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READING THE WOUND: WOLLSTONECRAFT'S *WRONGS OF WOMAN, OR MARIA* AND TRAUMA THEORY

DIANE LONG HOEVELER

I

In writing *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798)—her last unfinished novel—Wollstonecraft would appear to have been paralyzed or in the grip of a compulsion that allowed her only to imagine various scenarios of traumatic disaster for her heroine. While she exposed and at the same time reified the tyranny of sentimental literary formulae for women, Wollstonecraft also revealed that for women of all classes, life really was the way it was depicted in sentimental fiction—a series of insults, humiliations, deprivations, beatings, and fatal or near-fatal disasters. And as the majority of her critics have noticed, in the two novels she wrote we see in only slightly veiled terms the biography of Wollstonecraft herself, the continual disappointments in the weak mother, the failing father, the dependent sisters and the disappointing female friends.¹ At times, in fact, the baldness of the narratives becomes strained and embarrassing, as if the author could not bring herself to conceal in even the most rudimentary manner her extensive history of personal pain. Failing to distance herself from her narratives in what we would recognize as a socially acceptable (read: literary) manner, Wollstonecraft virtually slaps the reader in the face with her anger, her impotence, her frustration. At times, when reading the novels, we cannot be faulted for wondering, are we peeking voyeuristically into a virtual diary, a cathartic purging of Wollstonecraft's own disappointing familial and sexual experiences, or are we reading instead works of propaganda, systematic creations of an ideology that was to shape women's consciousnesses for the next two centuries? I have to conclude that *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* was intended to be read and understood as both—personally therapeutic and at the

same time historically significant for what it reveals about women's lives under patriarchy and an increasingly claustrophobic capitalistic system.

It is safe to claim that Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) stands as one of the earliest and most important documents in the history of the feminist movement.² And when Wollstonecraft is discussed as one of the founding mothers of feminism much is made of her adherence to Enlightenment principles, the writings of John Locke and Montesquieu, and the French Revolutionary tradition of fraternity, liberty, and equality. Virtually everyone who has written on Wollstonecraft's feminism, in other words, sees her working primarily within a male-originated and male-dominated tradition of writers.³ There is no denying the fact that Wollstonecraft consciously identified herself primarily with male writers, for her intense shadow-boxing with Rousseau throughout *A Vindication* indicates that her identification with him was stronger and more compelling than any she had with the various female writers of her time. She protests just too much about Rousseau for us to believe that she was anything other than alternately repulsed and intrigued by his vision of women and sexuality. We are not the least surprised when we learn that she confessed in a letter to Gilbert Imlay that she had always been "half in love with Rousseau." But finally Rousseau is not the issue, nor is Catherine Macaulay or any of the other women writers with whom Wollstonecraft was associated at some time in her professional life. What is at stake in Wollstonecraft's career is her attempt to merge deeply felt personal experiences of pain-woundings, a series of psychic traumas—with a more just social, legal, and political agenda for women.

One might ask, why is it important to recognize *Maria* as a product or enactment of personal as well as social trauma? Does such a reading change our interpretation of Wollstonecraft and her last work? Most interpretations of *Maria* as well as the *Vindication* tend to privilege the Enlightenment dialectic that is supposedly central in both those works. Critics tend to see Wollstonecraft as working in the "individual rights" tradition, also known as the liberal feminist agenda, and they assert that her works are largely social, political, cultural, and economic analyses of women's positions in society. But I would assert that Wollstonecraft's fictions provide one test case for revealing the cognitive value of trauma as a source for literary creativity. In the prose works Wollstonecraft was able to contain her personal wounds, although surely her traumas in regard to her parents creep into those texts repeatedly and cause their somewhat hysterical tone at times. But in her fictions Wollstonecraft opened the wounds of her later life. She used fiction as a form of therapy, and she attempted in *Maria*, her last unfinished work, to reshape and replay her life and its major crises almost as if she were turning an object around in her hand, looking at her wounds from different angles in order to understand and thereby control them. All of this is to say that

literature is written by individuals in the grip of fantasies and pain who then externalize their particular complex of fantasies onto the characters of their works.

This, of course, leads us to Freud. In his *Interpretations of Dreams*, Freud claims that a dream is not a fantasmagoria, but a text to be deciphered, and he observes that it is in the very nature of sexuality to have a traumatic effect on the ego; therefore, he justifies the connection between sexuality, trauma, and defense. For Freud, fantasies are the conscious articulations of a lack, a loss of the psychic plenitude we experienced in childhood, while in both fantasies and dreams the Ego dominates and determines all the actions and consequences so that the lack is denied. Most fantasies, therefore, center on scenarios of self-aggrandizement and are structured around a narrative in which the ego regains a protective home, loving parents, and autoerotic objects suitable for affection. As we will see, Wollstonecraft's heroine does struggle toward establishing an idealized family of her own, but she fails in the attempt, ending in a madhouse and then a courtroom.

Freud would later in his career resort to an explanation of fantasy that he called "primal fantasies of phylogenetic endowment," claiming that all fantasies are not individual, but traces of racial or primeval experiences. For Freud, the primal fantasies that recur in all individuals—and by extension, the human race—are all narratives of origin: the primal scene and voyeuristic fantasies, fantasies of seduction and the upsurge of sexuality, and the origin of the difference between the sexes and its manifestation in the fantasy of castration.⁴ In *Maria*, Wollstonecraft revisits all of these primal fantasies: seduction (two: Venables and Darnford), sexual difference (Maria's rivalry with her brother, Robert), castration (the courtroom boast of adultery), and the attempt to recreate a family of origins (the recovery of the dead baby). The birth of her daughter is also on some level an attempt to reconstruct her own birth, replayed with Maria as mother to herself. But Wollstonecraft's Maria finally castrates both Venables and Darnford, leaving her as a sort of virgin mother hallucinating about an all-female community with her daughter and Jemima. The author's peristent recourse to fantasy formations alerts us to the residual presence of trauma in the text. As the research on trauma makes clear, there is no final resolution or successful rationalization of trauma. Its effects linger like scars on a body, like markings on a blank page.

