister as she believes Edmund has improved her. Fanny’s education of Susan completes Austen’s analysis of female education in the novel, offering a different model of female behaviour from Fanny’s passive suffering in Susan’s decisive action. This focus on sisterly support and education provides a more positive model of female agency than Fanny’s earlier passivity and the intemperance of the Bertram sisters and Mary Crawford. Although stripped of explicit political engagement, Austen accesses earlier,

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<sup>29</sup> In a discussion between Rasselas and his sister the Princess Nekayah argues that ‘Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures’. Samuel Johnson, Rasselas [1759], ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford’s World Classics, 2009), 59.

positive models of female philosophy in her representation of Fanny, and, crucially, shows Fanny passing her hard-won lessons of female self-reliance on to her sister.

Like Belinda, Modern Philosophers and The Wanderer, Mansfield Park also includes a negative role model of female behaviour, linked to the counter-revolutionary example of the female philosopher, Mary Crawford, who is the object of Austen's critical appraisal. Mary fulfils a similar function in her novel as Harriet Freke, Bridgetina Botherim and Elinor Joddrell do in theirs. By satirising the character flaws of these women, Edgeworth, Hamilton, Burney and Austen create a space for a more positive heroine with whom they can make a range of feminist arguments, whilst remaining distant from both Wollstonecraft's reputation and the counter-revolutionary suspicion of the female philosopher figure.<sup>30</sup> In Mansfield Park, Austen's representation of Fanny and Mary is the more complex, because she makes Mary's character and actions so attractive and entertaining, and Fanny's both oppressed and oppressive, effectively reversing the trope of contrasting female philosopher figures in order to explore the ramifications of it. Like Harriet, Bridgetina and Elinor, Mary is both a figure of fun (both satirised and funny herself) in the novel and a more threatening presence, and she is also exiled from the novel at its conclusion, like these women before her. Mary, like these female philosophers, actively pursues the object of her affections; this pursuit reveals her calculating insights into the marriage market, at least to the increasingly jealous Fanny, and, through her, the reader. Instead of promulgating revolutionary dogma, like Harriet or Bridgetina, Mary makes a series of risqué jokes, sexualised comments and knowing references, criticised as inappropriate by both Edmund and Fanny, until she unforgivably fails to condemn her

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<sup>30</sup> Claudia Johnson argues that Austen has already accessed this tradition of contrasting female philosopher figures in Pride and Prejudice, in which Lydia Bennett's outrageous antics act as a cover for Elizabeth's own subversions of properly feminine behaviour, in Jane Austen, 76.

brother Henry's affair with Maria, leading to her exclusion from the novel. By depoliticising the counter-revolutionary representation of the female philosopher in Mary Crawford, Austen may seem to have made her unthreatening. On the other hand, unlike Harriet and Bridgetina, who are both figured as repulsive in manners and appearance, Mary remains dangerously attractive throughout Mansfield Park – Edmund is seduced by her beauty and grace, and these aspects of her character are experienced as threatening to Fanny.

Mary is introduced into the novel explicitly seeking a good marriage, encouraged by Mrs Grant who 'had fixed on Tom Bertram' (48) as a suitable match for her sister. Mary entertains Mrs Grant's scheme, although her focus quickly shifts to the younger Edmund: 'Matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well, and having seen Mr. Bertram in town, she knew that objection could no more be made to his person than to his situation in life. While she treated it as a joke, therefore, she did not forget to think of it seriously' (48). Austen's last line here encapsulates Mary's approach to not only marriage but the social whirl of the Bertrams's existence: her behaviour deliberately makes light of what she considers deeply. Mary's closing remarks on marriage sum up her combination of jokiness and calculation: 'I would have every body marry if they can do it properly; I do not like to have people throw themselves away; but every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage' (50). Mary's focus on marrying well, rather than the explicitly political concerns of counter-revolutionary female philosopher figures, exemplifies Austen's Post-Jacobin approach to the figure of the female philosopher in her fiction: Mary, Fanny, and the whole plot of Mansfield Park, are deliberately situated after the revolutionary conflict between English Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin concerns. The active expression of female desire, argued for by Emma Courtney, Harriet Freke and

Bridgetina Botherim, is stripped of its revolutionary overtones in Mary's case and reformulated as aggressive husband-hunting.

Harriet and Bridgetina's warped logic and garbled revolutionary declarations are reconfigured in Mary's frequent faux-pas. She playfully critiques the modern manners of one of Tom Bertram's female admirers, a Miss Anderson, who pretended shyness in private, only to be demonstratively affectionate in public, concluding 'I do not pretend to set people right, but I do see that they are often wrong' (58). Tom gallantly replies: 'Those who are shewing the world what female manners should be... are doing a great deal to set them right' (58, emphasis in original). The 'less courteous' Edmund replies: 'The error is plain enough... such girls are ill brought up. They are given wrong notions from the beginning. They are always acting upon motives of vanity – and there is no more real modesty in their behaviour before they appear in public than afterwards' (58, emphasis in original). This brief discussion between Mary, Tom and Edmund uncovers their different perspectives on female manners: Mary uses Tom's anecdote of the socially maladroit Miss Anderson to flirt with both Bertrams, accidentally revealing her own ambivalent approach to female manners – she sees the impropriety of Miss Anderson's actions but uses it for comic effect; Tom also uses the anecdote to flirt with Mary, complimenting her on her superior manners; Edmund, however, takes a higher-minded moral approach – effectively spoiling the flirtatious atmosphere – by seriously criticising Miss Anderson's false modesty. His approach echoes Wollstonecraft's critique of hypocritical courtship behaviour in her Vindication in which she argues 'Did women really respect virtue for its own sake, they would not seek for a compensation in vanity' (Vindication, 209). Edmund also regrets Mary's flippant attitude towards her uncle, her thinly veiled joke about homosexuality in the Admiralty – 'Of Rears, and

Vices, I saw enough. Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat' (71, emphasis in original), and other lapses in taste, although he refuses to rebuke her directly, instead criticising her to his admiring confidante, Fanny. Mary also makes more serious blunders, especially criticising the clergy, before she realises that Edmund is training to be a priest. Her dislike of his vocation remains a major stumbling block in their relationship, which Edmund finally ends when Mary refuses to condemn her brother's self-destructive affair with Maria Bertram.

Edmund recounts his offended delicacy at Mary's refusal to take the adultery in Henry and Maria's affair as anything more than folly to Fanny, who listens with a mixture of 'curiosity and concern, ... pain and ... delight' (525) at the demise of her rival in Edmund's affections. Fanny calls Mary's behaviour 'cruel... to give way to gaiety and to speak with lightness, and to you! – Absolute cruelty' (527), which Edmund rejects, arguing instead that Mary's flaws are not 'faults of temper' but 'faults of principle,... of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind' (527-8). Edmund's analysis of Mary's character flaws focuses on her early upbringing by her immoral Admiral uncle, revealing the cost of her early association with free living on her manners and morals. Here again, Edmund echoes Wollstonecraft's examination of the character weaknesses resulting from early association of ideas. In the concluding chapter of Mansfield Park, discussed in more detail below, Austen reveals that Mary 'lived together' with her sister Mrs Grant, and that after the death of Dr. Grant, 'they still lived together', as Mary had been unable to find a suitable match for herself 'who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield... or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head' (543). Mary finishes the novel in a surprisingly similar position to Bridgetina Botherim: still single and in the domestic

setting of the home – underscoring her connection to the counter-revolutionary female philosopher figure.

The Bertrams's performance of Elizabeth Inchbald's translation of August von Kotzebue's Lovers' Vows distinguishes Austen's Post-Jacobin perspective from revolutionary writing of the 1790s and the Anti-Jacobin reaction to it of the early nineteenth century. It allows Austen to study the developing relationships between the various characters in her novel, especially Edmund, Fanny and Mary, ironically and subversively charting them in relation to the radical drama they choose to put on. Penny Gay convincingly argues that 'in this most apparently anti-theatrical of her novels, Jane Austen employs the methods of the drama with brilliant panache'<sup>31</sup> in order to 'alert the reader to the moral ambiguity pervading the highly theatricalised society that she anatomises' (Jane Austen and the Theatre, 103). Austen's use of Lovers' Vows is less anti-theatre, therefore, and much more a tool used to discover and criticise the inherent theatricality, the obsession with appearance, which permeates the personalities of the Bertrams and their circle of friends, particularly Henry and Mary Crawford. Gay moves beyond the way in which Lovers' Vows 'can be used to support both a conservative and a radical reading of the novel' (107), contrasting Kotzebue's position as 'an obvious whipping-boy for the anti-Jacobins' given his foreignness and revolutionary sympathies with Austen's approach to Kotzebue's radicalism in her subversion of class boundaries (105). She concludes that 'Inchbald's play is ultimately most useful to Austen, not for its quotably subversive politics, but because it provides two strong female parts in scenes which suit perfectly the development of plot, character, and theme in this novel' (107).

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<sup>31</sup> Penny Gay, Jane Austen and the Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 98. Subsequent references, in-text.

Gay's bipartisan focus shows Austen ceding interpretative authority to her readers, by leaving her political sympathies open to competing exegesis: a position I describe as Post-Jacobin.

Lovers' Vows allows Austen to play with the relationship between Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford, with Fanny acting first as a jealous bystander then cajoled into the role of Cottager's Wife – reflecting, in a darkly comic mode, on her low social status. Mary cleverly manipulates Edmund into the role of her character Amelia's tutor, Anhalt, by introducing the idea of a neighbour taking on the role. Edmund's decision to take the role himself is rationalised by him as one of propriety, keeping the private theatricals within the immediate family circle, although it also relates to his increasing admiration of, and desire for, Mary. Austen uses the rehearsals for the play to reveal Edmund and Mary's shared desire, and Fanny's for Edmund, when she brings first Mary, then Edmund, to Fanny in order to rehearse a key scene between Anhalt and Amelia. Act III Scene 2 of Lovers' Vows sees Anhalt, as Amelia's tutor and her father's trusted advisor, sent to Amelia to counsel her to marry Count Cassel as her father's wishes decree. This mission is complicated by Anhalt and Amelia's illicit love for each other. The couple's scene together sees Amelia propose marriage to Anhalt instead, after Anhalt has set forth two visions of marriage, one happy and the other not. Austen's use of Lovers' Vows plays intertextually with these two views: in the first 'two sympathetic hearts' combine 'Patience and love', leaving 'melancholy and discord... far behind'<sup>32</sup>; in the second, Anhalt argues that 'When convenience, and fair appearance joined to folly and ill humour, forge the fetters of matrimony, they gall with their weight the married pair'

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, Lovers' Vows (1798) in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen, vol. 5, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 591-2. Subsequent references, in-text.

(Lovers' Vows, 592). In performing this scene in Mansfield Park, Edmund and Mary play out their unspoken wishes for the first vision of marriage but their relationship is also coloured by the unhappiness in the play's second version. Austen hints here that the folly and ill humour of this version may have dogged their potential union, which does upset the marriages of Maria Bertram and Mr. Rushworth, and Julia Bertram and Mr. Yates.

Austen's use of Lovers' Vows does not simply condemn the impropriety of the Bertrams's performance of the radical play in their father's absence, but uses it intertextually to comment on the young people's present desires and future fates. Austen's complex treatment of Kotzebue's play differs sharply from Hannah More's more straightforward condemnation of the German playwright in her Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, complicating the clear parallels Mee sees between Austen's novel and More's counter-revolutionary conduct book ('Austen's "Treacherous Ivory"', 80). More lambasts Kotzebue's immensely popular The Stranger as the 'first attempt at representing an adultress [sic] in an exemplary light'<sup>33</sup>, suggestively linking the play with Wollstonecraft's posthumous novel, Maria. More argues that the two publications form an 'aera in manners', as, at the same time as Kotzebue's play,

a direct vindication of adultery was for the first time attempted by a woman, a professed admirer and imitator of the German suicide Werter. The female Werter, as she is styled by her biographer, asserts, in a work intitled 'The Wrongs of Women,' [sic] that adultery is justifiable, and that the restrictions placed on it by the laws of England constitute one of the Wrongs of Women. (Strictures, 48)

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<sup>33</sup> Hannah More, Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1799), 48. Subsequent references, in-text.

More criticises Kotzebue's play and Wollstonecraft's novel, along with Godwin's biography, as both apologising for and encouraging adultery. Although Austen's conclusion, with its extended discussion of the effects of various adulteries on the Bertram family, could be said to parallel More's didacticism, her choice of a different Kotzebue play, which she uses sympathetically to develop her own points about marriage as well as to further her satire on social appearance, and her refusal to connect her criticisms to Wollstonecraft, suggest a more complex engagement with both German drama and revolutionary feminism than More's straightforward antipathy. Mary Waldron analyses Austen and More's contrasting literary techniques, arguing that Austen's ambivalent relationship with the Evangelical movement distinguishes her fiction from More's, whose fiction functions as propaganda for the Evangelicals. In contrast to More's Coelebs in Search of a Wife, Mansfield Park, according to Waldron, 'aims to counteract an increasing tendency for fiction to sermonise through ideal object-lessons'.<sup>34</sup> Although I find Waldron's analysis convincing – Post-Jacobin, even – I would add that borrowing tropes from Evangelical fiction, particularly Fanny and Edmund's focus on 'principles', allows Austen to mount a wide-ranging assault on social hypocrisy in the novel's conclusion.

Mansfield Park climaxes in a series of scandals involving the Bertram sisters, implicating both in adultery. Austen's treatment of adultery reflects upon earlier discussions across the political divide, particularly competing ideas of adultery in the works of Wollstonecraft and Hannah More. More argues that an adulteress is a character 'which, in all periods of the world, ancient as well as modern, in all

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Waldron, Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), (86).

countries, heathen as well as christian [sic], has hitherto been held in detestation, and has never been introduced but to be reprobated' (46). She criticises Kotzebue for encouraging his audience 'anxiously to wish to see an adultress restored to that rank of women who have not violated the most solemn covenant that can be made with man, nor disobeyed one of the most positive laws which has been enjoined by God' (47). More's condemnation of adultery is both echoed and challenged by Austen's concluding remarks. Her opening statement, 'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest' (Mansfield Park, 533), seems to distance her from the strict morality of More.

However, the rest of the chapter dwells on exactly the guilt and misery Austen has just disavowed. She is even suggestively critical of Fanny. Her next paragraph begins: 'My Fanny indeed at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of everything. She must have been a happy creature in spite of all she felt or thought she felt, for the distress of those around her' (533, my emphasis). Austen's conscientious addition, 'or thought she felt', suggests Fanny's supposed empathy for the Bertrams and Crawfords is an act, even if it is an act Fanny is not really aware of herself. Austen's repetition of 'in spite of' also links Fanny's happiness with a suggestion of spitefulness: her happiness depends on schadenfreude. Austen's final chapter continues with an analysis of the moral failings of the Bertram circle. Austen banishes the adulterous Maria, accompanied by Mrs Norris, because Sir Thomas refuses to countenance her return to Mansfield Park. Maria's banishment, in line with conventional morality, is leavened with an analysis of the inappropriate nature of her education, imputed by Austen to Sir Thomas's poor management of his family. Maria's adultery is not simply treated as her individual

contravention of social mores, which must be punished, but as the product of her deficient education, obsessed with the appearance rather than the achievement of virtue. Austen also condemns Mr. Rushworth for marrying Maria when he was aware that she loved another: 'The indignities of stupidity, and the disappointments of selfish passion, can excite little pity. His punishment followed his conduct, as did a deeper punishment, the deeper guilt of his wife' (537). Austen hints at the unfairness of Rushworth's ability, after his divorce, to enter into matrimony again, suggesting the likelihood that he would again be 'duped' into believing in his wife's affections, whereas Maria 'must withdraw with infinitely stronger feelings to a retirement and reproach, which could allow no second spring of hope or character' (537). Austen continues her criticism of the inequalities in society's dealings with men and women who have contravened social mores in her treatment of Henry Crawford. Dealing with Henry's deliberate seduction of Maria Rushworth, Austen drily notes: 'That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend his share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished' (542). The inequality of society's treatment of men and women allows Henry, and Rushworth, to avoid the public disgrace attendant on Maria's behaviour. Austen's criticisms here distance her from More's work, which focuses on women's misdemeanour without considering men's.

