THE GENDER MATRIX IN WOLLSTONECRAFT'S *LETTERS*

THE GENDER MATRIX IN MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S *LETTERS WRITTEN DURING A SHORT RESIDENCE IN SWEDEN, NORWAY, AND DENMARK* (1796)

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (2000)
(English)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Gender Matrix in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796)

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SUPERVISOR: Professor Peter Walmsley

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 99

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines discursive constructions of the subject in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Demmark* (1796) and how the gendering of cultural discourses impacts the narrator's identity. Frequently read as a proto-Romantic text, the Scandinavian *Letters* actually narrativize the clash between the dominant rationalism of modern capitalist society and the aesthetic and moral philosophies of the eighteenth-century 'cult of sensibility.' The intersection of discourses generates a gender matrix out of which emerges a fragmented writing subject who moves between a masculine observing 'self' and a feminine objectified 'other,' focusing alternately on outward gazing eyes and inwardly contemplative I's. This vacillation coincides with the narrator's ambivalence, produced by ideologies of sexual and cultural difference and, in turn, producing the dialectical movement between desire and disavowal manifest in the *Letters'* melancholy form and content. Sites of intertextuality reflect the melancholic subject's divided psychology, which, despite being constituted in and by 'naturalized' discourses of difference, reveals the constructedness of gender/sex and the limitations of compulsory heterosexuality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Professor Peter Walmsley for encouraging the development of my interests and scholarship regarding Wollstonecraft and, more importantly, for his generous contributions of time, enthusiasm, and expertise to this project. I am also grateful to Professors Grace Kehler and Mary O'Connor for their careful readings and helpful suggestions and to Gary Kuchar for kindly listening and conversing while I worked out these ideas. Finally, I would like to express my love and appreciation for my parents, Dr. John Pollock and Heather Pollock, whose unfailing support continues to cheer, motivate, and comfort me.

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Justice, Philanthropy, and Sensibility
from J.Wright's "*NEW MORALITY,*" published in the first volume of
The Anti-Jacobin Magazine & Review, August 7th, 1798.

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Introduction: Navigating the Matrix

Mary Wollstonecraft's travel journal, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), was received by a sympathetic readership and has been frequently described as Wollstonecraft's most popular publication.[1] Despite the immediate popularity enjoyed by this text and a renewed interest in Wollstonecraft's works and in travel writing as a genre over the last twenty years, the Scandinavian *Letters* have been shown relatively little attention. The scholarship directed toward the *Letters* is generally shaped less by critical rigour than by aesthetic appreciation and sentimentality, as in Virginia Sapiro's assessment:

> *A Short Residence* has many different layers. It is the only writing of Wollstonecraft that is lovely to read. She was an observant traveler, and highlighted details of clothing, dining tables, seaports, and children's faces in a way that makes this a good travel memoir. But it is also a treatise on nature and society, and she tried once again to understand history and human character, including her own. It is also a memoir of a woman struggling to win back her lover and to achieve peace of mind. (36)

William Godwin makes a similarly nostalgic statement regarding the Scandinavian *Letters* in his *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (1798) when he claims that "perhaps a book of travels that so irresistibly seizes on the heart, never, in any other instance, found its way from the press" (249). What can be observed from the quotations above, and perhaps even more clearly from Godwin's assertion that Wollstonecraft was a "female Werter" (242), is how cultural readings or stereotypes of gender overdetermine

[1] See Holmes' "Introduction" to the *Letters* and Butler's "General Introduction" to the *Works*. For more information regarding the reception of Wollstonecraft's writings, see Todd's *Mary Wollstonecraft: An Annotated Bibliography of Her Life and Works* and William and Johnstone's "Updating Mary Wollstonecraft: A Bibliography of Criticism, 1976-1989."

the reception of literary texts.[2] This is further exemplified by one of Wollstonecraft's contemporaries, Amelia Alderson, who made the following statement in a letter to Wollstonecraft: "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 a woman. I saw nothing but the interesting creature of feeling and imagination" (quoted in Holmes 37).

To date, scholarship on the Scandinavian *Letters* has deviated very little from the attitudes with which the text was first received; it adopts views similar to Godwin's by focusing on the "feminine" sensibility of Wollstonecraft's writing, perceived to be the textual reflection of Wollstonecraft's definitively "female" subjectivity.[3] Critics read the *Letters* biographically, as the encapsulation of Wollstonecraft's personal crisis, and either glorify or lament the supposed emotional and psychological breakdown described in the *Letters*.[4] Moreover, most criticism assumes consistency, and/or developmental progress, between the *Letters* and Wollstonecraft's other works, as if the *Letters* represent the achievement of a mature feminist philosophy or the personalized version of her political

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[2] Moore suggests that the perceived "feminine tone" of the *Letters* and their "first-person confessional narrative" both influenced the warm reception the *Letters* received. Moore explains the *Letters'* reception as follows: "Wollstonecraft quickly entered literary mythology not as a feminist heroine but as a feminine one – a vulnerable and pitiable woman cruelly abandoned by her unfaithful lover" (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 64, 68).