We can also, however, examine Maria's conduct in light of Freud's definition of hysteria: the hysteric suffers from a psychic trauma whose origin she does not know or has repressed, yet which has remained as a memory trace in her psyche. Freud labels these memories "parthogenic," and he notes that hysterical patients suffer from incompletely abreacted psychical traumas. Secondly, the gap in conscious knowledge between the trauma and the partial memory of it causes what Freud calls the "hysterical conversion," that is, the somatization of conflictual unconscious representations. According to

Freud, "hysterical symptoms are nothing other than unconscious fantasies brought into view through 'conversion'" (*SE*, 9:160). All of which is another way of saying that the body is compelled to act out its psychological overload either through excitation (tears, fits, hallucinations) or various forms of inhibitions (melancholy, paralysis, catatonic depressions). The gap, then, between knowledge about the trauma and the ability to process it consciously, constitutes the very origin of hysteria.⁵ But that same gap between the experience of a trauma and our ability to work through and out of it can also be seen as the very impetus of the need to write. By writing a literary text we transform the trauma, but we never process it to the point that the trauma can or ever will disappear. The residue of trauma as the origin of a literary work persists in repeated imagery patterns that we begin to recognize as excessive, obsessive, delusional, hyperbolic—indeed, hysterical. Julia Kristeva, in fact, has accused most women's novels of exhibiting "purposely perverse hysteria," while Mary Jacobus talks about "hysterical texts" like Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" as almost paradigmatic expressions of women's creativity.⁶ Maria, like her creator, appears to swing between excessive emotional overload and catatonic melancholia. The narrative oscillations in the text can be explained largely through the struggle to both act out the trauma and at the same time to futilely attempt to understand or rationalize the memories of the pain.

This brings us to Freud's late essay, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Here, he speculates on the nature of psychic trauma, connecting it to both hysteria and the persistence of fantasies as survival mechanisms in all human beings. We might conclude, in fact, that trauma is the outgrowth of one particularly virulent fantasy, the persecutory or beating fantasy that stems, for Freud, out of unresolved incestuous feelings toward the father. But Freud did not attempt to explain trauma merely as an outgrowth of castration anxieties. Instead, he complicated the issue by introducing a particularly literary example of his theory, Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberated*. When Freud chose to relate the story of Tancred and Clorinda, derived from Tasso's epic, he did so in order to illustrate the peculiar tendency of some people to wound and be wounded over and over again by the same agents, through a sort of fate that appears to be entirely beyond their own control.⁷ Freud writes that Tasso's hero, Tancred,

unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (*SE*, 18:3)

By using this particular narrative to illustrate his theory of trauma, Freud highlights the paradoxical nature of psychic woundings, that the experience of trauma repeats itself over and over again through the unconsciously motivated acts of the survivor. In other words, if a psychic trauma is experienced too suddenly or unexpectedly, it cannot be fully known or available to the consciousness until it imposes itself yet again, in fact, repeatedly in the nightmares and compulsively repetitive actions of the traumatized and traumatizer. Cathy Caruth summarizes Freud on this point, noting that it is the second wounding that finally allows the trauma to be located on the body of the victim: "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on."⁸

With this theory in mind I would suggest that the original childhood traumas for Wollstonecraft were the financial failure of her father, the emotional withdrawal of her mother, and the blatant favoritism shown by both to her brother. But the second wounding, the "adult" version of the same trauma—the sexual rejection by Imlay and his desertion of Wollstonecraft and their baby daughter, Fanny, for a dancer—was even more psychologically devastating, a trauma so severe that she was compelled to reenact it over and over again in her fiction, mingling and transmuting her pain with the imagery of women's bodies, tortured, beaten, and murdered. *Maria*, in fact, is suffused with images of abused and abusive women, and it is no coincidence that Wollstonecraft stumbled most awkwardly when she tried to conclude the novel. Writing its ending was tantamount to envisioning a future for herself and the unborn child—Mary Godwin Shelley—she was carrying. Traumatized by the desertion she suffered shortly after Fanny's birth, Wollstonecraft could only imagine further scenarios of disaster for herself and her surrogate heroine. The wounds that one detects while reading *Maria* are the scars left by desertion, betrayal, and abandonment. Like scabs lightly covering a deep gash, this particular wound—sexual betrayal—compelled Wollstonecraft to dissect it over and over again. And yet by writing the novel she was also able to imaginatively transmute that personal saga of rage and disappointment into a social and political theory that was based on herself as Everywoman, abused and battered, but hopeful that a corrupt system of barter in female flesh could be transformed through the power of a mother's love. It was a hopelessly and impossibly optimistic and idealistic dream, and yet given Wollstonecraft's personal history it made some sort of psychological sense. In creating herself in the fiction as the all-loving mother she never had, Wollstonecraft constructed the perfect revisionary history, a fantasy-formation of her own origins. Her only remaining problem, as she well knew, was the father.

II

How can we decode the narrative of trauma that runs throughout this novel and, indeed, explains its strange, abortive conclusions? As Freud has noted, trauma reveals itself in the imagery patterns of excessive and obsessive repetitions, and these are all too easy to recognize in the novel. Written after *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* presents another version of the sexually frightened, persecuted, victimized heroine, a woman unable to find a suitable male soulmate because social and financial corruption doom her from the outset to the status of an exchange object. The Author's Preface to *Maria* lays out Wollstonecraft's more clearly defined feminist agenda most clearly.⁹ The first paragraph puts before us "a wounded heart"; the second paragraph, only a sentence, juxtaposes "passions" to "manners"; while the third paragraph arrives at the real thesis of the work: the author's "desire of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society" (p. 59). This thesis, of course, had formed the central focus of the earlier prose version of it, the *Vindication*, and *Maria* does clearly attempt to work out in a fictional manner the issues and concerns that were developed in the *Vindication*. Reading at times like a barely-disguised sociological text, *Maria* was less conceived as a fiction in its own right than as a fictional presentation of ideologies already presented in prose.

In a letter of complaint that follows the Author's Preface, Wollstonecraft states explicitly to a correspondent that she wishes in her novel to eschew the "stage-effects" of suffering—in other words, melodrama—in favor of "delineat[ing] finer sensations." Her stated intent instead is to "show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various" (pp. 59-60). She accomplishes two aims with this thesis: first, she reveals that the sexual oppression of women cuts across class lines and, secondly, she highlights the importance of education for women as a way of escape from degradation and exploitation.¹⁰ But is there any way out, even for the highly-educated Maria? In fact, Wollstonecraft ends up undercutting her position in the *Vindication*, by arguing in *Maria* that ultimately education makes no difference for women. A poor, uneducated woman ends up in the same cell as the rich, educated woman, because finally the patriarchy is one large holding tank for women—a madhouse from which none escape unscathed.