Both Mansfield Park and The Wanderer engage with contentious issues from the literature of the 1790s, especially female education, marriage and women's position in between public and private spheres, meaning that Wollstonecraft is an unavoidable precursor figure for both texts. Burney's engagement with Wollstonecraft remains ambivalent, at least partially caricaturing elements of her life

and writing through Elinor, whilst accessing Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments in her depiction of Ellis. Austen's relationship towards Wollstonecraft's feminist critique of female education and social hypocrisy is both more implicit and more assured, making Fanny into a surprisingly successful female philosopher figure: she is able to articulate a limited feminism and, importantly, passes on her hard-fought lessons of self-reliance onto her more active, younger sister. Austen's engagement with Wollstonecraftian concerns reveals the extent to which revolutionary ideas about women's rights, female education and potential for social improvement have been naturalised by the early 1810s. In Mansfield Park, Austen is able to present Wollstonecraft's controversial arguments in the mild, decorous voice of her narrator, allied to Fanny Price's intense interiority.

1814, the year both novels were published, is also a crucial year in the life of Mary Shelley, the subject of my next chapter: as Austen and Burney negotiated the waning influence of the female philosopher in their fiction, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was preparing to begin her literary career, in a series of letters and journal entries documenting her journey across war-ravaged Europe with her lover Percy Bysshe Shelley and step-sister Claire Clairmont, which would be later published as History of a Six Weeks' Tour (1816). Mary Shelley's writing implicitly and explicitly confronts the fate of the female philosopher through her own, personal, intellectual and textual engagement with Wollstonecraft, much closer than either Austen or Burney's. Throughout her work, Mary Shelley reformulates the female philosopher for the reading audiences of the 1820s and 30s in the different literary genres of the gothic, the historical novel, science fiction, and the silver fork novel.

## **V: Wollstonecraft's Legacy in Mary Shelley's Novels: Genre, Gender and the Female Philosopher**

### **1) Introduction: Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Female Philosopher**

As Claudia L. Johnson argues, the tremendous influence the figure of the female philosopher exerted on both the self-representations of women writers and representations within their writing of female characters in the early nineteenth century began to wane after 1815.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I argue that the female philosopher, particularly the figure's complex relationship with the life and work of Mary Wollstonecraft, remained a pressing concern in Wollstonecraft's daughter, Mary Shelley's writing. Shelley's engagement with the female philosopher across a series of different genres – the gothic, the historical novel, science fiction, the silver fork novel – reinvigorated the figure for the new reading audiences of the 1820s and 30s. These decades saw Europe torn between the contradictory impulses towards increased authoritarianism and for widening participation in democracy. The disintegration of revolutionary ideals of transnational cooperation in the reassertion of authoritarian governments across continental Europe, with new models of international diplomacy has been well discussed by Jonathan Sperber.<sup>2</sup> As Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes have shown, increasing demands for widening participation in democracy acted as a radical alternative to the reformation of autocratic regimes,

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<sup>1</sup> Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *Revolutionary Europe, 1780-1850* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), 323-62. See also, *Napoleon's Legacy: The Problem of Government in Restoration Europe*, eds. David Laven and Lucy Riall (Oxford: Berg, 2000) on the resurgence of authoritarian governments across Europe.

culminating in Britain in the Great Reform Act of 1832.<sup>3</sup> The rise of nationalism led to both independence movements in Greece and Italy, as discussed in Roderick Beaton and David Ricks's collection on Greek nationalism and in Maria Schoina's discussion of the impact of Italian freedom movements on Shelley and her circle,<sup>4</sup> and demands for patriotic compliance in Britain and elsewhere. For women, these decades saw a calcification of attitudes limiting their sphere of influence to the domestic realm.<sup>5</sup> Shelley's experiments with fictional genres show her responding to the literary and cultural changes brought about by years of political turmoil. I argue that her generic innovations allow her to revivify Wollstonecraft's legacy into the nineteenth century.

Shelley's engagement with the gothic genre has been widely discussed, in particular depth by Fred Botting and Anne Mellor, and in collections edited by Stephen Bann and George Levine and U.C. Knoepfmacher.<sup>6</sup> I argue that Shelley's use of the gothic allows her to explore the figure of the female philosopher at a gendered remove. She uses the creature's sense of alienation to analyse the psychic cost of social exclusion, expressed in strikingly similar ways to earlier female philosophers from Emma Courtney to Fanny Price. Shelley's later, less discussed

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<sup>3</sup> See Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, eds. Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), particularly their very useful introduction, 1-70.

<sup>4</sup> The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism and the Uses of the Past, eds. Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) and Maria Schoina, Romantic 'Anglo-Italians': Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys and the Pisan Circle (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) analyse the impact of Greek and Italian freedom movements on Romantic writers, with Schoina exploring Mary Shelley's engagement in them.

<sup>5</sup> Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850, eds. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (London: Routledge, 2002) offers both a valuable survey of the wealth of literature on the 'separate spheres' discourse of nineteenth-century domesticity and a deconstruction of the term.

<sup>6</sup> See Fred Botting, Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), for a theoretical approach to Frankenstein and the gothic, and Anne K. Mellor, Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fictions, Her Monsters (London: Routledge, 1989), for a more historical approach. See also, Stephen Bann, ed. Frankenstein, Creation and Monstrosity (London: Reaktion, 1994) and George Levine and U. C. Knoepfmacher, eds. The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

novels remodel the female philosopher figure of the 1790s and early nineteenth century within the new literary genres of the 1820s and 30s, particularly the historical novel, exemplified by Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels, and the silver fork novel, written by Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Benjamin Disraeli, among others. In these later works, Shelley tests the female philosopher figure as a representative of female experience against newer models of feminine behaviour, particularly the domestic heroine, analysed by Nancy Armstrong,<sup>7</sup> and the Romantic heroine, who finds her most profound expression in women's poetry of the time, for example, in the works of Laetitia Elizabeth Landon and Felicia Hemans.

Throughout her six novels Shelley engages with her mother Mary Wollstonecraft's personal, textual and intellectual legacy to her, in order to explore the extent to which competing representations of the female philosopher figure can be reformulated for her contemporary situation: from the male monster in Frankenstein, through the struggling female figures in Valperga and The Last Man to the more successful heroines of Perkin Warbeck, Lodore, and Falkner.<sup>8</sup> As I show below in my discussion of Frankenstein, Shelley engages significantly with the female philosopher figure in her first novel. Valperga and The Last Man focus on the difficulties faced by women in patriarchal society; opportunities for improvement are shown to be dangerously fragile both in the past of Renaissance Italy and in an imagined apocalyptic future. On the other hand, a theme developing over the course

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<sup>7</sup> See Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) for her discussion of the domestic heroine.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Shelley's novella Matilda (written in 1819 but suppressed by Godwin and published in 1959), her two travelogues, History of a Six Weeks' Tour (1817) and Rambles through Germany and Italy (1844), and her short stories all also bear traces of Wollstonecraft's influence, which calls for closer critical scrutiny. However, for the purposes of this chapter, a focus on Mary Shelley's novels reveals the trajectory of her engagement with Wollstonecraft, and how her approach to her mother's life and work matures over the course of two decades.

of these novels is the potential disruptiveness of women's agency, from Victor's fears about the power of the female creature in Frankenstein, leading him to destroy her; to Beatrice's powerful, seemingly prophetic voice in Valperga; to Evadne's thwarted ambition in The Last Man. In these early novels, Shelley's relationship with Wollstonecraft's life and writing is characterised by idealisation uneasily mixed with anxiety: she remains indebted to her mother's pioneering work on female education and women's potential in the public sphere, whilst voicing persistent doubts about the practicability of Wollstonecraft's theories in her increasingly conservative, Post-Jacobin world. Her pragmatic concerns align her with the earlier works by Opie, Hamilton and Edgeworth which I discuss in my third chapter. In her final three novels, Shelley switches her focus to more positive models of female education in contrast to codes of honour which pervert male understanding. In these later novels, Shelley adapts Wollstonecraft's arguments for her post-revolutionary situation, both building upon her mother's work and deliberately contrasting her own approach to Wollstonecraft's. This confident approach allows her to create powerful, successful female characters combining Wollstonecraft's rationalism with Shelley's more Romantic worldview.

Whereas Shelley's early novels engage anxiously with the female philosopher figure, her later works deal more confidently with the figure, in part by colouring them with the contemporary, poetic figure of the Romantic heroine. As I discuss in my introduction, the female philosopher figure developed out of Enlightenment discourses which privilege rationality, virtue and religious piety, and therefore formed part of an eighteenth-century model of femininity. The Romantic heroine privileged female creativity, the imagination and a communion with nature, above the intellectual pursuits of the female philosopher, drawing on ideals of femininity

involved in the burgeoning Romantic movement. The female philosopher represented the thinking woman, an important figure in a progressive, Enlightenment narrative of increasing civilisation; the Romantic heroine embodied a new narrative of the creative self.

Although this new figure is most fully explored in women's poetry of the time, the originary Romantic heroine was born in 1807 in Madame De Staël's Corinne; ou, L'Italie: the novel's depiction of Corinne as a tortured female artist, at once intellectual, passionate and self-destructive, influenced a generation of women writers responding to and challenging De Staël's representation of female creativity, as has been well established by Kari Lokke.<sup>9</sup> The figure of the Romantic heroine developed throughout the early nineteenth century in, for example, the poetry of Laetitia Elizabeth Landon and Felicia Hemans.<sup>10</sup> Landon developed De Staël's representation of the female artist throughout her own poetry, especially in 'The Improvisatrice' (1824), which explores the speaker's career as a famous poet, together with telling her tragic love story, spliced together with examples of her extempore verse.<sup>11</sup> Landon's narrative of female inspiration, ambition and heartbreak is mirrored by Shelley's depiction of Evadne in The Last Man (1826). I argue that, in

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<sup>9</sup> See Kari Lokke, Tracing Women's Romanticism: Gender, History and Transcendence (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), which connects De Staël's representation of Corinne as a Romantic heroine to Mary Shelley's response to both author and heroine in Valperga, 57-83.

<sup>10</sup> Hemans is championed in Susan Wolfson, Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 39-77. Hemans' position in the development of the female poetess tradition, and how this connects to the Romantic heroine, is discussed in Marlon Ross, The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Landon's self-representation as an improvisatrice is explored in Glennis Stephenson, 'Laetitia Landon and the Victorian Improvisatrice: The Construction of L.E.L.' Victorian Poetry 30 (Spring 1992), 1-17. The Romantic heroine also informs other novelists' representations of female characters, for example, Sydney Owenson's Glorvina in The Wild Irish Girl (1806) (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008): powerfully, emotionally and imaginatively attached to the landscape of Ireland. Mary Brunton's novels Self Control (1811) and Discipline (1814) and Susan Ferrier's Marriage (1818), The Inheritance (1824) and Destiny (1831) also engage with, expand on and challenge the developing stereotype of the Romantic heroine.

<sup>11</sup> Laetitia Elizabeth Landon, 'The Improvisatrice' in The Improvisatrice and Other Poems (London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1824), 1-105.

her later novels, Shelley appropriates characteristics of the Romantic heroine, mainly developed in contemporary women's poetry, in order to colour her representation of contrasting examples of female behaviour. In this way, Shelley draws on the earlier tradition of the female philosopher, together with newer models of female behaviour, in order to revivify Wollstonecraft's cultural legacy in the nineteenth century.

## 2) Female Philosophy as Monstrosity: Frankenstein

The female philosopher seems, at first, to be absent from Shelley's first and most famous novel Frankenstein, as it is narrated by three male protagonists, and its female characters remain either marginalised or victimised by the action of the plot. However, both Ellen Moers and U. C. Knoepfelmacher have noted the creature's propinquity with the figure and, moreover, have focussed on the way in which the creature's narrative accesses elements of Wollstonecraft's life and work above either Victor's counter-narrative or Walton's framing tale.<sup>12</sup> Further, as Anne Mellor argues, Shelley forges a series of connections between the creature's story and the female characters in the novel, comparing his education, character and actions with those of Safie, who unconsciously aids his education and fearfully rejects him when he pleads for companionship with the De Lacey family, and Elizabeth Lavenza, whom he finally murders in warped revenge for Victor's destruction of the female creature.<sup>13</sup> I argue that, by paralleling her depiction of the creature with representations of the

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<sup>12</sup> See U. C. Knoepfelmacher, 'Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters' in The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel, eds. George Levine and Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 88-119, and Ellen Moers, 'The Female Gothic' in Levine and Knoepfelmacher, 77-87.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Mellor connects the creature to Elizabeth and Safie in Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters (New York: Routledge, 1989), further connecting him to Mary Shelley's self-representation as the novel's author, 45-7.

female philosopher, together with allusions to Wollstonecraft's life and work, Shelley both creates sympathy for each of these figures – the creature, the female philosopher and Wollstonecraft – and reveals her anxieties about the destabilising qualities of all three.

The creature's narrative forms the central section of the novel, and many critics have focussed on his story as the site of Shelley's engagement with the personal and textual legacy of Wollstonecraft's life and work. Charles Robinson and Joyce Zonana both argue that Shelley uses A Vindication of the Rights of Woman to develop both the tale of Safie's escape from Oriental(ist) slavery and the creature's reasoned assault on Western values.<sup>14</sup> Marie Mulvey-Roberts situates Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, in which Wollstonecraft positions the mother as the central figure in a child's development, as an important intertext connecting the creature's sense of alienation from the world with Shelley's own feelings of loss and betrayal at growing up without a mother.<sup>15</sup> D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf further suggest that Shelley models the way in which the creature first learns to read on Wollstonecraft's 'Lessons', written for Fanny Imlay, first published in the Posthumous Works as 'Both proceed from concrete to abstract, and both place learning in a supportive family context'.<sup>16</sup> I argue that these connections between Wollstonecraft's texts and the creature's (stunted) intellectual and emotional

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<sup>14</sup> See Charles Robinson, 'A Mother's Daughter: An Intersection of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' in Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives, eds. Helen M. Buss et al. (Peterborough: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 127-38, and Joyce Zonana, "'They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale': Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein' Journal of Narrative Technique 21.2 (Spring 1991), 170-84. Further references in-text as 'A Mother's Daughter' and 'Feminist Core' respectively.

<sup>15</sup> See Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Corpse in the Corpus: Frankenstein, Rewriting Wollstonecraft and the Abject' in Mary Shelley's Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner, eds. Michael Eberle-Sinatra and Nora Crook (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 197-210.

<sup>16</sup> See D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf, 'Introduction to Frankenstein', Frankenstein: The Original 1818 Text, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Peterborough: Broadview, 2005), 32.

development also forge links between the creature and the representations of the female philosopher, both positive and negative, which drew on Wollstonecraft's reputation in the early nineteenth century. The creature's autodidacticism, brought about by Frankenstein's abandonment of him, and his subsequent lack of the stable family environment sketched by Wollstonecraft in her 'Lessons', lead him to make strikingly similar critiques of the social hierarchy and hypocrisy disrupting his access to education as made by the female philosopher figures of the 1790s, such as Mary Hays' Emma Courtney.

The creature's self-education alongside the De Lacey family's interactions with each other, and Felix's teaching of Safie in particular, strikingly resembles the educational programme in Wollstonecraft's 'Lessons', which Shelley would have been able to read in Godwin's Posthumous Works of her mother, although the creature's experiences are tragically detached from the familial setting of Wollstonecraft's writing. 'Lessons' begin with lists of nouns relating to observable phenomena, from domestic animals to household furniture and meals in the first lesson. In the second lesson, Wollstonecraft moves on to verbs, particularly activities relating to a small child: 'Come. Walk. Run. Go. Jump. Dance. Ride. Sit. Stand. Play. Hold. Shake. Speak. Sing. Cry. Laugh. Call. Fall', and concepts such as numbers, colours, time and cleanliness.<sup>17</sup> The third lesson begins to arrange these nouns, verbs and concepts into sentences, from straightforward commands: 'Stroke the cat. Play with the dog. Eat the bread...' to surprisingly melancholic observations, such as: 'The man laughs. The child cries' ('Lessons', 469). Lessons V – VII develop a narrative which encourages the child to compare its circumstances to others, with

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, 'Lessons' in The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, vol. 4, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), 461-74, 468. Subsequent references, in-text.

the narrator's questions prompting an analysis of a younger baby and providing an explanation of the child's maturation (469-70). Lesson VI introduces the idea of breastfeeding and Lesson VII concludes with an intriguing psychological parable. The child has to stop breastfeeding after she grows her first teeth because she bites the narrator: 'Poor mamma! Still I did not cry, because I am not a child, but you hurt me very much' (470). This prompts the child's papa to decide she is 'old enough to learn to eat', teaching her to eat a crust of bread and looking for 'some other milk' (470). The seventh lesson encourages the child to enter into complex empathy with her mother's situation and begins to place her under her father's tutelage. The remaining lessons ask the child to compare her situation with that of a younger sibling, and to empathise with her others.