[3] See Poovey, "Love's Skirmishes and the Triumph of Ideology," *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (82-94); Yousef, "Wollstonecraft, Rousseau and the Revision of Romantic Subjectivity"; Alexander, "Versions of the Sublime," *Women in Romanticism* (169-174); Moskal, "The Picturesque and the Affectionate in Wollstonecraft's *Letters from Norway*"; Myers, "Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written… in Sweden*: Toward Romantic Autobiography"; Moore, "Plagiarism with a Difference: Subjectivity in 'Kubla Khan' and *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*"; Heng, "Tell Them No Lies: Reconstructed Truth in Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence in Sweden*"; Hust, "In Suspect Terrain: Mary Wollstonecraft Confronts Mother Nature in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*"; Ty, "Writing as a Daughter: Autobiography in Wollstonecraft's Travelogue," Jones, "Romantic Woman Travel Writers and the Representation of Everyday Experience" and "'When a Woman So Far Outsteps Her Proper Sphere': Counter-Romantic Tourism; Conger, "A New Page in the History of Her Heart," *Mary Wollstonecraft* (145-159).

views. Such readings presuppose and valorize a particular form of subjectivity as "selfhood" that emerges as dominant during the eighteenth century and continues to be debated by Romantic scholarship.[5]

Both feminist and non-feminist readings of the *Letters* have yet to interrogate their own critical assumptions regarding subjectivity. They merely posit the existence of a specifically female counterpart to the conventionally male Romantic subject. Consequently, this critical work remains mired in an ideology that presupposes the existence of a "self" whose character manifests gender traits, among other attributes, assigned to a stable identity.[6] By questioning from the outset the critical assumptions of previous Wollstonecraft scholarship, I intend to highlight, rather than ignore or dismiss, the generic and subjective instability of the *Letters,* an instability that is firmly rooted in the historical moment in which the text is produced and yet is more radically disruptive of normative gender subjectivity than has been previously acknowledged.

The Scandinavian *Letters* are replete with intertextual references, demonstrating to what extent Wollstonecraft is writing within, and responding to, a popular European

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[4] See Holmes; Nystrom also comments on how Wollstonecraft criticism is "often of a hagiographical nature" (10) and Parke reviews the tradition of reading Wollstonecraft as a feminist heroine in "What Kind of a Heroine is Mary Wollstonecraft?"

[5] See Newey, "Romantic Subjects: Shaping the Self from 1789 to 1989," for an overview of this debate.

[6] There are a some exceptional readings that destabilize the unified subject and/or stable gender identity: Favret, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the business of letters," *Romantic Correspondence* (96-132); Lawrence, "Composing the Self in Letters: Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark", Penelope Voyages* (74-102); Swaab, "Romantic Self-Representation: The Example of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters in Sweden*"; and to a lesser extent, Granqvist, "Her Imperial Eyes: A Reading of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark";* Adickes, "In Refutation of Burke; in Anticipation of Marx: Mary Wollstonecraft 1759-1797"; Kelly, "'A Solitary Wanderer'", *Revolutionary Feminism* (171-195); Mills, "Written on the Landscape: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark."* Among the more conventional readings, several critics indicate discomfort with their own attempts at synthesis: Myers, for example, acknowledges the presence of "varied selves" (182) and Yousef observes that "the narrator herself displays an inconsistent character" (543).

canon, including authors such as Shakespeare, Milton, Rousseau, Sterne, and Goethe. In *The Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft aligns gender with identificatory (reading) practices, implying that a discursively constituted "text" and its "subject" are intricately entwined such that the *only* mode of being is through discursive imitation.[7] For example, sentimental fiction teaches women to internalize beliefs in their irrationality and inferiority and to perform their proper and customary roles in subordination to men; if women read philosophy, however, they would gain confidence in their ability to reason and reject their former self-subordinating impulses. The *Letters* incorporate conventions and language familiar to eighteenth-century literary discourses. Sophisticated critical analyses argue that women writers (as opposed to men writers) appropriate and employ these popular discourses in ways that reflect their dis-ease or ambivalence towards the empowerment associated with phallocentric subjectivity. This ambivalence is reflected in the *Letters,* which are confusing in terms of style and genre.[8] Several scholars choose to designate the text as either proto-Romantic or Romantic, thereby focusing on Wollstonecraft's influence on Coleridge, Southey, and others, and failing to situate the text in its historical moment of production. That subjectivity is a major focus of the *Letters* suggests a likeness to the work of other Romantic writers. But if the *Letters* are to be included among Romantic texts, as several critics demand, then our very

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[7] For Wollstonecraft's philosophy of reading, see *Vindications*, "The effect which an early association of ideas has upon the character" (244-251) and Section II of Chapter VIII (330-333).

[8] Jump argues that the *Letters* derive from a long-standing tradition of eighteenth-century texts, particularly in their Rousseauian "combination of personal confession and intense appreciation of the natural world" (112). See also Conger's Introduction to *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility* for a discussion of intertextuality as a feature of sentimental fiction. Attempts to 'fix' the genre of the *Letters* continue to generate scholarship. For example, Heng suggests that the genre of the *Letters* is "creative nonfiction," which she later defines as a "politicized autobiographical narrative," thereby discounting other critics' claims that they are travelogue, confession, epistle, and autobiography (368, 370). I think it is more useful to acknowledge and explore the *Letters'* generic ambiguity as reflective of a multi-faceted subject; the text is better described by Heng as "a mobile structure that mixes narrative and scene setting" (371).

understanding of Romantic subjectivity, and indeed fabrications of subjectivity in general, need be expanded to account for the structural and ideological challenges that appear in Wollstonecraft's *Letters*. The shifting structure of the *Letters,* and their intertextuality, radically destabilize normative constructions of subjectivity. In fact, they pose a fundamental challenge to long-held beliefs regarding the existence and nature of the self.