Wollstonecraft begins *Maria*, then, by situating her text in a hyperbolic atmosphere of social terror and literary excess. The narrator's consciousness poses the central question of the text: "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (p. 64). Writing in 1798, she refers to the ambience of the popular female gothic novels of her day as the genre of postrevolutionary trauma. At the same time she evokes the desperation in the air, the atmosphere of the French Revolution:

Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavouring to recall her scattered thoughts! (P. 61)

Like Blake and the later male Romantic poets, Wollstonecraft believes that the mind is its own realm and that one lives ultimately within the circumference of one's psyche. Maria's psyche, however, is ruptured by the brutal treatment she has received from her husband. Her baby girl's face floats always before her eyes, but she is not aware that the child is already dead. Like all women in Wollstonecraft's *oeuvre*, she mourns that she has given birth to a daughter, because by doing so she is all too aware that she has perpetuated the cycle of misery and abuse that we know to be gendered warfare: "Still she mourned for her child, lamented she was a daughter, and anticipated the aggravated ills of life that her sex rendered almost inevitable."

An intense valorization of the mother and motherhood occurs in this text, but as we know from Wollstonecraft's other works and her biography, she frequently protested too much. She wants nothing more than her own mother's total attention and love, and this intense idealization of the mother causes her heroine's celebration of mother-love throughout *Maria*. When the mother fails to live up to the lofty ideals Wollstonecraft demanded of her, however, she is castigated and condemned as a failure, an evil being worthy of nothing but contempt. In choosing to make her heroine a twenty-six year old mother, Wollstonecraft begins this work where she could not take her earlier novelistic heroine, Mary. She has—however grudgingly—accepted the sexual reality of procreation, but now she seeks to have her heroine flee its soiling taint as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. The "victim" of one "atrocious" after another, she finds herself at the beginning of the novel literally in a madhouse, but metaphorically in the madhouse of her own mind. Unable to "battle the selfish scheme of her tyrant—her husband," she has been vanquished both in body and in soul. Her first spoken words in the text are, "I have no appetite," and it would appear that women have no appetite in Wollstonecraft's universe for food or sex. They hunger instead for perfect parents or parent-substitutes.

After six weeks in the madhouse, Maria becomes aware of another inhabitant, a man in an adjacent cell, a reader of Dryden and Milton who makes intelligent marginal annotations in the very volumes that Maria then peruses. This unnamed man very quickly becomes the unknowing recipient of Maria's pent-up emotions, largely because his jottings coincide with Maria's own opinions on politics and society. Maria begins to construct in her own image an ideal lover, somewhat drawn along the lines of Rousseau's feminized heroes. Again, Wollstonecraft appears to be gently mocking her

heroine while at the same time explaining and rationalizing her folly: "how difficult it [is] for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits" (p. 69). So bored that she falls in love as a form of distraction, Maria finds herself inventing a romantic hero who will share her political sentiments and, better yet, free her from the madhouse in which he also has been innocently immured. Hearing his voice for the first time, she is struck by something in it that makes it familiar. It is "manly," while at the same time "sweet" (p. 71). Familiar, masculine and feminine, the voice is the voice in Maria's own head of her absent and fantasy parents. It would appear that this unnamed hero has walked into a ready-made fantasy of the family romance where he can never live up to the heroine's expectations for him. Wanting a perfect father and a mother, she is forced to settle instead for a flawed lover and invariably finds herself disappointed.

This perfect lover, like the perfect lover in *Mary*, is once again named Henry, and possesses a familial history that mirrors in uncanny fashion the personal situation of Maria.¹¹ The Wollstonecraft fictional hero, in other words, is always a slightly masculinized version of her heroine, an idea that Percy Shelley was later to find so attractive in his mother-in-law's works that he used it himself throughout his corpus. But Henry's personal narrative bears striking similarities to the history of Wollstonecraft herself, as well as to all of her fictional characters. Once again we see parents who "visibl[y] dislike each other," dead and dying siblings, and the complete absence of "domestic affection" (p. 74). The hero's sexual initiation is described as a fall, a "vice," filling him with "disgust" and shame. His sexual partners are described as "creatures" whom the hero has met at the "theatre," and we can recall how strongly her earlier heroine Mary disapproved of her husband's dalliances at masquerades and theatres. Henry is supposed to represent the typical upper-class libertine male of the late eighteenth century, sensual and corrupt, viewing sex as a performance and game, with women the fallen and soiled prey to be discarded when the game no longer amuses. Wollstonecraft was quite rightly disgusted by this attitude, yet her loathing took on what we can only recognize as an excessive quality once she herself was the victim of her own unrequited passion for Imlay. Hating herself for a passion she could not control, Wollstonecraft was compelled to condemn sexual passion in women as debilitating and degrading, because she herself felt both.¹² The trauma of sexual betrayal, reactivating the earlier betrayal of her parents, could only produce the sort of intense nausea that we will see in Wollstonecraft's works when they veer, as they must, toward the sexual terrain.

Maria constructs Henry as an ideal lover much like Pygmalion created his idealized Galatea out of ivory only to see her come to life beneath his embraces. Still we cannot fail to notice that this text is obsessed with triangular configurations. Henry cannot be loved or understood apart from

Jemima, the servant woman, the lower-class surrogate who so often takes on the dirty work for the more-educated, ostensibly more-intelligent heroine. No sooner do Henry and Maria pledge their love, than the reader is immersed immediately in Jemima's narrative, and this is a narrative that is more detailed and more carefully wrought than is Henry's. Why? Like the lower-class women in *Mary*, Jemima bears a fearful symbolic weight. She, like them, has to embody the woes, sufferings, abuse, and beatings that can be delivered to innocent women whose only fault is to be born women in a society that views such beings as excess refuse or raw sexual material to be used and consumed. Jemima's narrative is an embarrassingly painful series of insults and affronts, beginning with maternal rejection, maternal death, paternal neglect and physical abuse, emotional woundings, and then another illegitimate pregnancy resulting from rape, and the entire cycle is slated to begin again. One recalls Blake's poem "The Mental Traveller" when reading Jemima's narrative because the same pessimistic presentation of gendered warfare motivates both texts, suggesting the same desperation and the same cynicism born of frustrated idealism.¹³