The creature achieves literacy through his own 'great application', discovering 'the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse' such as 'fire, milk, bread, and wood' (*Frankenstein*, 83, emphasis in original). He also learns that the names relate to the De Lacey family: 'The youth and his companion had each of them several names, but the old man had only one, which was father. The girl was called sister, or Agatha; and the youth Felix, brother, or son' (83-4, emphasis in original). Like the young girl in Wollstonecraft's 'Lessons', the creature moves from domestic nouns to familial relations, concluding with his difficulty in understanding more abstract concepts: 'I distinguished several other words, without being able as yet to understand or apply them; such as good, dearest, unhappy' (84, emphasis in original). This last word is clearly significant for the monster and underlines the difference between his education and that imagined in Wollstonecraft's 'Lessons'. The creature remains sharply divided from the warm domestic affections of the De Lacey family, marking his self-education with this unhappiness.

The creature's education stalls until the arrival of Safie, which allows him to learn to read alongside her. Clemit argues that his progressive reading-matter, beginning with Volney's The Ruins and moving on to Plutarch's Parallel Lives, Milton's Paradise Lost, and Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther, 'not only transforms the creature's sense of himself, but also equips him to launch a vigorous critique of Frankenstein's actions in both public and private spheres'.<sup>18</sup> This transformative power of reading links him to female philosopher figures from the 1790s onwards. Like Emma Courtney, Maria, Adeline Mowbray, even Bridgetina Botherim, the creature's sense of personal and societal injustice, and the eloquence of his attack on Victor's lack of parental responsibility, develops from his reading of philosophical and literary treatises. Shelley uses the creature's new sense of self to ironically criticise contemporary mores:

I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were, high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these acquisitions; but without either he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profit of the chosen few. And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. (Frankenstein, 89-90)

The creature's attack on the 'artificial distinctions of rank', campaigned against by Wollstonecraft in her Vindication (see chapter 4, above), unites him to the reasoned critique of existing social structures by female philosopher figures from the 1790s, particularly Hays' Emma Courtney and Wollstonecraft's Maria. Shelley satirises existing class hierarchies through the creature's awareness that human beings value

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<sup>18</sup> Pamela Clemit, 'Frankenstein, Matilda and the Legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft' in The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley, ed. Esther M. Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 26-44, 35.

'high and unsullied descent united with riches' at the expense of the 'virtue and good feelings' which the creature more genuinely admires in the De Lacey family.

The creature's reading of Werther and Paradise Lost mixes empathy (he identifies with Goethe's protagonist and with both Adam and Satan), with alienation: 'I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings concerning whom I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener' (96); a detachment which further links him to figures like Emma Courtney, whose early reading leads her to identify with both male and female heroes, until she realises that existing social structures both sexualise her and subordinate her desires to men's. The creature's confusion develops into existential crisis: 'My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?' (96). Some of the answers are supplied to him through Victor's journal, which he returns to his creator. He describes his discovery of the details of his 'accursed origin': 'the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors, and rendered mine ineffaceable', leading him to curse his creator for leaving him ugly, alone and hated (97). The creature's highly charged language, 'accursed', 'disgusting', 'odious and loathsome', does more than simply reflect his 'ineffaceable' self-loathing, it also highlights the transgressive nature of Victor's actions.

The creature's return of Victor's journal develops a recurring theme of the circulation of manuscripts in Frankenstein. Earlier, the creature offers Victor his transcripts of the letters between Felix and Safie which he claims 'will prove the truth of my tale' (92), by providing external evidence of the De Lacey family (although the strength of this evidence is diluted by their status as copies). Later used as evidence

for the truth of Victor's tale by passing them on to Walton, the contents of these letters are only summarised by the creature, never transcribed for the actual reader of the novel. The creature's narration of the content of these letters centres on the development of Safie's moral sense, which strikingly parallels Wollstonecraft's arguments on this process of maturation in the Vindication, stressing independence, intellectual development and moral rectitude. Zonana reads 'the letters as central... in finding the "mother", Mary Wollstonecraft, at the heart of Shelley's text... taking Mary Wollstonecraft's presence to have literary and philosophical rather than psychological and personal meaning' ('Feminist Core', 171). Robinson questions Safie's status as Wollstonecraftian heroine, arguing that it is problematised by her climactic rejection of the creature. I argue that Safie's treatment of the creature, reacting to his plea for companionship with fear and horror, reveals the complexity of Shelley's vision, showing her despairing insight into the lack of solidarity amongst alienated groups.

Safie's mother 'was a Christian Arab, seized and made a slave by the Turks' (92). Her determination to instruct her daughter 'in the tenets of her religion, and... to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet' (92) links both Safie and her mother not only to Wollstonecraft's feminism but to the connections she makes between women's position in patriarchal society and slavery throughout the Vindication.<sup>19</sup> Zonana argues that 'Safie's story, an embodiment of Wollstonecraft's philosophy, is

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<sup>19</sup> Moira Ferguson analyses Wollstonecraft's abolitionist stance in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834 (London: Routledge, 1992), arguing that Wollstonecraft is 'the first white British woman to mount a twin-pronged philosophical and economic assault on the institution [of slavery]', 188. Shelley's comparison of Safie and her mother with 'the female followers of Mahomet' also echoes Wollstonecraft's critique of Islam, in which she mistakenly argues that the religion denies that women can have a soul.

equivalent to the monster's story... The plot contained in the letters... can prove nothing about the monster's tale. But the theme, communicated through characterisation and imagery that evoke the Vindication of the Rights of Woman, is deeply relevant to the monster's story', as both Safie and the creature rebel against circumstances enforced upon them by patriarchy ('Feminist Core', 174). Safie refuses to consent to a life in the harem and the creature revolts against his solitary existence, brought about because of Victor's abnegation of responsibility for him. Robinson focuses on Safie's failure to sympathise with the creature, when she runs away from his plea for friendship, arguing that 'Despite all of her admirable qualities, Safie redeemed neither the monster nor the text of this novel' ('A Mother's Daughter', 136). Robinson's desire that Safie and the creature unite in solidarity in order to somehow redeem the novel misses Shelley's more sophisticated perspective on the lack of connection between alienated individuals in modern society. In the end, the creature is left with a painful sense of social exclusion, shared by Wollstonecraft and Shelley, which leads him to violence and (self-)destruction.

The creature's narrative ends with his demand that Victor make him a female companion because 'I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me' (Frankenstein, 107). Persuaded by the creature's sympathetic, rational speech, Victor finally agrees to make him a female companion, although he is already concerned that their 'joint wickedness might desolate the earth' (108). Victor eventually destroys his second creature in front of his first. He argues first that 'she might be ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake in murder and wretchedness' (128); secondly, that she 'might refuse to comply with a compact [to quit Europe with the male creature] made before her creation', thirdly that the

creatures ‘might even hate each other’ because of their mutual hideousness, and finally, that, through their sexual union, ‘a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror’ (128). Anne Mellor contends that Victor’s arguments explicitly reveal his fear of female sexuality, implicit in his attempt to create offspring on his own.<sup>20</sup> Further, the gender of the female creature would actualise the implied connections between the first creature, Wollstonecraft and the female philosopher figure. Shelley herself had laboured to obfuscate these connections, by making the creature male rather than female, enabling her to explore the legacy of the female philosopher’s political and cultural critiques, and, by extension, those of Wollstonecraft herself, from a more neutral, or masculine, perspective. Shelley makes Victor’s extreme fear of the malignity of the female creature, that she might become ‘ten thousand times’ worse than her mate, indulging in violence ‘for its own sake’ (which revealingly acknowledges the legitimacy of the first creature’s actions), mirror contemporary fears, discussed in the introduction to my thesis, over the sociopolitical, economic and cultural costs of increased female agency, nowhere more explicit than in the reactionary attacks on Wollstonecraft’s legacy after her death.

### 3) Historicising the Female Philosopher: Valperga

Valperga; or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca (1823), Shelley’s second full-length novel, contrasts the historical ascent of the titular Castruccio Castracani, the early Renaissance Italian soldier turned despot,

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<sup>20</sup> Anne Mellor, Mary Shelley, 40.

celebrated by Machiavelli, with the fictional fortunes of two women, the liberal, republican ruler Euthanasia and the would-be prophet Beatrice, whose fates are intimately connected to Castruccio's ruthless rise to power. Euthanasia represents an alternative to Castruccio's autocratic regime: Shelley imagines Valperga as a liberal, enlightened state championing social stability, a politics of care and cultural richness. Although Castruccio eventually betrays Euthanasia, razing Valperga to the ground, she embodies Shelley's ideal of female agency and political reform. In Euthanasia, she superimposes the Enlightenment iteration of the female philosopher figure, together with elements of Wollstonecraft's political arguments, onto the context of fourteenth-century Italy, suggesting new possibilities for the novel's contemporary context, especially the Italian independence movement gathering pace in the 1820s. The early 1820s saw the development of the Italian unification movement, il Risorgimento (meaning, the Resurgence), which began in 1815, after the fall of Napoleon and the reorganisation of Italy as a conglomeration of independent city states under Austrian rule. There were minor insurrections in Sicily in 1820 and Piedmont in 1821 which failed to win widespread support, but, more importantly, a cultural and artistic movement advocating national independence began to gather force.<sup>21</sup> Shelley lived and worked in Italy during this period, and Valperga can be read, in part, as her imagined manifesto for a liberal, republican government, exemplified by Euthanasia's enlightened rule.

As Euthanasia's fate reveals Castruccio's destructiveness in the public sphere, witnessing her childhood friendship with the despot sacrificed to political expediency, his corruption of Beatrice underscores his private vices. Castruccio

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<sup>21</sup> See Derek Beales and Eugenio Biagini, The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1971; repr. Harlow: Longman, 2002) for a detailed discussion of the Italian independence movement over the course of the nineteenth century.

seduces then discards Beatrice, both fascinated by her powerful status as seeming seer and repelled by this example of her disturbing agency. Shelley's representation of Beatrice draws on counter-revolutionary depictions of the female philosopher, combining potentially revolutionary public power with destabilising sensuality, but places her in a historical context distinct from that of either the 1790s or 1820s. Beatrice both parallels and contrasts with Euthanasia: Beatrice's uncritical devotion to the man who has effectively ruined her highlights Euthanasia's moral stance against Castruccio, at the same time as revealing how her feelings for the devious Prince blind her to the perfidy of his actions.

Like Opie's Adeline Mowbray and Hamilton's Modern Philosophers, Valperga concludes with the deaths of its heroines, Euthanasia and Beatrice. However, whereas Beatrice represents a provocative extension back into history of the female philosopher's self-destructive desires, the contrasting character Euthanasia suggests new possibilities for female agency, at the same time as the exigencies of her historical situation conspire against her reformist politics. Shelley's representations of the parallel personalities of her two heroines, together with the development of their relationship in the later stages of the novel, reformulate the tradition of contrasting female philosopher figures, positioning competing images of the female philosopher into a different historical context, early Renaissance Italy. In the figures of Euthanasia and Beatrice, Valperga historicises the female philosopher, creating an imaginary genealogy for a figure who haunts early nineteenth-century women's writing, particularly in the representation and reception of Wollstonecraft's political and philosophical thought, providing a historical justification for Shelley's feminism.

As historical fiction, Valperga engages in a dialogue with Walter Scott's historical novels; the authorship of the anonymous Waverley novels being an open

secret by 1823. Lidia Garbin argues that Shelley's 'love of Scott is shown by her reading Ivanhoe, Waverley, The Antiquary and Rob Roy in the space of a week, from 12 to 20 December 1821'.<sup>22</sup> Deidre Lynch contrasts Valperga with Scott's fiction, arguing that Shelley consciously reformulates the gender politics of the Waverley novels in her own writing.<sup>23</sup> Judith Wilt attacks Scott's treatment of women in his fiction, contending that his privileging of women's private influence over real power in the public sphere of political action constitutes the 'Great Lie' in his writing, as it ensnares women in a discourse of passive domesticity.<sup>24</sup> I argue that Shelley's novel reverses Scott's gender politics, by privileging Euthanasia's real power as liberal ruler of her Valperga over her private influence over her corrupted lover, Castruccio.

Furthermore, I situate Scott's female heroines as contrasting echoes of the female philosopher figure to Shelley's representation of historicised female philosophers in this and later novels. Alexander Welsh argues that:

The proper heroine of Scott is a blonde. Her role corresponds to that of the passive hero - whom, indeed, she marries at the end. She is eminently beautiful, and eminently prudent. Like the passive hero, she suffers in the thick of events but seldom moves them. The several dark heroines, no less beautiful, are less restrained from the pressure of their own feelings...They allow their feelings to dictate to their reason, and seem to symbolize passion itself.<sup>25</sup>

I argue that Scott's contrasting heroines contain echoes of the conflicting iterations of the female philosopher figure in the 1790s and later. For example, the proper,

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<sup>22</sup> Lidia Garbin, 'The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck: Walter Scott in the Writings of Mary Shelley' Romanticism on the Net 6 (May 1997) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/RON/1997/v/n6/005752ar.html>> 5 / 9 / 12.

<sup>23</sup> Deidre Lynch, 'Historical Novelist' in Schor, 135-50.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Wilt, Secret Leaves: The Novels of Walter Scott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 116-117. Wilt specifically attacks Scott's heroine in The Heart of Mid-Lothian, Jeanie Deans, arguing that her inability to trade the villainous Sir George Staunton's life for her half-sister Effie's, and her later release of this unlucky couple's illegitimate son, constitutes 'the crucial topos of this novel... that women must save, may not kill man', 126. I suggest that Scott's treatment of Jeanie is more complex than Wilt allows, especially her concluding release of the parricide son.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Welsh, The Hero of the Waverley Novels (Yale University Press, 1963), 71.

passive Rose Bradwardine in Waverley resembles the 'safe' Enlightenment example of the figure, exemplified by Edgeworth's Belinda or even Austen's Fanny Price, whereas Flora MacIvor's rebellious, Jacobite energy draws on the counter-revolutionary representation of the dangerously sexy, Jacobin female philosopher. Other *Waverley* novels also seem to draw on female philosopher figures, for example, Julia Mannering, caught between duty to her eponymous father, Guy Mannering, and desire for the lost laird of Ellangowan, Harry Bertram, in Scott's own second novel of 1815, and Diana Vernon, the fiery, Jacobite love interest of Frank Osbaldistone in Rob Roy (1817). Both of these women flirt with criticisms of social and familial strictures on female education and expression, played for mostly comic effect in Guy Mannering but with explicitly revolutionary, and potentially tragic, ramifications in Rob Roy, before they settle down with the heroes of their respective novels. Especially in her early novels, Shelley challenges this restriction on women's influence to the private sphere, offering a political, active alternative in Euthanasia's rule in Valperga before the more pessimistic critique of The Last Man.

Euthanasia's personality and politics connect her across historical boundaries to the Enlightenment exemplar of the female philosopher figure, in terms of her education, her personal stance on political issues surrounding liberty, republicanism and female agency, and her religious devotion. By the 1820s, the female philosopher as Enlightenment avatar was inextricably intertwined, for good or ill, with early 1790s Revolutionary discourse and the posthumous reputation of Wollstonecraft.

Euthanasia therefore represents Shelley's engagement with her mother Wollstonecraft's revolutionary politics: she positions Euthanasia as an enlightened female ruler, embodying the possibilities for women's political agency which are mentioned but left undeveloped in Wollstonecraft's Vindication, for example, her

'hint' that she 'really think[s] that women ought to have [political] representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government' (217). Euthanasia represents one of these representatives, cast back in time.

Euthanasia receives an anachronistically enlightened education, generally unavailable to women in Renaissance Florence, due to her father's blindness, which means his studies require her help. She offers to aid his studies by learning Latin, not the 'rude and barbarous Latin' of fourteenth-century Italy but 'the polished language of Cicero and Virgil'.<sup>26</sup> Shelley describes the effects of her 'advantageous and memorable' education:

she did not acquire that narrow idea of the present times, as if they and the world were the same, which characterizes the unlearned; she saw and marked the revolutions that had been, and the present seemed to her only a point of rest, from which time was to renew his flight, scattering changes as he went; and, if her voice or act could mingle aught of good in these changes, this it was to which her imagination most ardently aspired. She was deeply penetrated by the acts and thoughts of those men, who despised the spirit of party, and grasped the universe in the hopes of virtue and independence. (Valperga, 18)

This passage celebrates Euthanasia's reformist vision of futurity in a way which chimes with the writings of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Percy Shelley. Her rejection of 'the spirit of party' reflects Shelley's Post-Jacobin sensibility: the mutually destructive squabbles of the Guelphs and Ghibelines represent her awareness that neither the radicalism of her parents' 1790s generation nor the deepening conservatism of the 1820s offers her the 'hopes of virtue and independence' which animate her heroine in the novel. Her conclusion that Euthanasia's 'young thoughts

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Shelley, Valperga; or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca [1823] ed. Nora Crook The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley, vol. 3. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), 18. Subsequent references, in-text.

darted into futurity, to the hope of freedom for Italy, of revived learning and the reign of peace for all the world' were 'wild dreams' represents a challenge to a post-revolutionary era resigned to the reestablishment of partisan politics and autocratic regimes, connecting her historical novel with contemporary liberation movements in Italy and Greece.