Granted, when an eighteenth-century woman writer attempts autobiography, she acts in defiance of the ideological operations that do not grant women the status of subjects; yet we should not presume that a stable subjectivity is either an ontological given or is achieved through narrative. Despite a narrator's professed affirmation or valorization of a coherent "self," critical readings that assume the existence of a Cartesian *cogito* reveal more about a critical desire to impose coherence or to uncover a teleology than about the text itself. Contrary to the assumptions inherent in traditional biographical criticism, mainly about literature's ability to convey a coherent and progressive self, Foucault suggests that the name of an author be considered as a "function of discourse," that is, as a word that "simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions" (131). Following Foucault, recent re-readings of Romantic texts resist this 'impulse to order' and reinterpret moments of disruption and linguistic instability as foregrounding the illusory nature of a constituting ego.[9] Scholars frequently assert that women have historically and culturally been denied access to full

[9] In historical and theoretical analyses, modern Western subjectivity and possessive individualism are often traced back to Descartes' seminal claim, *Cogito ergo sum*, or 'I think, therefore I am.' Consequently, the Cartesian subject is not only individuated, but also transcendental in a metaphysical sense. The subject's ability to transcend materiality, made possible by the process of thinking, is based on dualistic construction that establishes the activities of the rational (and 'gentrified') mind in opposition to the activities of the body. Furthermore, rationality and transcendence becomes the basis for presuming the absolute separation

subjecthood: a universal, unified, coherent oneness. But rather than claiming the existence and authority of a fully "female/feminine" subject, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler deconstruct gender/sex while arguing for the subject's ultimate fictionality.

Julia Kristeva creates the term 'intertextuality' in *Revolution in Poetic Language.* It is commonly employed in critical theory to refer to the reciprocal influence of multiple texts (or writers) upon each other or to the practice of referencing several sources in a given text. Leon Roudiez notes, however, that intertextuality "has been generally misunderstood" (15). Kristeva's conceptualization of intertextuality is a signifying (and revolutionary) practice that entails "the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" and that is accompanied by a new articulation "of enunciative and denotative positionality" (Kristeva 59-60).[10] Based on Bakhtin's structural analysis of discourse, the Kristevan concept of intertextuality provides a theoretical framework for the exploration of subjectivity as a process rather than an ontological essence. So when Bakhtin describes the relationship between the word ("utterance") and its referent ("object") as "overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist" and as "a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents" (276), he is also describing the dialogic relationship between the discursive constant, 'I,' and the uncertain object to which it refers. The "word, directed toward its object...weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third

of the human species from other beings. Ecofeminist critiques of Western philosophy deconstruct this human/animal binarism (see Plumwood 1993).

[10] Rajan's elucidation of Kristevan intertextuality in "Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*" is particularly helpful to understanding intertextuality – theoretically and structurally – in the Scandinavian *Letters.* The *Memoirs* were published the same year as the Scandinavian *Letters,* and share many similar features with that text, such as a solitary female protagonist, epistolarity, and autobiographical concerns.

group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile" (Bakhtin 276). This kind of motion or play amongst signs and signifiers applies to the subject as well. Thus, in *Desire in Language*, Kristeva explains, "Writing is upheld not by the subject of understanding, but by a divided subject, even a pluralized subject, that occupies...permutable, multiple and even mobile places" (111).

Analysis of the *Letters'* intertextual implications in terms of gender identity underscores Butler's assertion in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* that gender performativity is analogous to citationality. Wollstonecraft's cross-identifications, manifest in the *Letters'* intertextuality, demonstrate that while the recognition of "gender" requires culturally-intelligible, repetitious performance, the *Letters'* ideological confusion undermines such normative role-playing and, in so doing, lends support to the theory that gender is, and only can be, performative. The narrative hermaphrodism expressed by the *Letters* undermines the notion of sexual difference by employing discourses that typically reify male/female polarizations, thereby exposing gender as a contingent construct, a construct that nevertheless gains cultural infallibility through processes of subjection. Gendering processes, while demanding our submission, simultaneously inscribe the possibility of their own subversion precisely through the exploitation of such discursive "differences."

Kristeva's "subject," divided by the oppositional functions of the semiotic and the symbolic, is not really a subject at all, insofar as the 'I' can only emerge as culturally intelligible within the univocal signification of the symbolic. Granted, Kristeva recognizes that the *speaking* subject, expressed through symbolic language, is necessary

to counter psychosis. Kristeva views such a subject developing out of a process of abjection, whereby one's identity is stabilized by expelling everything that would unsettle one's supposed unity, the boundaries of the subject. For example, the body and its excesses are frequently invested with the grotesque, indicating the subject's disgust and fascination with what it must abject. Thus, Kristeva writes, "I expel *myself,* I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself* [...] refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being" (*Powers* 3). Butler recognizes a similar process of abjection or repudiation in the setting up of the boundaries that delineate stable gender/sex identities; indeed, the subject can only come into being within a "matrix of gender relations" (*Bodies* 7). The identificatory process of assuming a sex coincides with the foreclosure or disavowal of those "dreaded" identifications – "threatening spectre[s]" – whose existence threatens the domain of the subject (*Bodies* 3). As such, the materialization and stabilization of gender/sex can be understood only through constant reiterations of disidentifications, projecting "outside" the subject what is intrinsic to the formation of subjectivity itself. The gendered subject, therefore, formed as it is on a "founding repudiation," can be understood as a fiction or fantasy; nevertheless Butler implies that such phantasmatic identifications, by providing order and intelligibility to the personal-social, are necessities without which "life itself would be unthinkable" (*Bodies* 6).

The subject, with its disruptive movement between gender/sex positions, is still not a willing agent of transgression; rather, it fails to conform to the "normatizing

injunctions that secure the borders of sex through the threat of psychosis, abjection, psychic unlivability" (Butler *Bodies* 15). Agency, therefore, must be redefined as the thwarted, divided psychotic's submission to its own subjectivation – as the desire and demand for wholeness that resides in one's own subordination to discursive laws which, paradoxically, empower the 'subjected' person with the illusory unity and autonomy invested in the Western subject. Confined to that which is always already speakable, the "agency" of the subject resides in the adoption of a coherent discursive position is a "reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler *Bodies* 15). The subject, then, is produced and reproduced only with reference to the authority of the law, the discourse that compels certain identifications and disavows others.