Jemima does not have her child, procuring an abortion instead, and Wollstonecraft does not condemn Jemima's act, placing it instead in the category of desperate measures. She also does not condemn Jemima's stint as a prostitute or the time she spends as "a thief from principle" (p. 90). Both acts, preying as they do on the patriarchy's privileges and corrupt power, are understandable given Jemima's dearth of other options. After she spends five years as the kept mistress of a wealthy and cultured man, Jemima finds herself once again on the street when the man suddenly dies. An eighteenth-century version of the "displaced homemaker," Jemima realizes that she has been "cast aside as the filth of society. Condemned to labour, like a machine, only to earn bread, and scarcely that, I became melancholy and desperate" (p. 89). Out of desperation she preys on a man who has already caused one woman's pregnancy. By forcing this man to reject his obligation to the woman and impending child, Jemima precipitates the other woman's suicide. Jemima has become, in other words, the murderess of her own displaced mother. Wollstonecraft reveals here what we all know too well. Victims of abuse become victimizers in their turn; the beaten become the beaters once they have the opportunity. The cycle of abuse meted out to Jemima finds its logical end product when she becomes as damaged and damaging as her oppressors. But within the logic of the beating fantasy, the "stiff, cold corpse" drawn out of the well, the nameless suicidal pregnant woman, can only be read as another lower-class woman substituting for the heroine Maria's displaced or unacknowledged crimes and her worst anxieties. The woman who would rather die than bear George Venable's child is here embodied as a public spectacle, a cautionary tale, distanced but strangely present and threatening to the heroine and her substitute.

Jemima "hate[s] mankind" because of her consciousness that "the rich and poor are natural enemies" (p. 90). A proto-Marxist in her sensibilities, she actually sounds more than a little like Victor Frankenstein's creature when she asks Maria, "'Who ever acknowledged me to be a fellow-creature?'" (p. 91). Jemima's narrative represents for Maria a crystallization of the "peculiar fate" of all "oppressed" women (p. 92). Thinking that her "humanity" has been "benumbed rather than killed," Maria decides, like Mary before her, to play the Lady Bountiful and educate Jemima: "Let me but give her an education—let me but prepare her body and mind to encounter the ills which await her sex, and I will teach her to consider you [Maria's daughter] as her second mother." This is a curious intention, largely because education has not helped Maria one bit to fend off the slings and arrows of experience herself. It also, however, reveals a curiously split self. Maria needs Jemima, not simply as a buffer in her relationship with Henry, but in her relationship with her daughter. Like verbal hyperbole or excessiveness in reacting to situations, over-idealization is a defense or screen to block the memory of a trauma. In the very overvaluation of the mother and her substitutes—like Jemima—we can detect the trauma that the mother inflicted.

Also curious is the fact that the daughter is already dead, unbeknownst to Maria. Maria's narrative, the longest section of the novel, is written as a letter to this already-dead baby daughter, a still-born missive, so to speak. The symbolic import of the letter, however, suggests that the lessons Maria learned, the lessons she hopes will educate her daughter and by extension the next generation, will not be understood or even heard by that audience. The text's futility, its failure to find a wide audience suggests that Wollstonecraft understood that she was presenting a message that would be rejected by the very women she hoped to reach. As she well knew, those women would rather read the gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe or the sentimental works of Charlotte Smith. Those women would rather believe that female victims ultimately triumph over their oppressors. Those women would rather not think too much about unfortunate creatures like Jemima or Maria (read: themselves).

But what we notice first about Maria's narrative is its similarity to Wollstonecraft's earlier *Mary, A Fiction* (1788). Once again there is a younger child who feels slighted by the "mother's extravagant partiality" to the older boy (p. 95). Once again the father is a despot and the mother is a paragon of "passive obedience." And yet once again the daughter is schooled in the arts of "continual restraint in the most trivial matters; unconditional submission to orders." The "negative virtues" that Wollstonecraft had condemned in *Mary* recur in this portrait of female neglect and "education." The mother-figure is both denigrated and at the same time valorized throughout the text of *Maria*. When the woman in question is Maria's failed mother, then the failings are cosmic, the reproaches deep and painful. When Maria

is describing herself as a mother, however, she rhapsodizes about the intensity and life-transforming power of her love for her daughter.

The valorization of the idealized mother and mother-love functions throughout Wollstonecraft's works as the highest social, indeed religious, value. In the absence of an active and present God, Wollstonecraft supplies the mother-deity, or at least her desire that there be such an all-loving, all-giving selfless entity. It seems fair to say that the failure of her own parents haunts Wollstonecraft throughout her life, causing her to either castigate or valorize every woman in her opus depending on how thoroughly she managed to internalize Wollstonecraft's high standards for mothering and the ability to dispense mother-love. The mother of Maria fails not simply for favoring Robert, the eldest boy, but for what her daughter calls "indolence of character" (p. 96). This laziness causes her to neglect her daughter's education, and certainly Wollstonecraft considered the mother's obligation to educate or at least oversee the education of her children to be the cornerstone of her theories. But as in *Mary*, the neglected daughter is never at a loss to find substitutes, and Maria turns to her beloved uncle as a substitute for both of her failed parents. Like the intelligent older men who populate her books, this uncle is a safe father-figure, desexualized, ironically providing a source for the money that attracts the odious husband Maria spends the rest of the text trying to shed.

When Maria comments on the privileges and prerogatives of the first-born son, she mentions his importance in carrying on the "empty family-name down to posterity" (p. 102). Wollstonecraft dispensed with surnames throughout *Mary*, and now we know why. Surnames belong only to the sons of a family, and they signify the system of patrimony and patrilineal privilege. Because daughters cannot share in such a system they are always essentially disinherited, if not literally then symbolically. Disinherited by her mother, who gives all her personal savings to Robert, Maria falls into an even more corrupt and disappointing family when her father quickly takes a mistress, impregnates her, and moves her into the household. The autobiographical similarity here is obvious, if a bit exaggerated, considering the situation of Wollstonecraft's own father and stepmother. Maria finds herself further distraught when this mistress next attempts to seduce Robert. There are clear similarities between this passage and a leitmotif that runs throughout *A Vindication*: "By allowing women but one way of rising in the world, fostering the libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as a proof of inferiority of intellect" (p. 103). The mistress's rampant sexuality disgusts Maria more than her mother's earlier partiality did. The desperate situation in her father's house causes Maria now to rush into marriage with George, not knowing that her uncle has essentially sold her by promising George five thousand pounds in payment for marrying Maria. Bartered and bought, Maria asks the question

that hovers over this and all of Wollstonecraft's other works: "For what am I reserved? Why was I not born a man, or why was I born at all?" (p. 105).