Describing Euthanasia and Castruccio's developing love for each other, Shelley links Euthanasia to late eighteenth-century female philosophers, such as Emma Courtney in Hays' novel and Maria in Wollstonecraft's unfinished work, by showing how her idealisation of Castruccio blinds her to his flawed moral character. She gives this trope an explicitly political twist, by revealing that Euthanasia's love of liberty, which has matured into a complex cultural system, is incompatible with Castruccio's narrower power-based policy. Shelley informs her readers: 'Castruccio was a staunch Ghibeline, and his soul was set on the advancement of that party; he did not sympathize with Euthanasia, but he appeared to do so, for he loved her, and listened, his eyes shining with pleasure, while she spoke in silver tones, and all appeared wise and good that came from her lips' (78). By playing Castruccio's lack of sympathy for Euthanasia's ideals against his desire for her, Shelley suggests both characters' limited appreciation of the abilities of the other, adding an additional nuance in Castruccio's idealisation of Euthanasia to a common scenario. Although Euthanasia is able, by the end of the novel, to recognise and rebuke Castruccio's self-serving arguments, her innocent love for him fatally delays this realisation. Shelley refuses to allow Castruccio any such moment of tragic self-recognition, instead showing how his political ambitions destroy his private virtues.

Shelley traces the tensions between Euthanasia's love for Castruccio and duty towards her dependants, contrasting her principled stance against his unscrupulous

actions, culminating in his attack on Valperga by way of a little known weak point used whilst he was courting Euthanasia. Before he attempts this ambush he sends his trusted lieutenant, and Euthanasia's friend, Arrigo di Guinigi, to persuade her to cede Valperga willingly to him. Arrigo's message from Castruccio mimics terms used by Euthanasia when she attempted to explain that her official duties trumped her love for him, so he argues that his threatened attack on Valperga is 'a question of state, and not a private altercation; and he would be unworthy of the trust reposed in him, if he permitted his individual inclinations to interfere with his duty towards the public' (201). Euthanasia sees through Castruccio's rhetoric and replies:

I would that the prince had not so far degraded himself, as to veil his tyranny with hypocrisy and falsehood... I will never willingly surrender my power into his hands: I hold it for the good of my people, who are happy under my government, and towards whom I shall ever perform my duty. I look upon him as a lawless tyrant, whom every one ought to resist to the utmost of their power; nor will I through cowardice give way to injustice. (201)

Euthanasia's response tears the veil away from Castruccio's sophistry and reveals his underlying corrupting ambition, stressing the continuity between Castruccio's private motivations and his actions in the public sphere. Her eloquence – in positioning his attack as a personally motivated assault rather than a public action; in standing up for the good of her people against his wishes; and in underscoring the principles of her resistance to his lawless tyranny – also reveals the extent to which Euthanasia functions as Shelley's ideal of a female ruler. Whereas Tilottama Rajan reads Euthanasia as 'androgynously Shelleyan',<sup>27</sup> Stuart Curran argues that 'On the profoundest level, Euthanasia dei Adimari represents the ideal to which Mary Wollstonecraft subscribed throughout her writings, and particularly in the Vindication

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<sup>27</sup> Tilottama Rajan, 'Between Romance and History: Possibility and Contingency in Godwin, Leibniz, and Mary Shelley's *Valperga*' in *Mary Shelley and Her Times*, eds. Betty Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 88-102, 88-9.

of the Rights of Woman'.<sup>28</sup> In Valperga, Shelley portrays Euthanasia as an avatar of Wollstonecraftian ideals, creating an imaginative space to test Wollstonecraft's social, political and cultural agenda in a different historical context.

Castruccio destroys Valperga and coerces Euthanasia into remaining his guest / prisoner at Lucca. When she is entrapped in a conspiracy against his life, Castruccio is unable to execute his childhood lover, instead banishing Euthanasia over the waves. Her ship is caught in a storm and she is never seen again, forgotten from public history. In her conclusion, Shelley contrasts the 'private chronicles' which recount the life and death of Euthanasia with the 'public histories... of the last years of the life of Castruccio' (323). In this way, she points to contemporary conceptions of the private sphere, more and more designated female, compared to the public sphere of male, political action, whilst at the same time problematising such divisiveness: Euthanasia has acted in a principled, enlightened manner in the public sphere, whilst Castruccio has abused his power in both public and private. She also uses the private / public debate to differentiate her use of the genre of the historical novel from Walter Scott by focusing on the ways in which women could act and affect change, as well as the social, cultural and political obstacles placed on such action; a perspective generally absent from Scott's fiction. Shelley's focus on the private chronicles from which she has reanimated Euthanasia allows her to encode in this downbeat conclusion the possibility of liberal, enlightened government by a woman. The wistful concluding lines of Euthanasia's story, 'Earth felt no change when she died; and men forgot her' (322), further suggests a link to Wollstonecraft, who Shelley may feel has

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<sup>28</sup> Stuart Curran, 'Valperga' in The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 103-15, 113.

similarly been forgotten: her novel reanimates not only Euthanasia, but, through her, the ghost of Wollstonecraft.

Throughout Valperga, Shelley contrasts Euthanasia's reasoned stance towards her trials and misfortunes against Beatrice's superstitious upbringing and increasingly irrational behaviour. Beatrice is introduced at the beginning of Volume II as a prophetess, suspected by the Inquisition and aided, albeit unknowingly, by corrupt priests to defeat their trial of her as a witch. She falls in love with Castruccio, who has sex with her, before revealing that he is in fact in love with Euthanasia, leaving her a broken woman. Although given a Renaissance veneer, Beatrice's career strikingly resembles that of female philosopher figures celebrated in early revolutionary writing and satirised in Anti-Jacobin fiction: Shelley replaces the destabilising political radicalism of the female philosopher with Beatrice's religious fanaticism, but from this different starting point allows Beatrice to give voice to social criticisms she shares with later feminist figures.

Shelley's depiction of Beatrice as a female philosopher further distinguishes itself from contemporary representations, often set in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, in her lack of a satirical narrative voice; Beatrice's own narrative of her life and love is treated seriously and sympathetically. Shelley's exchange of the female philosopher's revolutionary fervour with Beatrice's religious fanaticism clearly marks the fallacy of Beatrice's beliefs (her vocation as prophetess is revealed to be a sham and leads to her terrible, mock Gothic demise, maddened by the pronouncements of a false witch to throw herself under Castruccio's horse), at the same time as allowing her powerful expression of both her desires and her critique of a social system which validates male desire at the expense of female. Instead of falling back in line with social values as was customary with contemporary female

philosophers, Beatrice is allowed to enunciate a wide-ranging critique of social ills, still prevalent in Shelley's time, in her confrontation with Euthanasia. First, Beatrice attacks Euthanasia's belief in a benevolent deity, arguing 'with tumultuous eloquence': 'you either worship a useless shadow, or a fiend in the clothing of a god' (242). She demands: 'Look around you. Is there not war, violation of treaties, and hard-hearted cruelty? Look at the societies of men; are not our fellow creatures tormented one by the other in an endless circle of pain?' (243). She then lists public, religious and military atrocities of the recent Italian past, before turning to the private sphere: 'Then reflect upon domestic life, on the strife, hatred and uncharitableness, that, as sharp spears, pierce one's bosom at every turn; think of jealousy, midnight murders, envy, want of faith, calumny, ingratitude, cruelty, and all which man in his daily sport inflicts upon man'. She finally turns to the intellectual and emotional composition of the individual human being, castigating God's contrariness: 'Oh, what spirit mingled in my wretched frame love, hope, energy, confidence, – to find indifference, to be blasted with despair, to be as weak as the fallen leaf, to be betrayed by all!' (243-4). She concludes by voicing a profound ambivalence about the imagination itself, in a lengthy diatribe which expresses profound concerns about a central tenet of not only Percy Shelley's philosophy, but the educational systems of Godwin and Wollstonecraft as well:

And the imagination, that masterpiece of his malice; that spreads honey on the cup that you may drink poison; that strews roses over thorns, thorns sharp and big as spears; that semblance of beauty which beckons you to the desert; that apple of gold with the heart of ashes; that foul image, with the veil of excellence; that mist of the maremma, glowing with roseate hues beneath the sun, that creates it, and beautifies it, to destroy you; that diadem of nettles; that spear, broken in your heart! He, the damned and triumphant one, sat meditating many thousand years for the conclusion, the consummation, the final crown, the seal of all misery, which he set on man's brain and heart to doom him to

endless torment; and he created the Imagination. And then we are told the fault is ours; good and evil are sown in our hearts, and ours is the tillage, ours the harvest; and can this justify an omnipotent deity that he permits one particle of pain to subsist in this world? Oh, never. (244)

Beatrice's diatribe both attacks the imagination for its delusional qualities and celebrates its terrible power, revealing the extent of her bitterness about her experiences. Beatrice concludes her attack on religious, social, political and domestic dogma by assuring Euthanasia that 'if I have said that which appears to you blasphemy; I will unveil my heart to you, tell you my sufferings, and surely you will then curse with me the author of my being' (246), which Shelley entertainingly describes as 'my Anathema'.<sup>29</sup> Beatrice's central attack on the imagination combines painful self-awareness – she is driven to her own destruction by her imaginative self-identification as prophetess – with Shelley's own ambivalent vision of the problems of human creativity: the imagination is both creative and destructive, and she is aware that the creativity celebrated by her husband and parents contains the seeds of violence and disorder.

Euthanasia attempts to remedy Beatrice's distress by reformulating her nightmarish vision of the powers of the imagination with a calmer, more rational one, telling her friend a parable of the human soul as a 'vast cave' (262), figuring Consciousness as 'a centinel at the entrance', with the emotions waiting behind him. In 'the vestibule of this cavern', Euthanasia describes Memory, Judgement and Reason, surrounded by Joy, Fear, Hope, together with 'Religion... and Charity, or sometimes in their place, their counterfeits or opposites, Hypocrisy, Avarice and

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<sup>29</sup> In a Letter to Maria Gisborne dated 6 May [1823], Mary Shelley asks 'Did the end of Beatrice surprise you. I am surprised that none of these Literary Gazettes are shocked—I feared that they would stumble over a part of what I read to you & still more over my Anathema', *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, ed. Betty T. Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 336.

Cruelty' (262). In the dark, 'Conscience sits' and behind him, the Imagination.

Euthanasia's parable of the human personality shows her combination of rational discourse with imaginative power; unfortunately, it fails to console Beatrice, driven to despair by her bitter life experiences. In Valperga, Shelley balances her characterisation of Euthanasia as a Renaissance female philosopher, able to pursue, at least for a while, an enlightened, republican agenda in the public sphere of Italy's divided politics, with her representation of Beatrice as an unstable and destabilising force, foreshadowing the counter-revolutionary fears of the female philosopher figure. Whereas Euthanasia represents Shelley's ideal of female agency, fatally circumscribed in the novel by Castruccio's martial ambitions, she uses Beatrice to both voice and embody criticisms of the patriarchal system which valorises Castruccio's selfish and destructive career above the revolutionary potential of Euthanasia's reasoned, empathetic standpoint.

#### 4) 'Why Not the Last Woman?' The Last Man

The Last Man (1826) parallels the lives, loves and deaths of three female characters, Perdita, Idris and Evadne, with the contrasting political and personal visions of its three male protagonists, Lionel, Adrian, and Raymond. Perdita, Lionel's sister and Raymond's wife, is portrayed as more of a Romantic heroine than a female philosopher, eschewing interest in Lionel and Adrian's philosophical concerns to pursue her own imaginative communion with the political ambitions of her husband. Idris, Adrian's sister and Lionel's wife, represents a domestic ideal, attempting to shelter her friends and family from the course of the apocalyptic plague. Shelley questions this ideal, by tracing the costs of Idris' enclosure in the private sphere

through her illness and death. Evadne, loved by Adrian and the lover of Raymond, embodies the self-destructive and socially destabilising aspects of the counter-revolutionary representation of the female philosopher, although her thwarted ambition as a female artist also connects her to Romantic heroines such as Corinne in De Staël's novel and the self-representations of poets such as Laetitia Elizabeth Landon and Felicia Hemans. The Last Man represents the nadir of Shelley's engagement with the female philosopher figure, pessimistically tracing the limitations enforced on women's actions in both the private and public sphere and suggestively linking this patriarchal oppression to the apocalyptic events of the novel, systematically reducing humanity's sphere of action to a lost and lonely man in the ruins of Rome.

In her journal, Shelley self-consciously identifies with her narrator Lionel Verney's fearsomely lonely situation at the end of the novel: 'The last man! Yes I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions, extinct before me'.<sup>30</sup> The Last Man's ferocious pessimism, not only about women's role in society, but about the narrowing possibilities for reform in a rapidly consolidating conservative political landscape, has its source in Shelley's multiple bereavements – the loss of her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, her son William, and her friends, including Lord Byron – and in her political disappointments, witnessing the return of authoritarian governments after the fall of Napoleon and the defeat of reform movements in England.<sup>31</sup> For example, Raymond's doomed attack

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<sup>30</sup> The Journals of Mary Shelley, eds. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 476-7.

<sup>31</sup> Kari Lokke situates The Last Man as a post-revolutionary novel which 'demands... to be read as a *roman à clef*' entailing 'representations, both elegiac and profoundly bitter, of Percy Bysshe Shelley's idealism, Byron's titanism... and the progressive political commitments of her parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin' in 'The Last Man' in Schor, 116-134, 117. Samantha Webb

on Constantinople in order to free twenty-first century Greece from Turkish control echoes Byron's death fighting for Greek independence in 1824.

Shelley's identification with Lionel was also picked up on, more censoriously, in reviews of the novel, with the Literary Gazette asking, 'Why not the last Woman? She would have known better how to paint her distress at having nobody left to talk to; we are sure the tale would have been more interesting'.<sup>32</sup> This reviewer's gender bias – 'we have not ceased to regard Mrs Shelley as a woman and a widow' – suggests his anxieties over Shelley's sweeping political and cultural commentary in the novel, which he views as inappropriate subjects for a woman to write about, best exemplified by his reduction of The Last Man's palpable horror to her 'distress at having no one left to talk to'. The Literary Gazette's connection between Lionel's situation and Shelley's widowhood has been repeated in various critical studies since.<sup>33</sup> The question 'Why not the last Woman?' both misses the point – Shelley shows how Verney's unthinking sexism contributes to the destruction of women around him, from his sister Perdita to his wife Idris and even his daughter Clara – and unwittingly confirms it – Shelley's decision to make her lone survivor male underlines her critique of a patriarchal society which explicitly and implicitly discourages women's engagement with it.

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stresses the plague's ambiguous, textual nature; that it not only represents 'various revolutionary ideals: the French Revolution, the repressed female, and democracy or egalitarianism' but '[m]ore than being a symbol, it is a fulcrum on which to scrutinize the act of interpretation itself, the ways in which humanity makes sense of an Other and the consequences of those interpretations' in 'Reading the End of the World: The Last Man, History, and the Agency of Romantic Authorship' in Bennett and Curran, 119-133, 127. Pamela Clemit stresses that 'the sheer topicality' of the novel needs to be read alongside its roots in debates from the 1790s, arguing that The Last Man responds to contemporary concerns that 'Cuvier's theory of the world's evolution through successive natural disasters seemed to be confirmed by a series of outbreaks of epidemic disease, which offered concrete evidence of man's inability to control nature' in The Godwinian Novel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 191.

<sup>32</sup> Rev. of The Last Man, by Mary Shelley, Literary Gazette 474, (18 February 1826), 102-3, emphasis in original.

<sup>33</sup> Mellor makes this connection in Mary Shelley, 157.