Intertextuality makes explicit how the constitution and expression of a (culturally-intelligible) subject is delimited in relation to existent cultural discourses. Far from being a discrete, autonomous entity, the subject (text) is always already intertextual, intersected and intrasected by multiple, competing signifying systems. According to Butler, the inevitable failure of the "mimetic function," or the writer's ability to fully represent herself and her perceptions in language, means that writing is only possible through the author's various appropriations: "Because texts do not reflect the entirety of their authors or their worlds, they enter a field of reading as partial provocations, not only requiring a set of prior texts in order to gain legibility, but—at best—initiating a set of appropriations and criticisms that call into question their fundamental premises" (*Bodies* 19). Butler insists that the articulation of a subject is delimited from the outset by discourse.

The effect of a female writer's reinscription of an ideology that, on a widespread cultural scale, relegates women to the status of "abject" beings (excluded as they are from the formation of the universal human subject), according to Felicity Nussbaum in *The Autobiographical Subject*, is to "expose contradictory aspects of an ideological formation that were previously invisible" (138). Inevitably constrained by the dominant discourses in circulation, women writing in the eighteenth century are forced to identify with "the kinds of inferior female selves urged by male hegemonic and misogynist discourses" or to "disrupt the ideology of gender by disguising themselves as males" (Nussbaum 133). Contrary to Nussbaum, I would argue, however, that both strategies fail to disrupt dominant discourses, for the woman who assumes a 'masculine' point of view disavows her femininity (and therefore internalizes the valorization of maleness). Indeed, there is no speaking/writing position that is not implicated by an unequal economy of gender. What is important about the *Letters* is, first, the narrator's sensitivity to discourses based on gender distinctions, and second, the shifting positionalities the narrator occupies, indicating an inability to reach closure and bringing to the fore the gaps, elisions, and contradictions inherent in such discourses. The *Letters* so fully reinscribe gender difference as to literalize the ideological constructedness of binary gender oppositions. The incessant repetition of disavowal, excessive to a degree that demands the constant presence of the object/other, demonstrates that which "is" the gendered subject depends upon negativity, upon the denial of that which it cannot be and yet is. Such a "troubling return" of the repudiated, according to Butler, becomes a mode by which to contest social norms such that the production that encodes the abject not only highlights the necessary exclusion entailed by a heterosexual matrix but becomes a rearticulation of the terms of

intelligible sex and gender, thereby signalling the possibility for denaturalizing gender/sex and legitimizing something other than the heterosexual imperative (*Bodies* 23).

The *Letters* map a shifting identificatory pattern that repeatedly crosses the masculine/feminine gender divide. The oppositional binary logic undergirding the construction of male/female, which relegates women to the status of "other," also informs eighteenth-century constructions of subject/object, culture/nature, human/animal, civilization/savagery, reason/passion, sublime/beautiful, melancholy/mad, and so on. There are instances in the *Letters* when similar phallogocentric reasoning is at work, indicating that the narrator is speaking from an implicitly male/masculine subject position. At other moments, however, Wollstonecraft seems to identify with the subjugated, typically feminized, term in the opposition. More importantly, there are occasions when the text defies dualistic thinking through a conflation of terms – suggesting a union between subject and object. Such occasions articulate the potential for a discursive transformation, an unmaking of the self. Read together, the *Letters* never achieve the desired textual and subjective coherence; rather, they inscribe a psychical (subjective) fragmentation that resists resolution. It is through their intratextual deconstructive tendencies that the *Letters* expose the contingency of gender and exploit the mobility of a provisional subjectivity that is best described as a "cipher in a tissue of signs" (Newey 147).

If, as Butler suggests, "the speaking 'I' is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex" (*Bodies* 3), then to argue that the *Letters* construct a hermaphroditic subject is to reassert my suspicion regarding the coherence and autonomy

of the "subject" appearing in the *Letters*. Each utterance that reinforces a gendered position (and subject) assumed by the narrator draws attention to an/other position necessarily foreclosed in the process of acquiring such a localizing stability. The result is a divided subject – a subject that not only moves between the poles of male and female but, in becoming its own object, is positioned against itself. The task remains to elaborate what discursive and ideological mechanisms enable the mobility of such a subject and to point to the specific instances in the form and content of the text where gender trespass occurs.

The signifying processes forming the matrix that gives birth to the *Letters'* transgendered subject do so by creatively trans-posing several signifying systems, drawing on a network of literary texts and inscribing a plurality of linguistic meanings. By integrating several voices, texts, and gender positions, the *Letters* articulate "a new system with its new representability" (Kristeva *Revolution* 60). But this transformation of genre, gender, and subjectivity is possible only through discursive tools available to the writer so that, as Butler writes, "the acquisition of being" occurs only "through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the 'I'" (*Bodies* 15) Wollstonecraft's citations, therefore, incorporate the authorial power of a name ("Milton") or a text ("King Lear") and rely on the vision of the real contained in these texts in order to construct a subjective reality that is both borrowed and changed through the acts of appropriation and transcription. The names/texts conjure up an entire mode of signification which would have been familiar to eighteenth-century British readers, for according to Foucault, "the name of the author remains at the contours of texts – separating one from the other, defining their form, and

characterizing their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and culture" ("What is an Author?" 123). By referring to author, text, or semantic sequence, the *Letters* effectively incorporate multiple (often contradictory) subjects, each configured by and each, in turn, a metonymic configuration authorizing particular gender expressions. Through explicit referentiality, the *Letters* garner cultural authority but their (mis)appropriations ultimately produce a counter-normative gendered subject whose revolutionizing potential resides in its very fragmentation.