What women are "reserved" for is marriage, in Wollstonecraft's universe a "trap," a system of being "caged for life" (p. 108). Indeed, the description of their first five years of marriage suggests that when Maria realized she could not reform George's "taste" or character, when she realized she "could not become the friend or confidant of [her] husband," she lost what little shreds of self-confidence she possessed. Dehumanized by his dismissive and condescending attitude, Maria finds herself continually "silenced" by him. Most degrading of all is their sexual relationship, which Maria rather coyly discusses initially in the abstract, "for personal intimacy without affection, seemed to me the most degrading, as well as the most painful state in which a woman of any taste, not to speak of the peculiar delicacy of fostered sensibility, could be placed" (p. 109). George Venables, however, is so corrupt that he prefers the company of prostitutes to his wife, while his sexual proclivities are so jaded and "sluggish" that he needs the extra stimulus of "wantons of the lower class," with their "vulgar, indecent mirth," to enable him to perform. Because he only associates with "profligate women" he develops "a contempt for female endowments." He sees women as all-flesh, devoid of intelligent life because the possession of a "mind would be an impediment to gross enjoyment." As Maria muses, and this is as far as she allows herself to speculate along these lines: "Men who are inferior to their fellow men, are always most anxious to establish their superiority over women."

It is curious that Maria's baby is conceived right after her feud with her elder and favored brother. After settling the father's financial affairs in his own favor, Robert is now Maria's "sworn foe" (p. 113) and she knows it. Suddenly, inexplicably, George Venables is the ardent lover, although Maria has to admit that she would have preferred that he remain attentive to prostitutes rather than to her: "My husband's renewed caresses then became hateful to me; his brutality was tolerable, compared to his distasteful fondness. Still, compassion, and the fear of insulting his supposed feelings, by a want of sympathy, made me dissemble, and do violence to my delicacy. What a task!"

The "task" of sex is the requirement of a married woman, just as tending to the education of children is the task of a governess. Wollstonecraft apparently found both tasks intolerable, but she could offer married women no other view of themselves or their lives. The section that follows, in which Maria equivocates about the reality of women's sexual desires, seethes with ambiguity as well as unresolved trauma. Her hysterical reaction to genital sexuality encodes the existence and effects of residual trauma on the victim of betrayal and abuse. On the one hand, women are praised for their "coldness of constitution, and want of passion" by the novelists and moralists

of the day, while on the other hand they are expected to possess "finely fashioned nerves, which render the senses exquisite" (p. 114). Frigid but highly-wired sexually, Maria is in a hopeless conundrum in relation to the female body. She wants a child; she views sex as a "cruel act of self-denial." She longs for the chance to be a perfect and loving mother, and yet she despises the father of her child, "his tainted breath, pimpled face, and blood-shot eyes, his gross manners, and loveless familiarity." To say that Maria is ambivalent toward the female body, to say that she lives uncomfortably in her flesh, is to deal in understatement.

"[B]astilled for life," Maria finds herself an "out-law of the world" (p. 116), pregnant and the mere "possession" of her husband. A victim of the "partial laws enacted by men," the inhabitant of an alien country, she muses that women have no country (p. 118). Instead she flees to her comforting uncle—the recurrently benign face of the patriarchy—for assistance and advice. He offers her the sort of intelligent and wise counsel that Wollstonecraft would have liked to have received when she found herself in an equally desperate situation with Imlay. But rather than take direct action, Maria finds herself in yet another victimized situation. It is as if one sexual calamity—one beating fantasy—after another is catalogued in order to demonstrate yet again the persistent power of traumatic residue. This time her husband attempts to sell her sexual favors to an older man, "Mr S---," to whom he owes gambling debts. Older men have appeared throughout Wollstonecraft's works, sometimes as benign and non-threatening, sometimes as sexual and demanding. When Maria's uncle dies later she admits that she feels she has been "widowed by the death of my uncle" (p. 132), suggesting that there was an emotional tie stronger than we might ordinarily assume between an uncle and a niece.

After much dramatic acting-out and hyperbolic hysteria, Maria flees her husband and begins the series of moves that bring her to her final destination, the madhouse. "[H]unted like an infected beast," pursued by her husband for her uncle's inheritance, Maria is the ultimate caricature of a female victim. Even the landladies who shelter her turn her over to her husband. In a sort of paranoid fantasy, Maria realizes that she is haunted as well as hunted by Venables,

who seemed to assume terrific or hateful forms to torment me, wherever I turned.—Sometimes a wild cat, a roaring bull, or hideous assassin, whom I vainly attempted to fly; at others he was a demon, hurrying me to the brink of a precipice, plunging me into dark waves, or horrid gulfs; and I woke, in violent fits of trembling anxiety, to assure myself that it was all a dream. (P. 132)

Sexual anxiety is transmuted here into a series of stock gothic scenarios, suggesting that Maria suffers from a hysteria rooted in residual memories of

persistent abuse. She can turn to no one; she is completely alone and defenseless except for the absent and all-loving uncle (a convenient deistic God-figure). Maria is, however, also lapsing into a very early form of the feminist parthenogenetic fantasy that was to flower almost two hundred years later in the fiction of such writers as Marge Piercy or Joanna Russ, the notion that two mothers can bring a child into existence alone, with no male intervention.¹⁴

Just as Maria fancies that she is the offspring of her bachelor uncle's mind, so does she now convince herself that she can be the sole parent of her impending child: "I wished to be a father, as well as a mother; and the double duty appeared to me to produce a proportionate increase of affection" (p. 132). Later she records in her narrative that she "blush[es] to think that [her child's] purity had been sullied, by allowing such a man to be its father" (p. 133). In such a psychological state of hysteria and denial, Maria makes one of the most famous of Wollstonecraft's declarations: "But, born a woman—and born to suffer, in endeavouring to repress my own emotions, I feel more acutely the various ills my sex are fated to bear." The horror of birth and giving birth—these are subjects that are fraught for Wollstonecraft with a kind of intense anxiety and physical disgust that occurs later in the birth of Frankenstein's creature. The daughter of Wollstonecraft understood all too well what her birth cost her mother. Wollstonecraft only intuits the costs that childbirth exacts from the mother, and this mother—Maria—passes over the birth of her child only to dwell on the fact that three days after the birth she receives a harassing visit from her elder brother and news of her beloved uncle's death (p. 132). Birth, like marriage in *Mary*, is connected with death in ways that reveal the author's intense anxiety and ambivalence about the death-dealing properties of female sexuality.