Perdita complicates the reductive reading of Verney as the only authorial stand-in in the novel, as she also reflects aspects of Shelley's personality, along with several other characters in the novel: The Last Man functions as much as fragmented autobiography, in which different characters reflect different aspects of the organising authorial persona, as it does (seemingly) straightforward roman à clef.<sup>34</sup> Verney describes Perdita as an intellectual beauty, whose glance 'comprehended a universe of thought in its ken', but describes her manners as 'cold and repulsive' and her personality as passive-aggressive: 'She was submissive to those who held authority over her, but a perpetual cloud dwelt on her brow; she looked as if she expected enmity from everyone who approached her, and her actions were instigated by the same feeling'.<sup>35</sup> Perdita's 'cold and repulsive' manners reflect a characteristic Shelley was criticised about throughout her life, especially in her later years by friends who had known her in her youth. Perdita's solitary engagement with nature, in which she 'lost herself in these self-created wanderings, and returned with unwilling spirit to the dull detail of common life' (16) also echoes Shelley's self-representation in the 1831 'Introduction' to Frankenstein, in which she describes her own 'airy flights of... imagination' (Frankenstein, 176). She also includes autobiographical references in her later descriptions of other characters, especially Adrian's sister Idris. By eventually uniting Perdita with the Byronic Raymond, Shelley deliberately baffles straightforward biographical readings of The Last Man, in which she rearranges

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<sup>34</sup> Clemit discusses Mary Shelley's complex mixture of autobiography, biography and roman à clef in The Last Man in The Godwinian Novel, 175-210, warning that 'any reading of The Last Man as authorial therapy must be set against Mary Shelley's intellectual mastery of depressing circumstances', 189.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Shelley, The Last Man [1826], eds. Jane Blumberg with Nora Crook, in The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley, vol. 4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), 16. Subsequent references, in-text.

elements of her life with Shelley and his circle in order to make a wider comment on pressing political issues.

Perdita mixes characteristics of the female philosopher from fiction of the 1790s with a new figure developing throughout the 1820s and 30s, the Romantic heroine, deliberately eschewing philosophy in favour of a personal communion with nature and the imagination. Lionel describes her quest for solitude: 'She would ramble to the most unfrequented places and scale dangerous heights, that in those unvisited spots she might wrap herself in loneliness' (16), communing with nature in a way which echoes Romantic poets' encounters with the sublime. In her 1828 collection Records of Women: With Other Poems, Felicia Hemans offers an almost contemporaneous version of female-embodied responses to the sublime as Shelley explores in her 1826 novel. Poems such as 'Edith, A Tale of the Woods', 'The American Forest Girl' and 'The Spirit's Mysteries' combine female experience, the natural world and the sublime.<sup>36</sup> As well as reflecting Shelley's self-representation in these imaginative engagements with the natural world, her eventual fate contains echoes of Wollstonecraft's. Her discovery that Raymond has been unfaithful to her chimes with Godwin's account of the end of Wollstonecraft's affair with Gilbert Imlay. Her suicide, jumping into the sea when she discovers that Lionel has duped her into returning to England instead of remaining by Raymond's grave, connects her to Wollstonecraft's suicide attempt when she plunged into the Thames after the dissolution of her relationship with Imlay.

Adrian's sister Idris is idealised as a domestic paragon by her husband Lionel, although Shelley traces the costs of Idris's confinement to the domestic sphere to

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<sup>36</sup> See Felicia Hemans, Records of Women: With Other Poems (Edinburgh: William Blackwood / London: T. Cadell, 1828).

her health and personality. Idris represents Shelley's critique of the domestic woman: a loving wife and caring mother destroyed by the restriction of her altruistic actions to the private sphere of the home.<sup>37</sup> Neither a female philosopher nor a Romantic heroine, the domestic woman does not engage in the reasoned discussion of the first nor the creative endeavours of the latter. Gary Kelly situates the domestic woman positively as 'a middle-class construction... naturally restricted to the domestic sphere for her own good, the good of her family, and the good of society and the nation', in opposition to the courtly woman corrupted by luxury and excess (Women, Writing and Revolution, 7). Nancy Armstrong also privileges the domestic woman as bearer of middle-class subjectivity in Desire and Domestic Fiction. Shelley's more sceptical treatment of the figure in her fiction considers the damaging restrictiveness of being confined to the domestic sphere on a woman's mind and body.

Lionel idealises Idris before he meets her, stating 'To me she was everything and nothing; her very name mentioned by another made me start and tremble' (The Last Man, 42). Like Emma Courtney's idealised representation of Augustus Harley in Hays's earlier novel, Lionel's relationship with Idris is shown to be based on his idealisation of her in Shelley's later text, with damaging consequences for both Lionel and Idris. Lionel's later evocation of his wife's disposition also connects her to Shelley's own earlier heroine, Elizabeth Lavenza in Frankenstein, who is described

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<sup>37</sup> Neither a female philosopher nor a Romantic heroine, the domestic woman does not engage in the reasoned discussion of the first nor the creative endeavours of the latter. Gary Kelly situates the domestic woman positively as 'a middle-class construction... naturally restricted to the domestic sphere for her own good, the good of her family, and the good of society and the nation', in opposition to the courtly woman corrupted by luxury and excess (Women, Writing and Revolution, 7). Nancy Armstrong also privileges the domestic woman as bearer of middle-class subjectivity in Desire and Domestic Fiction. Shelley's more sceptical treatment of the figure in her fiction considers the damaging restrictiveness of being confined to the domestic sphere on a woman's mind and body.

as 'yielding', 'calm and philosophical' (Frankenstein, 23): 'The disposition of Idris was peculiarly frank, soft, and affectionate. Her temper was unalterably sweet; and although firm and resolute on any point that touched her heart, she was yielding to those she loved' (74). Like Elizabeth, Idris combines intellectual firmness with affectionate submission. Further, her partially enforced life of domesticity contributes to her destruction. Elizabeth's marriage to Victor makes her a target for the creature's bloodthirsty revenge; Lionel restrains Idris' tender desire to help the plague-ravaged populace of Windsor to care for her immediate family. He describes how 'Maternal affection had not rendered Idris selfish; at the beginning of our calamity she had, with thoughtless enthusiasm, devoted herself to the care of the sick and helpless' (215). Lionel 'checked her' in these altruistic exertions, making her concentrate on her immediate family. This restriction on her exertions, Shelley suggests, makes her focus all her worries on Lionel and her children, causing 'the very soul of fear [to take] its seat in her heart' (236). With no other outlet for her anxieties, she wastes away and dies. In this way, Lionel contributes to the deaths of his sister Perdita, by attempting to make her return to England with her daughter when she would rather stay close to Raymond's grave, and his own wife, by bridling her affections within the family allowing no other outlet for her caring spirit. Throughout The Last Man, Shelley builds up a picture of how men, perhaps unwittingly, constrain women's potential to act virtuously in the public sphere, leading to their destruction.

Finally, the Greek princess Evadne fulfils the archetype of the sexually dangerous female philosopher in The Last Man. Her affair with Raymond leads to his estrangement from his wife, Perdita, signals the end of his political ambitions, as he resigns from his position as Lord Protector to pursue his disastrous siege of

Constantinople, in part to assuage his guilty conscience, and begins to unravel his personality, leading him into deceit and depression. Evadne focusses Shelley's criticisms of the ways in which women's exclusion from the public sphere of political action damages not only women but the fabric of society itself, through Evadne's prescient curse adumbrating the progress of the plague.

Evadne's frustrated ambitions, first to influence the political landscape of her home country, then her artistic endeavours, align her with both the earlier tradition of the female philosopher figure and the newer representations of the Romantic heroine. Revealing the tragic circumstances surrounding Evadne's marriage and abortive political manoeuvring, Shelley combines Evadne's own narration with Lionel's contrapuntal account of her career to reveal how her thwarted desires get transformed into (self-)destructive ambition. Evadne tells Raymond that her father's profligacy led to him marrying her to a wealthy Greek merchant, whose own subsequent bankruptcy ends in his suicide and Evadne's desperate situation, destitute in one of London's slums. Evadne's narrative fits, with some local detail, a standard pattern of the abuse of daughters and wives through the marriage market, drawing on established tropes in fiction, such as the barbarous treatment meted out by friends, family and potential husbands from Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe* to Godwin's *Emily Melville*. However, Lionel reveals that Evadne has lied to Raymond: it was her political machinations for her husband which led to the couple's disgrace and penury, and Evadne holds herself responsible for her husband's suicide. Lionel recasts Evadne's story to show that the restrictions on Evadne's ambitions, which lead her to manipulate her husband, are as destructive as the mercantile dealings of her father and husband. He laments: 'Alas! that in human nature such a pitch of mental discipline, and disdainful negligence of nature itself, should not have been

allied to the extreme of moral excellence!' (92). Evadne's 'mental discipline' allies her to Enlightenment iterations of the female philosopher figure, just as concerns over her unnatural morality connect her to counter-revolutionary fears.

Returning to London in exile, after her husband commits suicide, Evadne enters Raymond's competition to design a National Gallery. Her design 'was new and elegant, but faulty; so faulty, that although drawn with the hand and eye of taste, it was evidently the work of one who was not an architect' (86). Shelley stresses both the beauty of Evadne's design and her lack of technical training. As a female artist, Evadne is limited by the lack of opportunities afforded to women in Shelley's imagined twenty-first century. Here and elsewhere, The Last Man uses its science-fiction setting to comment on contemporary concerns over the limitations of female education, reducing the scope afforded to women's creativity and expression.

Following Raymond to Constantinople, Evadne disguises herself as a Greek soldier: her male dress again reflecting on her thwarted female ambitions. Lionel finds her wounded on the battlefield, wildly lamenting 'that a woman, with a woman's heart and sensibility, should be driven by hopeless love and vacant hopes to take up the trade of arms, and suffer beyond the endurance of man privation, labour and pain' (144). Evadne's cross-dressing not only links her to women in male disguise in romance conventions but also to figures such as Harriet Freke in Edgeworth's Belinda, whose transvestism signals her unsettling of gender boundaries. By doing so, Evadne replays arguments from the 1790s over the status of the female philosopher as an 'unsex'd' woman: she is sexually aggressive, stressing her dangerous femininity, as well as unfeminine by the standards of early nineteenth-century decorum.

Evadne's final speech prophesies the demise of Raymond, and adumbrates the destruction of the human race through plague:

‘This is the end of love! – Yet not the end! ... Many living deaths have I borne for thee, O Raymond, and now I expire, thy victim! – By my death I purchase thee – lo! the instruments of war, fire, the plague are my servitors. I dared, I conquered them all, till now! I have sold myself to death, with the sole condition that thou shouldst follow me – Fire, and war, and plague, unite for thy destruction – O my Raymond, there is no safety for thee!’ (144-5)

Shelley connects Evadne's self-destructive desires, for political agency, for creative expression, and for Raymond himself, with the destructiveness of the plague. Lokke reads the repression of women's ambitions and desires throughout the novel as Shelley's acerbic commentary on contemporary gender relations: ‘In this context[,] ... Shelley's plague is indeed socially constructed and The Last Man points to the possibility that cultural institutions fostering direct and freer expression of female psychic, libidinal, and physical energy might very well restore health to a sick European society’ (The Last Man, 128). Evadne's death, brought about because of the social restrictions placed on her artistic and intellectual ambitions, symbolically brings about the plague which destroys mankind. Evadne's fate directly foreshadows Raymond's death, but also the deaths of Perdita and Idris. Evadne's prophetic death instantiates a chain of catastrophes, from Raymond's ill-fated entrance into Constantinople, leading to the advent of the plague into Europe; to Perdita's refusal to leave her unfaithful husband's graveside, culminating in Lionel's forced abduction of her and her suicide; and overshadowing Lionel's later refusal to allow Idris to attend to plague sufferers outside of her own family, which leads to her own wasting anxiety and exhausted death. From Evadne's thwarted ambitions through Perdita's suicidal attachment to the unfaithful Raymond to Idris' restriction of action within the private sphere, The Last Man despairingly connects the limitations on female agency

to the collapse of the functioning of civil society through the external agency of the plague.

### 5) Rehistoricising the Female Philosopher: Perkin Warbeck

The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck (1830), Shelley's second historical novel, set in late fifteenth-century Britain and Europe after the defeat of the Plantagenets at the Battle of Bosworth Field, reformulates the way in which the female philosopher figure was historicised in Valperga in order to suggest new possibilities for female agency, focussing on the peaceful potential of love, duty and domesticity in the Euthanasia-like form of Katherine Gordon.<sup>38</sup> Shelley recalibrates the female philosopher motif in the figures of the Spanish Monina De Faro, a Christian Arab like Safie in Frankenstein, and the Scottish princess Katherine Gordon, who concludes the novel with an affecting apologia for her widowhood at the court of the enemy of her husband, Henry VII. Betty Bennett argues that Katherine and Monina function in this novel in a similar way to Euthanasia and Beatrice in Valperga:

In Valperga, Mary Shelley introduced the fictional characters Euthanasia and Beatrice, the one to impart to her story her republican ideals; the other to function as victim of the system. In Perkin Warbeck, her anti-power idealism is fictionalized into the voice of Katherine Gordon, who actually was Richard's wife; and Monina de Faro, a fictionalized adopted sister, victim of her belief in the system and her own blind love for Richard.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Although critics have begun to reassess Mary Shelley's later novels, the dismissal of them in criticism such as Pamela Clemit's The Godwinian Novel, in which she argues in a footnote that Perkin Warbeck, Lodore and Falkner 'show an increased conformity to social and financial pressures and are not studied here' (138), still holds some traction. I argue that the three later novels reveal a more mature, nuanced and sophisticated engagement with Wollstonecraft's textual legacy than the anxious, pessimistic early novels.

<sup>39</sup> Betty T. Bennett, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: An Introduction (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 89. Subsequent references in-text, as An Introduction.

Like Beatrice, Monina is shown to be misguided in her beliefs: her unquestioning support for Richard's doomed campaign is socially and personally destructive. On the other hand, also like her pseudo-prophetic forebear, she is able to voice revolutionary attacks on the corrupt establishment of the Tudor court which are treated sympathetically, and connect her to the revolutionary debates of the 1790s and Shelley's reformist sympathies developing over the course of the 1820s and 30s. Perkin Warbeck represents an optimistic development from Valperga in Shelley's treatment of her second, contrasting female philosopher figure, Katherine Gordon, an actual historical figure, unlike Beatrice, Euthanasia and Monina, who survives the tragic action of the novel to enunciate a philosophy based on forgiveness, compassion and resilience.

Shelley's second historical novel, like Valperga, also engages with the cultural legacy of Scott's fiction, testing the limits of Scott's historical imagination. In Scott's novels, such as Guy Mannering and Rob Roy (discussed above), he focuses on protagonists who have either lost their legitimate inheritance, or have had it challenged at the beginning of the novel. For Fiona Robertson, Scott's Waverley novels 'are literally histories of restored legitimacy', arguing that 'All these novels tell not merely of miraculous recoveries of life and fortune but also of the restoration of something which is regarded as socially and legally just'.<sup>40</sup> Linking this theme to Scott's historical moment, between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832, Robertson states that 'the Waverley novels are distinctively post-Revolutionary fictions, telling stories of providential restoration of individuals and nations' (Legitimate Histories, 9). In Perkin Warbeck, Shelley subverts

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<sup>40</sup> Fiona Robertson, Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 8. Subsequent references, in-text.

Scott's schema, analysing the social and personal costs of seeking restoration, revealing the fictions underpinning such providential narratives. Shelley's novel imagines that Richard Plantagenet survived his uncle, Richard III's plot to murder him when he was imprisoned in the tower as a young boy. In the novel, Richard is disguised as 'Perkin Warbeck', an actual historical figure who claimed to be Richard and mounted a series of attempted invasions during Henry VII's reign. Shelley both follows the outline of the historical career of Warbeck, which became more and more desperate, and imaginatively creates a courageous, moral framework for Richard's decisions in the novel. However, the tide of history ensures that Richard, unlike the fictional Harry Bertram and Frank Osbaldistone in Scott's novel, is unable to reclaim his legitimate position as heir to the throne. Richard's tragic trajectory towards Perkin Warbeck's historical execution is offset by Shelley's more optimistic treatment of the fate of his wife, Katherine.

Shelley reverses the pessimistic conclusions of The Last Man, in which she scrutinized a society which marginalised women to its own cost, in Perkin Warbeck, which shows how women's support of masculine endeavour is essential to the public sphere of political action. Richard, the novel's semi-historical tragic hero, is shown to depend on the actions of important female figures in his life, from his courageous aunt, Lady Brampton, and his sister Elizabeth, unhappily married to his enemy Henry VII, to his childhood friend, Monina, and wife, Katherine. Shelley also stresses the extent to which Henry depends on his legitimacy as Tudor king for his marriage to the Plantagenet Elizabeth. Upon his last almost successful escape, before he is entrapped and executed by Henry's wives, Richard wonders to himself: 'that, in every adversity, women had been his resource and support; their energies, their undying devotion and enthusiasm, were the armour and weapons with which he had defended himself from

and attacked fortune'.<sup>41</sup> Outside the cottage of Jane Shore, his father's concubine, for a second time, Richard looks back on the aid he has received from her, and other women, and is aware, as other of Shelley's male heroes have not been, that he is in these women's debt. Richard's use of military language both points to women's importance beyond the domestic sphere and, more ambiguously, to the violence he forces upon both his family and friends, and the nation.