In the *Letters*, Wollstonecraft's reluctance to assign a unitary gender to herself is symptomatic of shifting cultural perceptions regarding the 'nature' of gender. This thesis examines some of the social and psychological circumstances that influence the *Letters'* formulation of a complex matrix of gendered subject positions, the effect of which is not to reassign gender to a supposed corporeal referent but to point to a radical disjuncture. The narrator's phantasmatic identifications expose "gender" as a fluid, non-deterministic category. Rather than ignore or marginalize the *Letters* for their apparent aberrance, literary studies can only benefit from exploring the *Letters'* defiance of gender normativity and from suggesting what historical contexts and discursive mechanisms provide the occasion for the *Letters'* alternative constructions. Studies on popular eighteenth-century discourses have demonstrated how such discourses are inflected, however inconsistently, by a dominant ideology of sexual difference.[11] By focusing on gender as one important dimension of subjectivation, I suggest that the ways in which the *Letters* fail to adhere to gender-specific codes and conventions demonstrate not only that

gender subjectivity is constituted discursively, but also the potential for subjective mobility even within the discursive constraints operating on women writers in the eighteenth century. Basically, the *Letters'* disregard of gender (and sex) as an overdetermining identificatory category enables both the constitution and the fragmentation of the subject through the occupation of various contradictory subject positions. Consequently, the matrix of intersecting discourses operating in the *Letters* produce gender configurations that are more complex than those accounted for in a dehistoricized consideration of "gender" alone.

The Scandinavian *Letters* are written on the cusp of Romanticism and express a vexed positionality due to their engagement with late eighteenth-century debates regarding traditional values of sociability and communal dependency and emergent ideas of democratic rights, commercial enterprise, colonialism, and sanctity of the individual. The *Letters* ostensibly express the author's desire to represent her 'self' and her 'nation'; it is clear, however, that even as the text assumes an *a priori* identity, its subject lacks coherence and stability. What occurs in the *Letters,* regardless of Wollstonecraft's invitation to readers to become "better acquainted with me" and her concerted effort at self-fashioning, is the unfixing of boundaries between self and other ("Advertisement" 62). Structurally and ideologically, the *Letters* represent fragmentation. If the text presumes a narrating "egotist," it nevertheless demonstrates how subjective positionalities are constructed through discourse ("Advertisement" 62). Moreover, the narrator's occupation of these various positions indicates the potential for a discursive mobility that literally and figuratively displaces the subject. By attempting to represent a

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[11] On sensibility, see Barker-Benfield; on the sublime, see Mellor; on beauty and taste, see Robert Jones; on melancholy, see Schiesari, Showalter, Battersby; on nationalism and imperialism, see Sudan, Mills

consolidated 'self' and 'nation,' the *Letters* reveal that any such representation is always already a fiction. Consequently, the *Letters* work to deconstruct self/other, subject/object dualisms which are responsible, in material and ideological ways, for historically-dominant power relations that privilege white, bourgeois, male subjectivity while designating and denigrating "others" necessarily excluded by the construction of such a subjectivity as normative.

The extent to which certain discourses were gendered in the eighteenth century is suggested by William Godwin when he comments that readers of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) projected from the text a masculinized author, to the very extreme of imagining her physically as a grotesque caricature of a man:

> The contradiction, to the public apprehension, was equally great, as to the person of the author, as it was when they considered the temper of the book. In the champion of her sex, who was described as endeavouring to invest them with all the rights of man, those whom curiosity prompted to seek the occasion of beholding her, expected to find a sturdy, muscular, raw-boned virago and they were not a little surprised, 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. (Godwin 232)

Apparently, to her contemporaries Wollstonecraft's transgression lay, not in the particular expression of women's rights, but in the bold appropriation of rationalist political discourse itself.[12] In the eighteenth-century imagination, the capacity for language and thought were linked to the innate and natural qualities of one's sex. In the passage above, Godwin alludes to the cultural belief that liberal philosophy is inherently rational

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(*Discourses of Difference*), and Pratt.

[12] Mary Poovey argues that Wollstonecraft denies her female sensibilities in order to write in a rationalist, 'masculine' discourse in *The Rights of Woman* where as the *Letters* are written in an emotional, 'feminine' discourse. I argue, however, that there are passages in both texts that use 'reason' to express a misogynistic, satirical attitude typical of eighteenth-century representations of women while other passages

(and therefore, masculine). It follows that a woman who can insinuate herself into a subject position hitherto only available to males must appear physically as a man. But that Wollstonecraft's indisputable "femininity" suggests otherwise challenges the very meaning of 'woman' as a signifier. Apparently, the discursive apparatus responsible for the naturalization of gender and for the gendering of popular cultural discourses enables the mechanisms of its own undoing.

Written at a moment when interactive transformations take place between Lockean empiricism and continental rationalism,[13] the increasing feminization of sentiment and the masculinization of reason ensure that gender identities congeal into the rigid categorizations of female/body/passion and male/mind/reason scholars associate with later nineteenth-century cultural ideals.[14] Wollstonecraft's desire to combine reason and passion in a non-gendered subject means that the *Letters* ambivalently inscribe "sensibility" with its embodied perceptions and affective responses.

This thesis examines the *Letters* as a text that incorporates multiple discourses, such as autobiography, sensibility, imperialism, mercantile capitalism, and British nationalism. The resulting intertextual contradictions illuminate and reify the ideologies of gender and bourgeois sensibility underlying these discourses. The narrator of the *Letters* vocalizes sentiments typical of a male, middle-class traveller but cannot fully reconcile the trivialization of suffering and the exploitative visual, racial, and sexual economies upon which sentimental travel literature is based. While Wollstonecraft's

encode a sentimental valuation of passion and feeling. The *Letters* do not represent such a radical break from Wollstonecraft's philosophical works as Poovey would have readers believe.