As in *Mary*, again we see a lower-class woman betray the heroine, and this time the deed is done by a "maid" hired by Maria to accompany her and the baby to Italy. Betrayal of one woman by another suggests the lateral violence that equally victimized females practice on one another when they are forced to compete for an increasingly smaller share of the goods and resources of a society that stigmatizes them. Maria is incredulous at this betrayal, and queries in disbelief, "How could a creature in a female form see me caress thee, and steal thee from my arms?" (p. 134). But in addition to reading this assault as another displaced beating fantasy, is there not a sense of uncanny wish-fulfillment in the kidnapping of the baby? Maria resents the child and the physical tie the baby represents to her odious husband. On other grounds the baby is repellant as a reminder of female sexuality continuing from one generation to the next, as a sort of stigma, a badge of the shame of being a woman. How convenient to have the baby magically and suddenly disappear.

But not only does the baby disappear, so does the mother. Suddenly transported to a madhouse, Maria finds herself "buried alive" and in the grip of "the fangs of her enemies" (p. 135). Her narrative breaks off with the scribbled names of her two new allies, Jemima and Darnford. Again, we can see evidence of a constant compulsive need on the part of both Mary and Maria to situate themselves in triangular relationships. Neither woman can tolerate living alone with a man; both take a female friend into the menage as if to provide a buffer. But the heroine is clearly positioning herself as a child between two idealized and only vaguely sexualized parent-figures. Jemima and Darnford are the parents Maria would choose for herself if she had that power, just as the foils in *Mary*, Henry and Ann (loving, well-read, and patient), are the parents the heroine would construct for herself. Wollstonecraft may have suffered all her life the pangs of disappointment and anger toward her own weak parents, but her novels allowed her to create other, ideally nurturing families.

Fiction allowed Wollstonecraft the opportunity to transform the traumas she had suffered, as well as to play out her most paranoid fantasies about oppressive and abusive social laws designed to keep women in subordinate positions. The trial by fire, or the public tribunal, stands in melodramatic literature as the central trope toward which all of the plot's actions are directed.¹⁵ In *Maria*, the heroine is presented with an easy way out of her dilemma: hand over half of her uncle's inheritance to George and she will be set free to travel where she likes. She decides instead that her best course is to trust her new lover, Darnford, as her "husband" and recipient of her fortune, although the narrator suggests to us that he is no more worthy of trust than was the awful Venables. Why is Maria so partial to trusting men when they have brought her nothing but misery? As the narrator puts it, "[t]here was one peculiarity in Maria's mind: she was more anxious not to deceive, than to guard against deception" (p. 138). Sentimental and gothic heroines need a man, because without one they are missing that which they can be certain a man will provide: victimization and abusive trauma.¹⁶

Maria wants a public trial because she imagines that it will stand as a public vindication of her beliefs and actions, and so she brings it on herself as quickly as possible. As soon as she is out of the madhouse Venables brings a suit against Darnford for seduction and adultery and Maria insists that she argue his defense in court herself, acting as his attorney. Considering that these two people have recently both inherited large estates, one can only suppose that they could have hired the best lawyers in England if they had wanted. This is a woman who feels "the dogs of law were let loose on her"; "the sarcasms of society, and the condemnation of a mistaken world, were nothing to her, compared with acting contrary to those feelings which were the foundation of her principles" (p. 142). Maria is so principled that she

decides she can best represent Darnford by writing a "paper" that will be read to the court on behalf of his defense. Surely it is significant that Maria as a woman cannot speak in court, but instead finds herself forced to resort to writing, a more distant and controlled medium that she thinks will lend more credence to her arguments, but that results only in her defeat and dismissal by the judge.

What are we to make of this maddeningly unrealistic conclusion to a novel that painfully exhibited one woman's attempts to rewrite her own traumas in hyperbolic, exhibitionistic terms? To dismiss the novel as crude or to find it simply a veiled form of propaganda is to deny the validity of Maria's—and Wollstonecraft's—traumas. Maria's actions throughout the novel make sense only if we view them as traumatic residue, evidence of the fact that trauma itself can never be rationalistically dismissed, no matter how many times one tries to reshape and thereby control it. Once a wounding has occurred, trauma lives a life of its own, twisting and turning in the victim's psyche and on whatever page he or she attempts to compose.

III

One of the most interesting characteristics about *Maria* is the fact that Wollstonecraft could not envision a satisfactory conclusion for her longest and most serious work of fiction. She sketched out seven possibilities, each of which we will closely examine.¹⁷ The tendency in all of the proposed endings is toward disaster, toward recapitulating yet another trauma, with an ever-increasingly distinct tone of victimization of the heroine. The first proposed ending is the simplest and most prosaic of sentimental forms, the temporary separation of the lovers and their eventual blissful reunion. In this version, Darnford communicates through his letters, some of which are lost and cause unnecessary concern and anxiety for Maria. The lovers are eventually reunited and "calm" is restored to Maria's "mind" (p. 146). This ending simply does not fit the text we have just read. Maria's mind was never calm and the problems faced by these two lovers simply are more serious than can be suggested by lost or misplaced letters. We know that this ending could never have found its way into the text of *Maria* because it is an ending that emerges from a sentimental novel that *Maria* has gone much beyond. By veering into a gothic landscape, the novel we have just examined is unable to accommodate itself to this trite and simplistic wrapping up of the tale.

The second version is equally—if not more—inadequate. In this version, Darnford is absent because of business. What business? Maria would worry about his long absence except that "love to excess, excludes fear or suspicion" (p. 146). Once again we can see that Wollstonecraft was trying to deny the gothic and melodramatically hyperbolic aspects of her actual text, trying to retreat into the safety of the sentimental codes and conventions that would allow women to love to excess. But Maria has quite simply never loved

anyone to excess, least of all a man. This version is not a plausible or convincing conclusion to a novel that is concerned with radically different issues. To put it another way, this text is not about love; it is about hate.