Monina de Faro, the first of Shelley's female philosopher figures in the novel, is perhaps Richard's staunchest supporter, staying true to his cause until her death. However, she is less Bennett's 'victim of her belief in the system' and more an avatar of radical critique in that system. Monina acts courageously throughout the novel, rescuing Richard when he is injured in his early campaign fighting with the Spaniards against Moorish strongholds; petitioning his sister Elizabeth to plead his cause with her callous husband, Henry VII; organising a meeting of Plantagenet sympathisers in London; and rousing rebellion amongst Cornish peasants for Richard's last desperate assault on Henry's dominion. Although Monina is portrayed sympathetically throughout, and is shielded from fall or ruin through her steadfast devotion to her principles, Shelley uses the failure of her cause and her death in exile with her father to comment on the failure of radical hopes in the French Revolution, faced with the solidification of autocratic governments in the 1830s. She makes it clear that Monina has been seduced by the romance of Richard's doomed campaign: 'All these words, king, victory, and court, wove a golden tissue before the ardent girl's eyes... [and] she knew not that night was falling upon her, while still she fancied that she advanced towards the ever-retreating splendour of the sky' (105). Monina passionately and

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Shelley, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* [1830], ed. Doucet Devin Fischer in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, vol. 5. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), 352. Subsequent references, in-text.

rationality champions Richard, who, in Shelley's retelling, has a legitimate claim to the throne. However, Perkin Warbeck explores the extent to which powerful figures such as Henry VII can establish a pretended form of legitimacy through force. Monina is both unable and unwilling to recognise this, leading to the disappointment of her hopes and her downcast exit from the novel after Richard's defeat.

Shelley uses the contingent nature of Henry VII's reign – he depends for his legitimacy on his politically expedient, loveless marriage to Richard's sister – to reflect upon the procedures behind the resurgence of autocratic regimes across Europe gathering pace throughout the 1820s.<sup>42</sup> These included the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France after Napoleon's defeats in 1814 and 1815, which, in spite of the imposition of a written constitution, was viewed as the restitution of the ancien régime in the country, and the much more conservative, and violent, restoration of Ferdinand VII of Spain, determined to rule as an absolute despot, and refusing the constitution forced on France. By 1830, the year Perkin Warbeck was published, the unpopular rule of Charles X in France had been challenged by the more liberal Louis Phillipe, leading to the former's abdication and exile, and Ferdinand's rule in Spain was increasingly contested in Spain.<sup>43</sup> Contemporary tumult over the legitimacy of these regimes fed into Shelley's portrait of the unrest facing Henry VII after his victory at the Battle of Bosworth.

In contrast to Monina de Faro, Katherine Gordon, the second, and more successful, of the novel's female philosophers, consistently counsels Richard to give

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<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Sperber, Revolutionary Europe, 1780-1850 (Harlow: Longman, 2000) analyses the return of autocratic regimes across Europe in the post-Napoleonic era, discussing the conservative emphasis on 'legitimacy, hierarchy, and patriarchy', 295.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Broers, Europe After Napoleon: Revolution, Reaction and Romanticism, 1814-1848 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) offers a detailed overview of the effect of the Congress of Vienna after Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo on the post-war governance of Europe, particularly in his useful first chapter, 9-18.

up his anachronistic and destructive hopes for the throne and to retire into domestic anonymity with her: 'The Lady Katherine saw a vain mask in all the common-place pomp of palaces; she perceived that power failed most, when its end was good; she saw that accomplishing its purpose in the cottage, or in halls of state, felicity resulted from the affections only' (291). For Richard, as for Monina, foregoing his legitimate claim to the throne is unthinkable, and leads to both their deaths. Katharine, on the other hand, survives and is the first example of a surviving female philosopher in Shelley's corpus. Katherine succeeds where earlier female philosopher figures – Frankenstein's creature, Euthanasia and Beatrice, Evadne – fail. She differs from her predecessors by successfully integrating elements of the Enlightenment iteration of the female philosopher – rational discussion, political awareness and religious devotion – with aspects of the Romantic heroine: particularly in Katherine's case, an emphasis on love and compassion, over and above the focus on creativity, the imagination and naturalness, which proves debilitating to women from Corinne and Landon's *Improvisatrice* to Shelleyan heroines such as Elizabeth Lavenza and Perdita Raymond.

Perkin Warbeck's conclusion begins with a footnote, in which Shelley positions Katherine as 'a favourite of mine' and the epilogue as an apologia for 'her abode in Henry the Seventh's court, and other acts of her life' (395). Shelley allows Katherine to 'speak for herself, and show how her conduct, subsequent to her husband's death, was in accordance with the devotion and fidelity with which she attended his fortunes during his life' (395). Shelley's opening gambit is disingenuous: Katherine's defence of her behaviour provides the moral of the novel. Katherine's position as 'a favourite' of Shelley's suggestively connects the character's status as a widow in a hostile environment with her creator's authorial position in the England of the 1830s.

Katherine begins her apologia by focusing on the self-centredness of humanity's view of the universe, arguing that 'Even those, who as they fancy, sacrifice themselves for the love of God, do it more truly for love of themselves; and the followers of virtue too often see their duties through the obscure and deceptive medium, which their own single, individual feelings create' (398). Katherine's argument pinpoints the ego-driven self-deceptions of both Monina and Richard and goes on to suggest the remedy for such in 'love, charity, or sympathy [which] teaches us to feel pain at others' pain, joy in their joy' (398). Katherine's incisive insight into mankind's self-delusions reveals her lineage as a female philosopher, whilst her suggested solution connects her to the developing figure of the Romantic heroine, marking the domestic sphere as a feminine alternative to the power struggles in the political realm. Her contrast between the self-love which obscures and deceives Richard and Monina and the benevolence she advocates herself also links her to Godwin's position in Political Justice, in which he argues that disinterested benevolence is the only possible virtuous position (discussed in chapter 2, above).

Katherine insists upon her femininity, using it to make a sly point about women's lack of education: 'I am a woman, with a woman's tutelage in my early years, a woman's education in the world, which is that of the heart – alas! for us – not of the head. I have no school-learning, no logic – but simply the voice of my own soul which speaks within me' (398). This statement echoes the position of Hays's earlier heroine, Emma Courtney, who argues that she is 'neither a philosopher, nor a heroine, but a woman, to whom education has given a sexual character'.<sup>44</sup>

Katherine's emphasis on her femininity and her lack of education here forges a

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Hays, Memoirs of Emma Courtney [1796], ed. Marilyn L. Brooks (Peterborough: Broadview, 2000), 149.

connection between her and Hays's infamous heroine from the 1790s. This echo reveals a continuity of thought from the mid-1790s to the late 1820s in two women writers connected, in their different ways, friend and daughter, to Wollstonecraft's cultural legacy. Katherine then uses the accession of her heart above her head to excuse the continuance and development of her affections after her husband's death: 'And must my living heart be stone, because that dear form is dust, which was the medium of my communication with his spirit?' (400). Instead of wallowing in grief, Katherine argues for her continued usefulness: 'Where I see suffering, there I must bring my mite for its relief. We are not deities to bestow in impassive benevolence. We give, because we love...' (400). Bennett argues that Katherine 'exemplifies a microcosmic conduit to socio-political reform as subversive as, but arguably more idealized than, Euthanasia's republicanism' (*An Introduction*, 90). For Shelley, Lady Katherine Gordon is the first of her successful female philosophers, able to assert her femininity as an aspect of her philosophical system. This success depends on the sublimation of the female philosopher figure's revolutionary elements, dangerously evident in Monina's character, within the Romantic heroine's emphasis on the feminine qualities of love and compassion.

## 6) The Female Philosopher in Contemporary Fiction: Lodore

Lodore (1835) is explicitly about female education, contrasting the sexual education of its heroine Ethel Lodore, which knowingly cites Wollstonecraft's critique of girls' sexualisation, although without acknowledging its sources, against the more intellectual upbringing of Fanny Derham, which again follows Wollstonecraft's arguments for improved education for women. Indeed, Lisa Vargo argues that

'Lodore may be conceived as an imaginary conversation with Mary Wollstonecraft'.<sup>45</sup> However, Ethel is a flat heroine, 'perfect', submissive, obedient and unchanging – her character does not develop in the novel. I argue that Shelley subversively suggests that, given such an education, a woman is incapable of development. Ethel resembles a happier version of Idris in The Last Man: unthinkingly pleased with her narrowly domestic existence, even when confronted by the horrors of poverty and debt. Fanny's character also remains undeveloped in the novel, and Shelley concludes Lodore with a provocative metafictional analysis of her reasons for not developing Fanny further: the sort of female philosopher figure whom Fanny represents has no place within the fictional conventions of the 1830s. Lodore shares generic similarities with the silver fork novel of the 1820s to 40s, which Winifred Hughes entertainingly characterises thus: 'No self-respecting silver fork novel would be complete without its duelling scene, its gambling scene, its dinner scene, its dancing scene. Nor would it pass muster without its fashionable arranged marriage and at least the suspicion of an adulterous liaison'.<sup>46</sup> The plot of Lodore includes hints of all these scenes. However, Mary Shelley subverts the silver fork emphasis on high life by focussing on the financial implications of Lodore and Villiers's decisions. She also situates Fanny Derham as outside the silver fork's remit, questioning the format's usefulness for women readers. The character who matures into self-awareness and accountability over the course of the novel is Lodore's widow, Cornelia, and it is through this new widow figure that Shelley develops the points made by Katherine

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<sup>45</sup> Lisa Vargo, 'Further Thoughts on the Education of Daughters' in Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives, eds. Buss et al. (Peterborough: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 178.

<sup>46</sup> Winifred Hughes, 'Silver Fork Writers and Readers: Social Contexts of a Best Seller' NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction, 25.3 (Spring, 1992), 328-347, 328. However, Mary Shelley subverts the silver fork focus on high life by focussing on the financial implications of Lodore's decisions. She also situates Fanny Derham as outside the silver fork's remit, questioning the format's usefulness for women readers.

Gordon at the end of Perkin Warbeck. It is Cornelia, rather than Ethel or Fanny, who represents the potential Shelley sees for female representation within the novel: a flawed woman able to overcome social and personal obstacles in order to protect her family and find forgiveness for her earlier vanity and pride. In Lodore, Shelley gives the triumvirate of female figures of The Last Man, Idris, Perdita and Evadne, a more optimistic spin: Ethel is a happier version of Idris, Fanny continues the development of the female philosopher figure from Katherine Gordon in Perkin Warbeck, and Cornelia struggles away from the ambitiousness which destroys Evadne.

Lodore's education of Ethel in America follows the brand of female education critiqued by Wollstonecraft in her Vindication, down to the fact that Lodore 'drew his chief ideas from Milton's Eve'.<sup>47</sup> Wollstonecraft criticises Milton's portrayal of Eve, alluding to his representation of her as a perfect, obedient beauty, because:

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.  
(Vindication 88)

She also reveals Milton's inconsistency by contrasting Eve's speech to Adam in which she tells him 'what thou bidst / Unargued I obey; so God ordains; / God is thy law, thou mine' with Adam's argument with God that 'Among unequals what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight?' (89, original emphasis). Shelley's allusion to Wollstonecraft's critique of Milton's Eve in Lodore achieves multiple aims: first, it gestures back to her representation of Safie in Frankenstein; secondly, it sharpens her own critique of Lodore's miseducation of Ethel; and finally, as the allusion is

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<sup>47</sup> Mary Shelley, Lodore [1835], ed. Fiona Stafford The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley, vol. 6. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), 18. Subsequent references, in-text.

implicit – the reader must make the connection between Shelley’s use of Milton’s Eve and Wollstonecraft’s for themselves, Shelley uses Wollstonecraft as a silent partner in her attack on continuing poor standards of education.

That Wollstonecraft’s arguments act as a bridge between Milton and Shelley is exemplified in her analysis of the defects in Ethel’s education:

A lofty sense of independence is, in man, the best privilege of his nature. It cannot be doubted, but that it were for the happiness of the other sex that she were taught more to rely on and act for herself. But in the cultivation of this feeling, the education of Fitzhenry was lamentably deficient. Ethel was taught to know herself dependent... She seldom thought, and never acted, for herself. (Lodore, 19)

Ethel is given a sexual education by her father, making her dependent on him; passive, docile, unquestioning. She is denied independence, and is therefore rendered unthinking and passive. Over the course of the novel, Shelley tests Lodore’s assertion that the ‘worst ills of life, penury and desertion, she could never know’ (19). Starting with Lodore’s death at the end of volume I, Ethel’s happiness is tested by her father’s vindictive will against his wife, leaving Ethel in a tenuous social position, and her relationship with the prodigal Villiers beset with the dangers of debt, poverty and imprisonment. Over the course of the novel, Shelley shows just how poorly Lodore has equipped Ethel for life, although Ethel remains disarmingly oblivious to most of her trials.

Lodore contrasts Ethel’s sexual education with her friend Fanny Derham’s intellectual pursuits. Fanny’s father, Lodore’s childhood friend, has educated his daughter ‘in the dead languages, and other sorts of abstruse learning, which seldom make a part of a girl’s education’ (79). Shelley positions Fanny as her female philosopher figure in the novel: ‘Fanny, to use her own singular language, loves

philosophy, and pants after knowledge' (79). When Ethel meets Fanny again in London, Shelley develops her character:

Such a woman as Fanny was more made to be loved by her own sex than by the opposite one. Superiority of intellect, joined to acquisitions beyond those usual even to men; and both announced with frankness, though without pretension, forms a kind of anomaly little in accord with masculine taste. Fanny could not be the rival of women, and, therefore, all her merits were appreciated by them. (214)

Shelley refocuses the threatening aspects of female philosophers from the 1790s here, by making Fanny attractive to women, instead of a dangerous influence, and only distasteful to men, rather than a destabilising sexual presence. In fact, by defusing the threat of the female philosopher, Shelley unsexes, or desexualises, Fanny Derham – stating here that she ‘could not be a rival of women’ in men’s affections, and also that, compared to Ethel, whom marriage and social status have made a woman, Fanny ‘was still a mere girl’ (205). Shelley reformulates the dangerously sexual allure of revolutionary-era female philosophers in her portrait of Fanny as an intellectual woman, whose learning and accomplishments make her more attractive to other women than men. Fanny’s threat to men, still present in this description, is intellectual rather than sexual. With her, Shelley focuses on the philosopher in the female philosopher.

Fanny remains a subsidiary character in the novel’s drive to reunite estranged mother to docile daughter, an active, intellectual foil to Ethel’s passive, unthinking patience. Shelley teasingly closes the novel by suggesting Fanny’s future life:

it is not in a few tame lines that we can revert to the varied fate of Fanny Derham... One who feels so deeply for others, and yet is so stern a censor over herself – at once so sensitive and so rigidly conscientious – so single-minded and upright, and yet open as day to charity and affection, cannot hope to pass from youth to age unharmed... What the events are, that have already diversified her existence, cannot now be recounted; and it would

require the gift of prophecy to foretell the conclusion. In after times these may be told, and the life of Fanny Derham be presented as a useful lesson, at once to teach what goodness and genius can achieve in palliating the woes of life, and to encourage those, who would in any way imitate her, by an example of calumny refuted by patience, errors rectified by charity, and the passions of our nature purified and ennobled by an undeviating observance of those moral laws on which all human excellence is founded – a love of truth in ourselves, and a sincere sympathy with our fellow-creatures. (313)

Shelley positions ‘the fate of Fanny Derham’ as unwritable within the literary conventions of the 1830s: her past ‘cannot now be recounted’, her future is unforetold. Shelley delays telling her story indefinitely, hinting at the ‘useful lesson’ to be gained from her idealised status as female philosopher.

With Ethel educated into desultory domesticity and Fanny remaining only a potential force for good, it falls to Ethel’s estranged mother, Cornelia, a vain, spoilt socialite, to engineer the novel’s final reconciliations. Cornelia’s mother, the pointedly named Lady Santerre (‘sans’ and ‘terre’: without land or earth) educates her daughter to make a good match, to return her to the social position she has lost through her dead husband’s profligacy and his family’s persecution, particularly the brother’s choice ‘to consider the wife most to blame’ (40) for their dire economic situation. This situation wryly nods both to Shelley’s early married life to Percy – the first of many such resemblances throughout the novel – and to her current dependence on Sir Timothy Shelley’s grudging support for her and his grandson. The Santerre brother’s blame of Lady Santerre further suggests that it is the women in relationships who are blamed for the partnership’s profligacy.