[13] Percy Adams summarizes eighteenth-century philosophical trends as follows: "By the mid-eighteenth century Locke's building-blocks theory of knowledge had apparently become more widely accepted, even on the Continent, than the rationalism of Descartes or the more mystical Leibnitz. Then Hume would be even more empirical and Kant would combine Locke and Descartes" (141).

masculinized gaze reinscribes asymmetrical gender, class, and cultural relations, such reinscriptions require the repression of feminine identifications that nevertheless resurface as empathetic feelings for women, members of the lower classes, and cultural 'others.' Consequently, the narrator's trespass onto the territory of the male subjectivity is complicated by ambivalence, expressed through an awkward resistance towards visual objectification, rationalism, commerce, and colonization. The inconsistent narrative stance is productive in the sense that it highlights processes of subjectivation, the ways in which gender ideology informs such processes, and the potential for subverting such processes and thereby transgressing normative gender roles. The specific circumstances surrounding Wollstonecraft's journey establish the basis for the ambiguously gendered subject of the *Letters* to undermine the stability of sexual identity as well as the rational, autonomous subject. More specifically, the psychological defenses of denial and incorporation expressed by a melancholic narrator allow 'her' to identify with her male lover and to undermine the dominant ideology of sexual difference precisely through its retention, thus engendering an 'uncanny' subject whose trans-positionality exposes the latent contradictions of a phallocentric economy that enforces compulsory heterosexuality and subjectivates women as objects rather than as speaking and writing subjects.

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[14] See Kelly, "Gender, Class, and Cultural Revolution, *Revolutionary Feminism* (1-22).

I. An Epistolary Difference: "Mary" as Imlay

Mr Johnson whose uncommon kindness, I believe, has saved me from despair, and vexations I shrink back from – and feared *to encounter; assures me that if I exert my talents in writing I may support myself in a comfortable way. I am then going to be the first of a new genus.*
– Mary Wollstonecraft, 1787 (*Collected Letters* 164)

The occasion of Mary Wollstonecraft's journey through Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Germany is only alluded to in the "Appendix" of the Scandinavian *Letters*[15] where Wollstonecraft writes, "[p]rivate business and cares have frequently so absorbed me, as to preventing my obtaining all the information, during this journey, which the novelty of the scenes would have afforded, had my attention been continually awake to inquiry" (198). Per Nystrom's reconstruction of Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian journey tells us that she agreed to go to Scandinavia to conduct an inquiry into a missing ship owned by her lover, Gilbert Imlay.[16] The ship was registered as a Norwegian vessel and the captain of the ship was entrusted with the transportation of a fortune's worth of French silver and gold plate that would be used to buy supplies in Gothenburg. Imlay, a sympathizer with the Revolution, was using the North Sea as a trading route to avoid the British blockade against France. The ship disappeared in August 1794 and was reportedly sunk. The captain, however, was known to have returned to his hometown of Risor, Norway. Wollstonecraft travelled to Risor as Imlay's legal representative and likely attended an Inquiry into the matter conducted by the

[15] There is no standardized abbreviation for the lengthy title of this work. Carol H. Poston refers to it simply as the *Letters,* which is convenient for the sake of brevity. The Scandinavian *Letters,* however, should not be confused with Wollstonecraft's *Collected Letters* or the *Letters to Imlay* which have also been published. All the references to the Scandinavian *Letters* include the letter number and the page number from Holmes' 1987 edition.
[16] The most informative aspects of Nystrom's account are summarized by Holmes (21-26).

Danish courts. Her mission was to discover what happened to the ship and seek financial compensation for Imlay's loss.

While travelling was becoming more commonplace for women and the middling classes by the end of the eighteenth century,[17] Wollstonecraft's journey and the responsibilities allotted to her were anomalous by the standards of her time. Unescorted by a male companion, she left Hull, England, on June 27th, 1795, accompanied by her one-year-old daughter fathered by Imlay, named Fanny, whom she left in the care of a French maidservant, Marguerite, in Gothenburg, Sweden, while she pursued business affairs over the course of three and a half months. Throughout the journey, Wollstonecraft kept a journal consisting of letters, as well as maintaining correspondence with Imlay. Wollstonecraft scholars frequently speculate on the relationship between the posthumously published *Letters to Imlay* and the travel account, which was published by Joseph Johnson four months after Wollstonecraft's return to England and Imlay's return of the letters she had sent to him from Scandinavia.[18] While there are almost identical

[17] G.J. Barker-Benfield explains how travel became fashionable for middle-class women and even how such activities held potential for transgressing gender roles: "Critical representations of 'women of the world' (both in fact and in fiction), from parvenus to the duchess of Devonshire, symbolized 'the growing tendency of women to travel, participate in outdoor leisure activities, and...exploit the opportunities offered by contemporary enthusiasm for family life in a social setting.' Emblematically, some of these opportunities required 'the widespread adoption of the male's riding habit, including the frock coats,' provoking sharp debate over the meanings of femininity and masculinity" (204).

[18] Citations from the *Letters to Imlay* refer the reader to *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft,* Vol. 6. Ferguson and Todd's chapter, "Letters from Sweden" in *Mary Wollstonecraft* (89-103), contextualize the travel journal in relation to the *Letters to Imlay*. The *Letters to Imlay* record Wollstonecraft's vacillating convictions regarding her relationship to Imlay and include two suicide notes, one written before and one after the Scandinavian journey (*Works* 415-430). Uncertain of his affections, she repeatedly denies that relationship is over even when Imlay's communication (or lack thereof) signals its demise. The acceptance of the loss coincides with her suicide attempt upon returning to England. Janet Todd speculates on Wollstonecraft's motivations and eighteenth-century attitudes toward suicide in "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Rights of Death." The suicide note, dated October 10, 1795 (only one week after Wollstonecraft's return to England), echoes Dido's threat to Aeneas in Ovid's *Heroides* (a popular translation of the "Letters of the Heroines" was Dryden's *Dido to Aeneas* [1683]). Wollstonecraft writes, "Should your sensibility ever awake, remorse will find its way to your heart; and, in the midst of business and