The third possible ending, marked "I" again, enters into an elliptical discourse, suggesting more thought and the rough evolution of a plot sequence. In this version, Maria is tried for adultery, loses her fortune and the odious Venables, and safely retreats into the country, presumably with the now wealthy Darnford. This version suggests a relatively happy ending for all parties, although it is indeed unfortunate that Maria ends up financially as dependent on Darnford as she was not on Venables. Once again we are in the sentimental terrain where the novel's issues are reduced to finances and inheritances. The dependency of the heroine on Darnford suggests that Maria is now in an even more vulnerable situation than she was when first married to Venables and able to draw on a separate fund from her uncle. This version of the ending suggests that Wollstonecraft desperately tried to recast the novel as a sentimental fable about women and money, rather than a sexually explosive text about sexual trauma, betrayal, and female nausea and repulsion toward the body.

The fourth possible ending is most vague, suggesting that someone—not named—is prosecuted for adultery. Darnford leaves for France and his letters to Maria are the subject of some concern to her (perhaps these are the missing letters we read of earlier in version one). The plot thickens when Maria learns she is again pregnant and Darnford returns. He acts strangely and Maria is left to discover something about him that we are not privy to whatsoever. Clearly here we note echoes of the Imlay situation—the pregnant woman anxiously waiting upon the master's moods and inclinations, only to learn that there is another woman already in the wings. The abruptness and gaps in the narrative also suggest that Wollstonecraft was digging close to topics that were personally painful and unresolved. The need to see Darnford as a betrayer throughout the text alerts us to his identification with Imlay, an identification that Wollstonecraft could not conceal despite her best efforts.

The fifth possible ending has Maria paying damages to her husband and Darnford leaving for France. Maria retreats into the country to care for her father, only to be "shunned" by all. In desperation she returns to London, discovers herself to be pregnant, awaits the return of Darnford only to learn something (again, we are not given any clue), causing her to promptly miscarry after his visit. This scenario builds on the last one, and shows Wollstonecraft recurring again to the old Imlay wound. We know, however, that Wollstonecraft was pregnant again, this time by Godwin, and that despite her best efforts to trust him, she feared disappointment and desertion by him. The ambivalence that Wollstonecraft's narrator and Maria exhibit throughout the novel suggest to us that their creator was unable to come to terms with her desertion by Imlay. Whatever she may have claimed to him, the trauma

of bearing her daughter, Fanny, and then raising the child, while claiming the name "Imlay" for both of them, must have taken a fearful toll on a woman who needed so desperately to create a perfect family, not simply for her daughter but for herself.

The sixth possible ending has Maria divorced by her husband, deserted by Darnford, pregnant, miscarrying, and then committing suicide. This option is the starkest and bleakest of all the scenarios, and yet it is also the truest one to the text of the novel as a whole. The narrator of *Maria* certainly suggested that Darnford was unworthy of Maria's trust, thereby preparing us for the possibility of his betrayal. And certainly suicide was an option that Wollstonecraft had acted on herself more than once. In these last two scenarios the heroine is most clearly positioned as a hyperbolically extravagant, sentimental heroine-victim. Her identity, not to mention her very existence, are predicated on the approval and support of her lover. Without him or the child she would have borne, she is nothing and dooms herself to death. In every possible ending, the heroine is never a self-contained individual acting in her own right, although she has spent the text demanding just such a birthright. Without the approval of others and the status of an external support system, the heroine atrophies.

The seventh and last possible ending makes explicit just how pernicious such a psychological dependency is. This scenario is the most regressive of all the possibilities, and also, curiously, the most extensively developed. In this version, Maria swallows laudanum and sinks into a reverie of guilt and expiation that plays out the imagined sins of her life. Her "murdered child" appears to her in a dream-vision, and she asks herself if, in fact, she did not desert the child "the moment it was born." In her anguish she longs for a speedy death, wondering only if she will "find a father where [she is] going!" Just as she is about to sink for the last time Jemima enters the room with her daughter. The melodrama could not be thicker, for Maria sees the child, faints, and awakens to "violent vomiting." Jemima plays *deus ex machina*, explaining that she never trusted the husband and brother, suspecting that they might have "secreted the child" in order to extort Maria's fortune from her (p. 147). The child lisps an adorable "'Mamma!'" and Maria is determined to "live for my child" (p. 148). "The conflict is over," Maria declares. She has found meaning and purpose in life through mothering her daughter. Now if motherhood is fraught with the sort of dependency and repulsion that Maria has depicted throughout this work, how can its valorization provide the heroine with her ultimate and total happiness in life? The contradictions that swirl around the maternal body are dense in Wollstonecraft's work, largely, I would argue, because she never resolved her own infantile disappointments in her own mother.

How can we best make sense of the seven abortive endings to *Maria*? As I have suggested here, in writing this text Wollstonecraft was in the grip of reliving the two major traumatic events of her life: her disappointment with and anger at her parents, followed by her desertion and betrayal by Imlay. She was drawn to writing fictions about women named "Mary" largely as a form of self-talk, a displaced therapeutic mechanism that allowed her to replay and reshape traumatic events in her own life. Maria's dream of the dead baby coming back to life cannot fail to alert us to Wollstonecraft's intense anxiety about the impending birth of her second child, recalling as it did the emotional trauma and uncertainty surrounding the birth of her first child. Freud has noted, "Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (*SE*, 18:13). What is suggested in this phenomenon, according to Caruth, is "that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it. What one returns to in the flashback is not the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival. Repetition is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to claim one's own survival" (p. 64). As Caruth points out,

The return of the traumatic experience in the dream is not the signal of the direct experience but, rather, of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was *not* direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place. Not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced, continually to confront it over and over again. For consciousness, then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life. (P. 62)

Again, we can recall Freud's query about trauma: is trauma to be understood as the direct and immediate brush with death, or is trauma the experience of surviving that near-fatal disaster and yet to be forced to relive it repeatedly in dreams and painful memories? As Caruth has noted, "in the oscillation between the crisis of death and the crisis of life" we get "a kind of double-telling," a narrative that exists "between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (p. 7). In Wollstonecraft's case, she conceals the initial wound—her parents' rejection and her own survival—only to have the original lack, the primordial trauma, reactivated when Imlay decisively rejects her and closes her out of the familial circle she was trying to establish with him and their daughter. Her novels center on the dynamics within dysfunctional families, while clearly these families are meant to be microcosms of patriarchal society. If Wollstonecraft was wounded by the psychological and sexual abuses inher-

ent in such systems, then she believed that all women were. Reading the wound, it would appear, is as uncomfortable now as it was then.