Lady Santerre’s hopes for her daughter, that she will make a ‘splendid match’ (41) to return them both to the fashionable world is comically played off against Lodore’s bucolic expectations, figuring Cornelia as ‘a girl radiant in innocence and

youth, the nursling, so he fancied, of mountains, waterfalls, and solitude; yet endowed with all the softness and refinement of civilized society' (41). The opening section of Lodore deals with the disintegration of its hero's expectations about his wife, and Shelley's subtle critique of his behaviour. First of all, the expectations themselves are obviously oxymoronic: Lodore views Cornelia as both a 'natural' woman, raised in seclusion and innocent of fashionable vices, and 'civilized' by its veneer of respectability. Further, his desire for 'unquestioning submission' sounds an ominous note in their relationship, which Shelley exploits in her rendition of their unhappy married life.

Rather than the social innocent Lodore expects, Cornelia has been brought up 'to view society as the glass by which she has to set her feelings, and by which to adapt her conduct' (44). Lodore's plans for her improvement are soured by the miseducation she has received from her mother, who has 'exerted herself to secure her empire over Cornelia; she spared neither flattery nor artifice; and, well acquainted as she was with every habit and turn of her daughter's mind, her task was comparatively easy' (44). Shelley shows both Cornelia's potential for improvement and Lodore's inability to tutor his wife effectively, through his wounded pride and sense of alienation. So, Cornelia 'was ignorant, accustomed to the most frivolous employments, shrinking from any mental exercise, so that although her natural abilities were great, they lay dormant' (44) and Lodore refuses to teach her differently from her mother, as he 'disdained to enforce by authority, that which he thought ought to be yielded by love'. Shelley focuses on his error here:

he had married one so young, that her education, even if its foundation had been good, required finishing, and who as it was, had every thing to learn... a tutor can do nothing without authority, either open or concealed – a tutor must sacrifice his own pursuits

and immediate pleasures, to study and adapt himself to the disposition of his pupil. (45)

Shelley shows how Cornelia's character flaws are worsened by the clash between her mother's cynical, social machinations and her husband's false ideals (his false delicacy, even). Through Cornelia, Shelley critiques both masculine expectations that women be 'natural' and the social forces which encourage affectation and disguise. Cornelia is caught between her mother's Machiavellian schemes and her husband's refusal to counter these plots because of his unrealistic ideals. She is only able to fulfil her intellectual and emotional potential after the death of both her husband and mother: a fact which must have resonated with Shelley's own situation, overshadowed by the figures of Percy Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Cornelia and Lodore are further split apart by the birth of their daughter, Ethel. Lady Santerre encourages Cornelia to recommence her social engagements after Ethel's birth, leaving Ethel to the care of her doting father. The relationship is strained and finally broken by her flirtation with a Polish Count, who is revealed to be Lodore's unwitting, illegitimate son by his ex-mistress. Shelley's treatment of the love triangle between son, father / husband and wife hints at the incest taboo. Lodore loses his temper and strikes his son, fleeing the country with his infant daughter to avoid a duel with his own child, flirting with the conventions of silver fork fiction. Cornelia refuses to accompany him, leading to an irrevocable split between them, as she remains in London and Lodore goes into self-imposed exile in the wilds of America.

As Ethel remains impassive throughout the novel and Fanny's actions are indescribable, Shelley focuses more and more on the maturation of Cornelia Lodore as the driving force of the novel's action. Between the 'masculine' ideal of Ethel's sexualised education in submissiveness and the feminist ideals of Fanny, Cornelia

charts a realistic course of development in the novel: flawed, proud, sometimes unyielding, beholden to social convention, Cornelia manages to negotiate the public world of economic transaction for the benefit of her family, selflessly sacrificing her own concerns in order to ensure her daughter's happiness, although Shelley orchestrates the conclusion of the novel to meet Cornelia's desires. Cornelia represents a female figure positioned between Fanny's female philosopher and Ethel's domestic woman: neither intellectually distanced from sexuality like Fanny, nor educated into passivity like Ethel, she charts a course between competing representations of womanhood in the contemporary literature of the 1830s in order to show the potential to exist beyond such categorisations. Cornelia's position outside the binary represented by Ethel and Fanny, of passive femininity against unwritable rationality, and her flawed, though improving personality, connects her to Edgeworth's earlier character, Lady Delacour – both female characters who resist easy categorisation and exist on the boundaries of conventional behaviour.

### **7) 'A Worshipper of Domestic Life': The Female Philosopher in Falkner**

Falkner (1837), Shelley's final novel, returns to themes explored in her early work, of seemingly doomed male relationships, warped by codes of honour, and works out ways to circumvent this violent, self-destructive logic through the courageous intervention of its heroine, Elizabeth Falkner. Criticism has focused on the connections between this final novel and Shelley's first, famous work of fiction, Frankenstein, particularly Elizabeth's differences to an earlier Shelley character: Elizabeth Lavenza. Both Betty Bennett and Kate Ferguson Ellis argue that Falkner rewrites Frankenstein's narrative of women destroyed by the desires of men. Bennett

argues that that both Elizabeths Lavenza and Raby 'serve as generative metaphors for Shelley's enlightened conviction that the world could be bettered – the world just after the Napoleonic wars, when revolution seemed possible in Britain, as well as the rapidly entrenching world of the Victorians'.<sup>48</sup> Bennett's focus on Shelley's engagement with her post-revolutionary era meshes with my own emphasis on what I describe as the Post-Jacobin period. Ellis states that the novel 'posit[s] female empowerment as the only lasting solution to injustice of every sort, since it alone could rein in the desire for unlimited power and social approval that drives her male characters'.<sup>49</sup> Alongside this reversioning of Elizabeth Lavenza, I argue that Elizabeth Falkner also reformulates Godwin's representation of Wollstonecraft in his Memoirs. With Elizabeth, Shelley takes Godwin's divided representation of Wollstonecraft in the Memoirs – her revolutionary public persona as a radical philosopher and her private character as a 'worshipper of domestic life'<sup>50</sup> – and shows how a woman could combine elements of the Enlightenment / revolutionary female philosopher figure with the Romantic heroine.

Throughout the novel, Elizabeth is shown to be active, intellectual, questioning and charitable – the ideals Shelley focuses on in her presentation of Fanny Derham, and the ideals embodied by her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. Shelley takes the radical, Romanticised representation of Wollstonecraft in Godwin's Memoirs and directs her mother's revolutionary energy into a subversively reformulated conception of dutiful domesticity. As Elizabeth is in no way a public intellectual like

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<sup>48</sup> Betty T. Bennett, 'Not This Time, Victor' in Bennett and Curran, 1-17, 17. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>49</sup> Kate Ferguson Ellis, 'Falkner and Other Fictions' in Schor, 151-62, 153. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>50</sup> William Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [1798] in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol. 1, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), 132.

Wollstonecraft, Shelley is able to tap into Godwin's positive representation of her mother as a private person, without engaging with his anxious apologetics over Wollstonecraft's writing. As a private individual, Elizabeth develops a far-reaching concept of the domestic sphere, embracing her international education, an ethic of forgiveness crucial in reconciling her (not quite) adoptive father-figure, Falkner, with her love interest, Gerard Neville, who seeks vengeance on Falkner for the accidental death of his mother, and a virtuous understanding of fidelity, disdainful of contemporary social strictures on female behaviour.

Confronted by Lady Cecil, Neville's step-sister, and Mrs. Raby, her heretofore estranged aunt, with the details of Falkner's imprisonment and their demands to detach herself from him, Elizabeth replies: 'Gratitude, duty, every human obligation bind me to him'.<sup>51</sup> Lady Cecil and Mrs Raby take up conventional positions against Elizabeth, the first arguing from 'feminine delicacy', the second insinuating 'the duty owed to her family, to shield it from the disgrace she was bringing on it' (234). Shelley narrates Elizabeth's complex response to their attempts to separate her from Falkner, as she 'had been brought up to regard feelings, rather than conventional observances; duties, not proprieties':

was she to adopt a new system of conduct, become a timid, home-bred young lady, tied by the most frivolous rules, impeded by fictitious notions of propriety and false delicacy? Whether they were right, and she were wrong – whether indeed such submission to society – such useless, degrading dereliction of nobler duties, was adapted for feminine conduct, and whether she, despising such bonds, sought a bold and dangerous freedom, she could not tell; she only knew and felt, that for her, educated as she had been, beyond the narrow paling of boarding-school ideas, or the refinements of a lady's boudoir, that, where her benefactor was, there she ought to be; and that

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Shelley, *Falkner* [1837], ed. Pamela Clemit in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, vol. 7 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996), 234. Subsequent references, in-text.

to prove her gratitude, to preserve her faithful attachment to him amidst dire adversity, was her sacred duty – a virtue, before which every minor moral faded and disappeared. (234)

Shelley condenses into Elizabeth's decision to defy social convention and actively place herself at her benefactor's side in prison an electrifying critique of contemporary restraint placed on 'feminine conduct': social conventions are dismissed as 'frivolous rules', 'fictitious' and 'false'; 'submission to society' is linked to a 'useless, degrading dereliction of nobler virtues'.

Elizabeth's critique draws confidently on Wollstonecraft's attacks on the hypocrisy at the heart of expectations on female conduct. For example, in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft contrasts the 'scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety', which the education of women forces on them, and which Elizabeth protests against above, with 'human virtues' acquired 'by the exercise of their understandings' leading to 'that stability of character which is the firmest ground to rest our future hopes upon' (Vindication, 88-9). Shelley focuses on Elizabeth's stability of character in the above exchange, exemplifying a Wollstonecraft exercise of her understanding, figured as more virtuous than conventional social mores. The suggestion that Elizabeth's actions may amount to 'a bold and dangerous freedom' is ridiculed in their context of consoling Falkner in prison. Her focus on 'sacred duty' and 'virtue' exposes the vapidness of the social ideals Elizabeth sets herself against. It is important to stress that Elizabeth is not eschewing shallow social conventions for a stricter confinement within the bounds of the patriarchal, domestic family circle: Falkner is not her father, but an unrelated, more or less altruistic benefactor. Shelley is not arguing for strict adherence to domestic ideology, as Mary

Poovey and Anne Mellor have argued,<sup>52</sup> but social relationships based on reasoned choice about affections and duties.

Moreover, Elizabeth's devotion to Falkner is justified by his exculpation at trial – rewriting the horror of Justine's trial in Frankenstein. Her continued love for Falkner forces Neville, deeply in love with her, to forgive Falkner, allowing the three of them to live in some kind of harmony at the end of the novel. Elizabeth's reasoned defence of her ideals against social convention succeeds in Falkner, reconditioning our reading of not only Elizabeth Lavenza's failure to defend Justine, but also the collapse of Euthanasia's ideals confronted by the death-dealing Castruccio; Evadne's thwarted ambitions in The Last Man; Monina's doomed radicalism in Perkin Warbeck; and Fanny Derham's unwritable status as female philosopher in Lodore. Elizabeth successfully combines elements of the female philosopher figure, particularly the international sweep of her liberal education and her rational defence of following what she feels to be right, with a new emphasis on love, compassion and fortitude. She represents Shelley's project to situate the revolutionary tradition of the female philosopher, so connected to her mother Mary Wollstonecraft's reputation, within post-revolutionary literary conventions. What makes this manoeuvre so subversive is that, in Elizabeth, Shelley manages to make the societal critique associated with the female philosopher so appealing to the tastes of the reading audiences of the 1830s, by clothing her in the form of the Romantic heroine.

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<sup>52</sup> See Mary Poovey's chapters on Shelley's later novels in The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 143-71, and Anne Mellor's comments in Mary Shelley, 177-212.



## **Conclusion: 'Reader, I Married Him': The Future of the Female Philosopher**

The female philosopher was a central figure in 1790s debates about women's rights. In the early nineteenth century, she became entangled with Mary Wollstonecraft's posthumous reception and reputation as politically dangerous, socially destructive and sexually promiscuous. This intertwining, based partially on Wollstonecraft's own sympathy towards the revolutionary ideals embodied by the figure, was driven by her friend and disciple Mary Hays's memorialisation of her as an exemplary female philosopher and her husband William Godwin's radical, Romanticised representation of her in his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). My thesis explores the shifting emphasis on both the female philosopher figure and Wollstonecraft's cultural legacy in what I describe as the Post-Jacobin period, stretching from 1799 into the first four decades of the nineteenth century; decades riven by war, economic hardship, and social upheaval, caught between radical pleas for reform and reactionary demands for patriotic compliance. In dealing with Wollstonecraft's life and writing, women writers partook of Post-Jacobin strategies balancing revolutionary critique with a more conservative understanding of the need for social stability in a period of great, and sometimes violent, uncertainty. These writers sought to access some of Wollstonecraft's arguments whilst remaining distant from her notorious reputation promulgated in the Anti-Jacobin press. By including a pseudo-Wollstonecraftian caricature in their texts, often based more on Hays than Wollstonecraft in any case, women writers managed to split considerations of her scandalous life from a more sympathetic consideration of her feminist arguments.

Mary Hays plays an important role in my thesis. Her work most influenced by Wollstonecraft predates the Post-Jacobin period I describe throughout the rest of my

argument. However, her self-representation as a female philosopher was bolstered by her personal and professional relationship with Wollstonecraft, and she created an influential image of Wollstonecraft as female philosopher through her memorialisation of her friend. She was also used by later women writers to inform their caricatured representations of female philosophers, from Hamilton's Bridgetina Botherim, based directly and with deliberate malice on Hays, to later figures such as Burney's Elinor Joddrel. In Hays's early works, Letters and Essays and Memoirs of Emma Courtney, she developed her own model of female philosophy based on a reading of Wollstonecraft's life and work which stressed a balance between reason and passion. In turn, she shaped her memorialisation of Wollstonecraft as an exemplary female philosopher by drawing on her own idiosyncratic reading of her friend's life and work: representing her as a woman who combined deep feeling with profound thought, connected by feminist activism. I argue that Hays's most successful integration of Wollstonecraft's influence on her own feminist position is represented by her 1803 work Female Biography, which excludes Wollstonecraft from her collection of illustrious and celebrated women whilst drawing on her personal, textual and cultural legacy to make a range of feminist arguments throughout the text.

Godwin's radical, Romanticised representation of Wollstonecraft in his Memoirs ironically fuelled the reactionary attack on both his own political philosophy and his dead wife's reputation. Anti-Jacobin propagandists exploited the division in Godwin's representation of Wollstonecraft between his vision of her as a proto-Romantic heroine of sensibility and her revolutionary persona as a radical writer, in order to attack and discredit the couple's radical critiques of society as sexually motivated excuses for promiscuity. Godwin does split Wollstonecraft into two in his

Memoirs, attempting both to celebrate her public profile as revolutionary writer and categorise her as a ‘worshipper of domestic life’<sup>1</sup> in the private sphere. More positively, this split is exploited by later women writers, who divide representations of Wollstonecraft in their own writing between ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ iterations of the female philosopher. Godwin’s response to the aggressive reception of the Memoirs in his 1799 novel St. Leon was to further entrench his representation of the Wollstonecraftian heroine, Marguerite de Damville, in the domestic sphere. I argue that Godwin’s movement from Romantic radicalism in the Memoirs to Revolutionary nostalgia in St. Leon marks the turn in his work between an English Jacobin perspective, basically optimistic about the chances of reform, to a Post-Jacobin one, more cautious, even pessimistic, about the possibilities of change.

My usage of the term Post-Jacobin stems out of my reading of Peter Knox-Shaw’s Jane Austen and the Enlightenment, in which he connects Godwin’s St. Leon with Austen’s Sense and Sensibility to argue that these writers share a liberal perspective on current affairs. I build on Knox-Shaw’s connection throughout my thesis, but argue that this shared, liberal perspective extends from a progressive position, sympathetic with radicalism against reaction, to a moderate one, more conservative and suspicious of the destabilising consequences of radical reform. I would suggest that Godwin occupies the more progressive end of this spectrum, and Austen the more moderate. In my third chapter, I situate Opie and Hamilton as moderates and Edgeworth as progressive. Opie, Hamilton and Edgeworth’s novels each respond to Godwin’s representations of Wollstonecraft, and the reactionary demonization of her, by drawing on Wollstonecraft’s own posthumous novel, The

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<sup>1</sup> William Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin, vol. 1, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), 132.

Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria, in order to rewrite not only the revolutionary feminism of Wollstonecraft's last novel but also the reactionary response to Wollstonecraft herself. These novels deal with the contested representations of the female philosopher figure by either killing her off, maiming her, forcing her back into the domestic realm, or depicting her in a deliberately sanitised fashion. These restrictions on the female philosopher allow for the subtle reintroduction of Wollstonecraftian feminism into each novel, informing their critique of social injustice, especially the exclusion of women from the public sphere of political action. In *Belinda*, Edgeworth moves beyond the dichotomy in the representation of 'safe' and 'dangerous' female philosophers to suggest a new model of female behaviour in the reformed figure of Lady Delacour.