passages in the two sets of letters, there is no evidence to support Claire Tomalin's claim that the Scandinavian *Letters* were "entirely made up of letters she had sent Imlay from Scandinavia" (188). Indeed, the opposite seems more likely as a letter sent to Imlay less than a month after Wollstonecraft arrives in Scandinavia states her intentions to begin a journal "which will, I hope, discharge all my obligations of a pecuniary kind" (*Works* 422). Wollstonecraft had good reason to believe that the publication of a travel book would be a profitable venture.[19] Margaret Hunt's study of travel literature indicates that the early eighteenth century, with its rising literacy rates and its fledgling middle-class culture, saw "one of the most striking cultural trends...the rapid rise in popularity of secular forms of writing, with travel books prominent among them" (335).

Wollstonecraft conducts her journey on behalf of Imlay, as his "wife," despite the fact that they never married.[20] The circumstances surrounding Wollstonecraft's journey are made even more interesting by a piece of paper authorizing her to act as Imlay's agent (Holmes 22; Nystrom 18). William Clark Durant's *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1927) provides a facsimile of the document granting Wollstonecraft power of attorney over Imlay's affairs. It reads:

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sensual pleasure, I shall appear before you, the victim of your deviation from rectitude" (*Works* 430-1).

[19] Wollstonecraft was familiar with the genre of travel writing. According to Peter Swaab, Wollstonecraft reviewed over 24 travel books for Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review.* These reviews are collected in *Works,* Vol. 6. Out of these 24 travel books, three were written in the form of letters and only one is written by a woman (Swaab 14). Wollstonecraft's review of the latter, Hester Lynch Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections, made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* (1789) is less than approving: "These travels are very desultory, and have all the lax freedom of letters without that kind of insinuating interest, which slightly binds a nosegay of unconnected remarks, and throws a thin, but graceful veil over egotism; the substitution of *one* for *I*, is a mere cobweb" (109).

[20] The fact that Wollstonecraft and Imlay were never *legally* married became apparent when she married Godwin in 1797. Godwin explains in the *Memoirs* that Wollstonecraft was registered at the American embassy in Paris as Imlay's wife in order to escape the imprisonment of all British residents in France as decreed by the French convention (240).

> Know all men by these presents, that I, Gilbert Imlay, citizen of the United States of America, at present residing in London, do appoint Mary Imlay, my best friend and wife, to take the sole management of my affairs and business...Thus, confiding to the talent, zeal, and earnestness of my dearly beloved friend and companion, I submit the management of my affairs entirely and implicitly to her discretion. (quoted in Holmes 22-3)

As "Mary Imlay," Wollstonecraft potentially secures her subjectivation as a wife, the social role that, in the eighteenth century at least, depends on a rigid adoption of sexual prescriptions and a domestic division of labour. Wollstonecraft, remembering the promise of a family "home" and a responsible engagement with private and social duties, desires the stability afforded by this subjectivation (*Works* 407). Beyond the social ostracism inflicted on an unwed mother, the very viability of Wollstonecraft's subjectivity is threatened by the loss of Imlay and altered by his absence. The culturally appropriate role of the female, heterosexual subject – the sentimental heroine appearing in the *Letters to Imlay* – is further complicated by ambivalence in the Scandinavian *Letters,* ambivalence produced by a combination of different discourses and the narrator's feminist political agenda.[21]

[21] The *Letters to Imlay* contain none of the political and social commentary that appears in the travel journal and they quite obviously imitate the generic conventions of the amorous epistolary tradition traced by Linda Kauffman, whose study includes Ovid's *Heroides* and the letters of Heloise and Abelard.). The *Letters to Imlay* record Wollstonecraft's vacillating convictions regarding her relationship to Imlay and include two suicide notes, one written before and one after the Scandinavian journey (*Works* 415-430). Uncertain of his affections and increasingly disillusioned, she repeatedly denies that relationship is over even when Imlay's communication (or lack thereof) signals its demise. Janet Todd speculates on Wollstonecraft's motivations and eighteenth-century attitudes toward suicide in "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Rights of Death." The suicide note, dated October 10, 1795 (only one week after Wollstonecraft's return to England), echoes Dido's threat to Aeneas in Ovid's *Heroides* (a popular translation of the "Letters of the Heroines" was Dryden's *Dido to Aeneas* [1683]). Wollstonecraft writes, "Should your sensibility ever awake, remorse will find its way to your heart; and, in the midst of business and sensual pleasure, I shall appear before you, the victim of your deviation from rectitude" (*Works* 430-1). Syndy Conger provides a lucid summary of the structure of the *Letters to Imlay* in "The Sentimental Logic of Wollstonecraft's Prose" (145-49). Despite all the extra-textual references in the Scandinavian *Letters*, Wollstonecraft never refers to the classical myth of Dido (the queen who

Returning briefly to a discussion of the document above, which is clearly more than a profession of marriage, let us consider how it works to validate Wollstonecraft's acting on behalf of Imlay. The institution of marriage establishes patrilinearity through the wife's assumption of her husband's proper name. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler explains how the name has a symbolic function that confers on the subject "a social durability and legitimacy" over time while also "stabiliz[ing] a set of multiple and transient imaginary identifications" (152). Butler suggests, however, that this theory of the name can only apply to men since a patriarchal social structure secures the patrilineal line through "the ritual exchange of women" that requires women to shift their "patronymic alliance" (153). For women, therefore, "propriety is achieved through having a changeable name, through the exchange of names, which means that the name is never permanent, and that identity secured through the name is always dependent on the social exigencies of paternity and marriage" (153). In other words, the stability of the male subject is contingent on, and conditions, the dramatic instability of the female subject who is, after all, not really a "subject" as such, emerging as "she" does only in relation to men and only enjoying permanency as long as those relationships endure. These insights suggest that female subjects, always already conditioned by social flux and nominal flexibility, are positioned to "transgress" gender roles as a potentiality of their very constitution, even if such transgressions are necessarily impermanent.