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NOTES

- 1 Emily W. Sunstein begins her insightful biography of Wollstonecraft with the chapter, "The Original Defect," an analysis of Wollstonecraft's flawed relationship with her parents as the originating wound in her psyche. She concludes, "the parental flaws of Elizabeth and Edward John Wollstonecraft and the influences of Mary's early life, instead of training her to acceptance, brought about a protest unusual in degree and kind that dominated the rest of her life." See her *A Different Face: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975), p. 20. Wollstonecraft's troubled relationship with both her parents forms one of the central concerns in the many biographies we have of her. The discussion of her attitude toward her stepmother can be found in Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 22. For representative recent discussions of the life, see Ralph M. Wardle, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966); Margaret George, *One Woman's 'Situation': A Study of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1970); Eleanor Flexner, *Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1972); as well as an overview of the subject by Janet Todd, "The Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Signs* 1 (1976): 721-34.
- 2 On the relation of the *Vindication* to *Maria*, see Mitzi Myers, "Unfinished Business: Wollstonecraft's *Maria*," *Wordsworth Circle* 11 (1980): 107-14. Myers concludes that "*Maria*, then, is both an aggrandisement and a critique of feminine feeling and imagination" (p. 111). And on the same subject, see Marilyn Butler, "The Woman at the Window: Ann Radcliffe in the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen," *Gender and Literary Voice*, ed. Janet Todd, *Women and Literature* n.s. 1 (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), pp. 128-48.
- 3 The idea that women will seriously improve their social standing by imitating masculine values such as "Reason" is developed at length by Anne K. Mellor in her chapter "The Rational Woman," *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 40-64. And for another valuable discussion of how tropes of constructed femininity interacted with the emerging ideology of feminism, see Mitzi Myers, "Reform or Ruin: 'A Revolution in Female Manners,'" *Studies in 18th-Century Culture* 11 (1982): 199-216.
- 4 My discussion of Freud's theories of fantasy is drawn from the analysis by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin et al. (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 5-34.
- 5 My discussion of Freud's theories of hysteria is indebted to Elizabeth Bronfen, "Hysteria, Phantasy and the Family Romance," *Women's Writing* 1 (1994): 171-79.
- 6 Julia Kristeva's discussion of hysteria is developed at greater length in my *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (Univ. Park: Penn State Press, 1998), p. 13. Also see Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986).
- 7 Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* [SE], 24 vols. trans. James Strachey (London:

Hogarth Press, 1953-74). All quotations from Freud's works will be from this edition, with volume and page number in parentheses.

- 8 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996), p. 4.
- 9 Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 55-148. All quotations from *Maria* will be from this edition, with page numbers in parentheses in the text.
- 10 The Enlightenment emphasis on education for women was tied up with the development of "sentimentality" as a change in consciousness. Further discussion of this development can be found in Jean Hagstrum's *Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982). On the same subject, also see the valuable collection of essays, *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics*, ed. Syndy McMillen Conger (Totowa, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1990). Of particular interest in the Conger collection is Catherine N. Parke's article, "What Kind of Heroine is Mary Wollstonecraft?," pp. 103-19. And on weakness as a central component of Sentimentality, see R. W. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); and Syndy Conger, "The Sentimental Logic of Wollstonecraft's Prose," *Prose Studies* 10 (1987): 143-58 and her *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1994).
- 11 "Henry" is the name of the mysterious second brother of Wollstonecraft, believed by Sunstein to have been institutionalized his entire life in a mental hospital. Tomalin claims the boy died within the first year of his life (p. 4), but Sunstein suggests that the brother did not die, and that the family's move to Hoxton, site of the most famous mental institution in England, can be explained by the fact that they lodged Henry there and wanted to live close by. The description of the madhouse in *Maria* also suggests a more thorough knowledge of such locations than would be generally supposed possible at the time. See Sunstein's discussion in *A Different Face*, pp. 36-37. "Henry" is also the name of Henry Gabell, the tutor Mary met on the ship to Ireland to begin her governess position (also see *A Different Face*, p. 123).
- 12 Wollstonecraft's unhappy affair with Imlay, the source of so much of her writing, is detailed in numerous sources. Her letters to Imlay were first published by Godwin in 1799, while his to her were destroyed and have never been available. We have, then, only one side of the story: hers. On this issue, see *The Love Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft to Gilbert Imlay*, Roger Ingpen, ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1908). The split I have identified in Wollstonecraft's fiction has been noted by others. In particular, Miriam Brody has identified "two Mary Wollstonecrafts—one who loved and one who was contemptuous of love." See her discussion in "Mary Wollstonecraft: Sexuality and Women's Rights (1759-1797)," *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Theorists*, Dale Spender, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 41. "George Venables" can be read as one side of Wollstonecraft's split presentation of Imlay. Toward the end of their affair she became obsessed with the idea that Imlay had become something other than the man he actually was. She wrote in her farewell letter to him: "You know best whether I am still preserving the remembrance of an imaginary being . . . Still I have an affection for you." Sunstein suggests that Mary could not see Imlay clearly because she was in the grip of a "primitive and inexorably fixed drama," the recovery of "her divided father" (see *A Different Face*, pp. 294, 279).

- 13 Blake, of course, illustrated some of Wollstonecraft's early prose works and knew of her earlier infatuation with Fuseli. See Nelson Hilton, "An Original Story," in *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), pp. 69-104.
- 14 Feminist SF texts contain as one of their most recurrent motifs the notion of gender-bending reproduction and childrearing. Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) presents a future utopian society where men breastfeed and children are conceived and gestated in a laboratory, while Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) is set in a future where men have been exterminated and all reproduction consists of merging split ova in a test tube. Both works were clearly attempts to fictionalize the thesis of Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (1970), which argued that the power of the patriarchy was located in the biological inequality of the sexes.
- 15 The trial, a melodramatic staple, is discussed by Peter Brooks as a central element in what is essentially a "Manichean" structure. In the struggle between good and evil, melodrama requires a "drama of recognition" that culminates in a "full-fledged trial." The entire thrust of the work "dramatizes a nightmare struggle for recognition of the sign of innocence, which is also the struggle for the assertion of selfhood" (see his *The Melodramatic Imagination* [New Haven: Yale, 1976], pp. 27, 31, 52).
- 16 I explore the notion of victimization as the crucial component of "professional femininity" in *Gothic Feminism* (1998).
- 17 The multiple endings of *Maria* are analyzed by Myers in "Unfinished Business," while her later article, "Sensibility and the 'Walk of Reason,'" contains a valuable discussion of Wollstonecraft's attempts to use book reviewing to refine her own critical project (in *Sensibility in Transformation*, ed. Conger, pp. 120-44).