Claudia Johnson dates the diminution of the female philosopher figure's influence on women's writing to 1815, the year after the publication of Frances Burney's The Wanderer and Jane Austen's Mansfield Park.<sup>2</sup> Austen and Burney's 1814 novels both reflect upon the tumults of the 1790s and reformulate its revolutionary debates for the Post-Jacobin context of the 1810s, which saw the end of the Napoleonic wars, the rise of radical consciousness and the abolition of the slave trade. Whereas Burney explicitly alludes to Wollstonecraft's life and work, Austen implicitly draws on her arguments, especially about the effects of female education on women's personalities, and both of their novels include contrasting female characters, based on the contested representations of the female philosopher figure in pro- and counter-revolutionary writing. Both texts end with the exclusion of female characters who have either transgressed social boundaries, antagonised the

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<sup>2</sup> See Claudia Johnson, Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 21.

heroine, or both. However, whereas Burney's purging of her text's transgressive female characters provides a bittersweet triumph for Ellis, Austen uses the punishment meted out to Mary Crawford and Maria and Julia Bertram in order to attack the sexual double standard which chastises women in order to allow men to remain unaffected by social opprobrium. Austen's more confident appropriation of Wollstonecraft's critique of social hypocrisy in relation to women reveals the extent to which Wollstonecraft's ideas have permeated literary representations of women, against the best efforts of reactionary writers: Austen is able to access Wollstonecraft's controversial arguments by presenting them in the form of her narrator's mild, decorous voice, connected to the self-effacing personality of Fanny Price. Fanny emerges as a surprisingly successful female philosopher in Mansfield Park, able to pass on her hard-won lessons of independence to her braver, more active younger sister.

In my thesis, I have extended the remit of the female philosopher's influence into the 1820s and 30s, by exploring Mary Shelley's continuing engagement with her mother Wollstonecraft's personal and textual legacy in her later novels. Mary Shelley's maturing relationship towards Wollstonecraft's life and work hinges on her reformulation of the female philosopher figure in different historical contexts, in different genres, from the historical novel popularised by Walter Scott to the silver fork novel of Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli, and in combination with newer literary figures representing women, especially the Romantic heroine. Further, I contend that the figure of the female philosopher, interlinked as she has become with Wollstonecraft's life and work, diffuses throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Wollstonecraft's influence on Victorian-era women's writing requires more work, beyond the remit of my thesis. However, I would like to conclude with a brief

analysis of the female philosopher figure's afterlife in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, published at the end of the Post-Napoleonic era, the year before a new series of revolutions rocked the European continent.

Published in 1847, fifty years after Wollstonecraft's death, Brontë's enduringly popular novel is a female Bildungsroman, a first person narrative detailing Jane's harsh treatment in her aunt's family; the abusive regime of Lowood School; her career as a governess at Thornfield Hall; her love affair with Mr. Rochester, climaxing in the revelation of his attempted bigamy; Jane's escape and her fortuitous meeting with her cousins, the Rivers family; St. John's proposal to her and her rejection of him; and her return to the ruined Thornfield, destroyed by Rochester's first wife Bertha Mason, concluding with Jane's marriage to the blind and maimed Rochester. Jane Eyre has been analysed from various critical perspectives, and is especially open to feminist, psychoanalytic and postcolonial interpretations.<sup>3</sup> It also fits, surprisingly readily, into the paradigm I have described throughout my thesis, in which contrasting female philosopher figures allow the woman writer to access and develop Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments.<sup>4</sup> In this conclusion, I will focus on the way in which Brontë's depictions of Helen Burns, Bertha Mason and Jane herself

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<sup>33</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) (Yale: Yale Nota Bene, 2000) is propelled by its analysis of Jane Eyre, combining feminist and psychoanalytic approaches to explore Jane's self, split between her and Bertha Mason, who embodies her unarticulated rage. Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' Critical Inquiry 12.1 (Autumn 1985), 243-61, analyses Brontë's Jane Eyre by contrasting it to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea, initiating the postcolonial rereading of the text.

<sup>4</sup> James Diedrick explores the connections between Jane Eyre and Wollstonecraft's feminist polemic in 'Jane Eyre and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' in Approaches to Teaching Brontë's Jane Eyre (New York: MLA, 1993). Kirstin Hanley builds on Diedrick's suggestion by focussing on the way in which Brontë draws on Wollstonecraft's pedagogical suggestions in Original Stories from Real Life, in "A New Servitude": Pedagogy and Feminist Practice in Brontë's Jane Eyre Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies 5.3 (Winter 2009) <<http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue53/hanley.htm>> 28<sup>th</sup> September 2011. I differ from both Diedrick and Hanley by suggesting that Brontë must negotiate the vagaries of Wollstonecraft's posthumous reputation over the fifty years which had passed between Wollstonecraft's death and the publication of Jane Eyre, in order to access Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments. This means that, for Brontë, the female philosopher is an unavoidable figure in her reading of Wollstonecraft.

reflect upon the tradition of contrasting female philosopher figures in earlier nineteenth-century women's writing.

Jane meets Helen Burns at Lowood Institution. Helen is intellectual, self-denying and profoundly religious. She submits to the brutal regime at Lowood, instigated by the cruel-natured Mr. Brocklehurst, because she receives a fuller education, in secret, from Miss Temple. Helen finally dies angelically of consumption; her death leads to the discovery of Brocklehurst's harsh treatment of his scholars, and the reformation of the school along more liberal lines. Helen is both a mentor for Jane – she guides the younger girl through her early experience of Lowood, helping her to benefit from Temple's teaching – and a warning figure – her passivity and submissiveness stultify Jane's passionate feelings. I suggest that Helen represents the Enlightenment iteration of the female philosopher taken to extremes: she combines rational study with intense religious feeling, leading to the attenuation of her bodily strength. Elaine Showalter describes her as 'the perfect victim and the representation of the feminine spirit in its most disembodied form'<sup>5</sup>: she is, effectively, all mind.

Helen's relationship with her teacher Miss Temple reveals the extent to which her characterisation parallels that of the positive, Enlightenment / revolutionary iteration of the female philosopher. Jane comments, wonderingly, on their shared learning:

They conversed of things I had never heard of; of nations and times past; of countries far away; of secrets of nature discovered and guessed at: they spoke of books: how many they had read!

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), 115.

What stores of knowledge they possessed! Then they seemed so familiar with French names and French authors...<sup>6</sup>

Helen shares with Miss Temple, and with earlier female philosophers such as Wollstonecraft and Hays, and their creations Maria and Emma, a love of reading, an international perspective, and, tellingly, an emphasis on French culture. By killing off Helen, Brontë subverts the tradition of the Enlightenment iteration of the female philosopher figure surviving her counter-revolutionary twin, at work in the novels of Elizabeth Hamilton, Maria Edgeworth, Burney and Austen (discussed in chapters 3 and 4, above). In doing so, she suggests that Helen's extraordinary submissiveness and her extreme piety are unhelpful in the development of Jane's psyche.

Of course, the novel's off-stage climax, Bertha Mason's arson attack on Thornfield Hall, leads to her death too, clearing the way for Jane's companionate, egalitarian marriage to Rochester which concludes the novel. It is more difficult to align Bertha with the earlier tradition of the female philosopher figure, even in her most reactionary form. However, I argue that, as Helen is the Enlightenment iteration of the figure taken to extremes, so too is Bertha the counter-revolutionary version of the female philosopher warped to her paranoiac limit. In Jane's encounter with Bertha after the collapse of Rochester's wedding ceremony, Brontë stresses Bertha's bodily size and strength, her sensuality, over her intellect, because she has been driven to madness by her incarceration in Thornfield Hall.<sup>7</sup> This focus on Bertha's body, at the expense of her reason, and even her humanity, aligns her with reactionary attacks against the female philosopher, which strove to decouple the term, arguing that it was impossible for a female to be a philosopher. Moreover,

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<sup>6</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Michael Mason (London: Penguin, 2003), 85. Subsequent references, in-text.

<sup>7</sup> Her imprisonment aligns her with earlier Gothic heroines, including Wollstonecraft's Maria.

when Jane first sees Bertha, she describes her as a ‘clothed hyena’ (Jane Eyre, 328), connecting her to Wollstonecraft who was described in her 1790s heyday as ‘a hyena in petticoats’.<sup>8</sup> When Bertha attacks Rochester, Jane describes her as ‘a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest – more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was’ (328). Bertha’s nightmarish strength and violence, her size, and the fact that she can almost overcome her husband, also align her with Victor’s fears about the female creature in Frankenstein. Bertha represents the nadir of male fears about the power of the female philosopher: combining almost mindless bodily strength with savage violence, underscored by profoundly threatening sexual power. Rochester himself hints at Bertha’s dangerous sexual energy when he describes her assault on him as ‘the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know’ (328).

By exorcising first Helen Burns then Bertha Mason from the novel, Brontë creates a space for Jane Eyre to develop into her own kind of female philosopher, eschewing the pious passivity of Helen and restraining the inarticulate rage represented by Bertha’s aggression. Before Rochester’s arrival at Thornfield, Jane articulates a feminist disappointment at the narrowness of her existence:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action, and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is

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<sup>8</sup> Horace Walpole salutes his friend Hannah More in a letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> October 1795 as ‘thou reverse of that hyena in petticoats, Mrs Wolstoncroft [sic]’, The Correspondence of Horace Walpole, vol. 31, 397. Horace Walpole’s Correspondence: Yale Edition <<http://images.library.yale.edu/hwcorrespondence/page.asp?vol=31&page=397>> 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (129-30)

In this passage, Jane connects her feminist perception of women's need for equality, improved education and increased access to the public sphere with her awareness of both personal and political rebellion, or revolution. Her reference to 'political rebellions' harks back to the tumult of the French Revolution, as well as foreshadowing the Revolutions of 1848, which would erupt across Europe, if not in Britain itself, the year after the publication of Jane Eyre.<sup>9</sup>

Jane's criticism of men who argue that women should 'confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings', etc, connects her to Mary Hays, who similarly critiques women's confinement to such activities, arguing in Letters and Essays, for example: 'I doubt whether there will be any sewing in the next world, how then will those who employ themselves who have done nothing else in this?'<sup>10</sup> Jane is also connected to Hays, and to the caricatured versions of Hays such as Hamilton's Bridgetina Botherim and Edgeworth's Harriet Freke, because of her plain, even ugly, exterior. Jane's self-description focuses on her 'want of beauty': 'I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer: I sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately and finely developed in figure; I felt it as a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked' (114). As discussed in chapter 1, Hays'

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the 1848 Revolutions, see Jonathan Sperber, The European Revolutions, 1848-1851 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which offers an interpretation which attempts 'to connect the outbreak and course of the revolution with the social, economic and cultural changes of the preceding decades', 2-3, comparing it to both the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Hays, Letters and Essays (London: Knott, 1793), 34.

appearance was often attacked instead of engaging with her feminist arguments; for example, Coleridge describes her as 'a thing, ugly and petticoated'.<sup>11</sup> Hamilton describes Bridgetina, based on Hays, as short, ugly and, unlike Jane, who takes care of her dress, permanently dishevelled. Edgeworth's Freke is similarly irregular in appearance, described as disconcertingly masculine throughout Belinda. Brontë reworks the trajectory of Bridgetina and Harriet's, and even Emma Courtney's stories, in which Bridgetina falls back into a life of domesticity with her mother, Harriet is maimed in a mantrap as punishment for her unladylike behaviour, and Emma is denied a healthy relationship with the man she loves, in Jane's eventual marriage to Rochester. This marriage can be read as the belated triumph of the female philosopher figure represented by Bridgetina, Harriet and Emma, in earlier nineteenth-century women's writing.

In one sense, Jane's marriage to Rochester, signalled by her famous (almost) last words 'Reader, I married him' (Jane Eyre, 498), represents her reinscription back into a normative discourse of domesticity. In this reading, her refusal to accompany St. John Rivers on his missionary enterprise to India shows her unwillingness, perhaps inability, to act in the public sphere. Instead, she chooses to return to and remain in the private sphere, restricting herself to the roles of wife and mother. As such, she follows in the footsteps of earlier female philosophers who return to the domestic sphere at the end of their novels, for example, Ellis in The Wanderer and Fanny in Mansfield Park. On the other hand, the conclusion to Jane Eyre stresses Jane's freedom of choice. In her discussions with St. John about the manner in which she would be prepared to accompany him to India, she is clear that

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<sup>11</sup> Coleridge's description comes from a letter to Southey, quoted in M. Ray Adams' 'Mary Hays, Disciple of William Godwin' PMLA 55.2 (June 1940), 472-83, 473.

she is incapable of either marrying him or loving him in any capacity other than like a sister. When he tells her that ‘undoubtedly enough of love would follow upon marriage to render the union right even in your eyes’, she angrily replies, ‘I scorn your idea of love... I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it’ (454). Later, discussing St. John with Rochester, she tells him: ‘He is good and great, but severe; and, for me, cold as an iceberg... He sees nothing attractive in me; not even youth – only a few useful mental points...’ (493), implicitly contrasting St. John’s view of her with Rochester’s. Jane rejects her reduction by St. John to an intellectual pawn, embracing instead the mental, emotional and physical fulfilment of her life with Rochester. Showalter argues that Jane Eyre ‘anticipates and indeed formulates the deadly combat between the Angel in the House and the devil in the flesh that is evident in the fiction of Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark, and other twentieth-century British women novelists’ (A Literature of Their Own, 112). She also accesses and reformulates an earlier tradition of contrasting female philosopher figures, in the intellectualism of Helen Burns and the threatening sexuality of Bertha Mason, destroying both in order to allow Jane to find her own balance: the balance, I suggest, which Hays searched for in her writing, especially Emma Courtney.

The destruction of the female philosopher figures in Jane Eyre does not represent the exorcism of Wollstonecraft’s ghost from the corpus of women’s writing. Instead, it allows for a reappraisal of the influence of Wollstonecraft’s feminism on nineteenth-century women writers. The anxious division of female consciousness between conflicting representations of the female philosopher figure, which bedevils women’s writing at the beginning of the century, stems from competing interpretations of Wollstonecraft’s life and work. Opie’s Adeline Mowbray, Hamilton’s

Modern Philosophers, and later Burney's The Wanderer struggle to keep Wollstonecraft at a distance, at the same time as using her feminist arguments to drive their social critique. As the century progresses, the way in which women writers approach these divisions becomes more sophisticated, turning criticism of transgressive female characters onto the sexual double standard which exempts men's behaviour from similar scrutiny. Although this is implicit in many of these texts, Austen's Mansfield Park confidently appropriates and naturalises Wollstonecraft's radical critique of social hypocrisy in order to attack the sexual mores of her post-revolutionary moment. Mary Shelley engages with her mother's personal and textual legacy to her by remoulding the female philosopher into more and more successful iterations, culminating in her fusing with the separate tradition of the Romantic heroine in Falkner. Brontë's Jane Eyre forms part of this tradition by shedding the unhelpful connotations of the female philosopher figure, in both her ideal and nightmarish forms, in order to recreate her in Jane's plain, ordinary form. By shedding both Enlightenment and counter-revolutionary iterations of the female philosopher, Brontë allows her heroine to engage with Wollstonecraft's revolutionary feminist philosophy anew.

By exploring the intertwining of Wollstonecraft's reputation with the figure of the female philosopher figure from 1792, when Mary Hays published her Wollstonecraftian Letters and Essays, to 1837, with the publication of Mary Shelley's Falkner, Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period raises questions about Wollstonecraft's reception in the nineteenth century, the origins of modern feminism, the history of Romantic-period women's writing and the position of women between public and private spheres. Throughout my thesis, I have argued that, far from becoming close to untouchable in the

aftermath of the publication of Godwin's Memoirs, Wollstonecraft continues to assert a tremendous hold on the imaginations of women writers, in spite of her dangerous reputation as sexually and politically wanton. Women writers engage in various strategies to negotiate Wollstonecraft's compromising reputation in order to access her political and philosophical arguments on women's rights, especially through the creation of competing female philosopher figures in their texts. Women writers from Hays to Shelley seek to develop, expand upon and shape Wollstonecraft's textual legacy in order to create a feminist perspective on the post-revolutionary world of the early nineteenth century. Romantic-period women's writing both draws on and moves on from Wollstonecraft's revolutionary life and work, constructing an image of Wollstonecraft useful for the changing contexts of the early nineteenth century: from the effects of the Napoleonic Wars on British society, to the rise of working-class consciousness and the developing discourse of domesticity. Wollstonecraft's arguments about women's rights, female education and situation in society get incorporated within this discourse, with women writers from Elizabeth Hamilton to Jane Austen using Wollstonecraft's ideas to create a distinctive, Post-Jacobin space for women within the private sphere, from which to mount a critique of their increasing exclusion from the public sphere of political action.

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