By *taking Imlay's place*, Wollstonecraft assumes all of the patronymic authority invested in the name "Imlay." But beyond this substitution, the assumption of a name

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kills herself after being abandoned by her lover) nor to Rousseau's *Julie, où la nouvelle Heloise*, although the latter is mentioned in Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (see *Works,* Vol.1). The love relationship between Dido and Aeneas appears as an

enables the name's power to subjectivate (or to produce a subject) in Wollstonecraft herself; for, according to Butler, "the name as patronym does not only bear the law, but institutes the law" (*Psychic Life* 154). As Imlay's legal signatory, Wollstonecraft is designated *to be* Gilbert Imlay. As the piece of paper that confers authority to Wollstonecraft emerges out of a heterosexual matrix marked by rigid sexual differences (that is, it is dependent on Wollstonecraft's position in a companionate marriage, as both female and "wife"), what she *becomes* is the opposite of what she was before: not just another person, but a subject specifically gendered as male. This phantasmatic identification is only made possible through Imlay's absence, an absence that makes possible the letter-writing process and an absence that, consequently, is *demanded* by the *Letters*' epistolary form.

II. His Sentimental Gaze: The Gender Economy of Sensibility

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. Women have a frame of body more delicate and susceptible of impression than men, and, in proportion as they receive a less intellectual education, are more unreservedly under the empire of feeling.

– William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (276)

The British "cult of sensibility" and its correspondent expression in sentimental literature begins in the early eighteenth century as a popular expression of Lockean psychology and attended by male-centred bourgeois interests, becomes by the end of the century associated with femininity, revolutionary impulses, irrationality, and all things that provoked reactionary scorn. According to G.J. Barker-Benfield, sensibility basically "denoted the receptivity of the senses and referred to the psychoperceptual scheme

intertext in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (68) and Godwin calls Wollstonecraft a "Dido" in the *Memoirs* (232).

explained and systematized by Newton and Locke. It connoted the operation of the nervous system, the material basis for consciousness" (xvii). But there is no easy way to trace the cultural development and the 'gendering' of sensibility since "the flexibility of a word [sensibility] synonymous with consciousness, with feeling, and eventually identifiable with sexual characteristics, permitted a continuous struggle over its meanings and values" (Barker-Benfield xvii). The complexity of sensibility is shown by the way it permeated social and philosophical debates regarding politics, aesthetics, psychology, and economics.

Without assuming a consistency among (or even within) Wollstonecraft's works, I will be referring to Wollstonecraft's other writings because they represent some of the most interesting and informed analyses of sensibility available to scholars of the late eighteenth century. In *The Rights of Men* (1790),[22] Wollstonecraft responds to the "witty arguments and ornamental feelings" in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) by stating: "Even the Ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations. Sensibility is the *manie* of the day" (36). Extending several of the arguments that appear in the first *Vindication*, *The Rights of Woman* could be summarized as both an exploration of how aesthetic discourses participate in politics as well as an elaboration and transformation of the philosophy of sensibility. Arguing for social reform and gender equality, *The Rights of Woman* implicitly contests anti-revolutionary arguments waged for sensibility (as in

[22] I distinguish between Wollstonecraft's two *Vindications* by using *The Rights of Woman* (1792) and *The Rights of Men* (1790); all citations are from *The Vindications*, Eds. D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf.

Burke's *Reflections*) *and* against sensibility (as in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*).[23] Both conservative factions manipulate the meaning of the word in order to argue for a natural order that denies women rationality. Nicola Watson explains how, on one hand, "a Burkean ideal of feeling, defined in opposition to the disintegrative force of 'Reason'" equated sensibility with chivalry and thus to traditional gender roles associated with a masculinist chivalric code (7). On the other hand, sensibility was defined as an "excess of feeling and correspondent lack of rationality" and "identified as revolutionary energy" and "anarchic desire" (Watson 7-9).

Although many critics have read *The Rights of Woman* as advocating "Enlightenment" rationality and degrading embodied feelings, they forget that the very basis of Wollstonecraft's argument is a Lockean materialist epistemology. They also confuse Wollstonecraft's critique of affectivity and artificial weakness with an absolute dismissal of sensibility (*Vindications* 177). *The Rights of Woman,* however, concerns itself with the displacement of sensibility by false sentiment and sensuality; Wollstonecraft observes "the prevalent fondness for pleasure which takes the place of ambition and those noble passions that open and enlarge the soul" (113). Divorced from gender, and reinvested with moral value, the "nobler passions" thus provide the necessary stimuli to reason and the imagination, which, working in unison, foster humanitarian feeling and actions.

Environmental psychology initiated a paradigm that allowed women and men of subordinate classes to see their differences as effects of unequal socialization and access to education, and to claim their rights to participate in social life. Although the work of

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[23] See the title page of this thesis for a caricature of the "New Sensibility" as it appeared in *The Anti-*

Locke and Newton promised the denaturalization of hierarchical class and gender relations, Barker-Benfield states that, for women, "the promise soon began to be short-circuited by the restoration of a model of innate sexual difference" (xvii). If the "man of feeling" emerges at a time when sentiment and sociability were upheld as positive qualities for individuals to possess, then the subsequent degradation of sensibility corresponds to its increasing alignment with femininity. In fact, far from granting women civil and political rights, several prominent eighteenth-century writers even deny to women the possession of a "soul," that metonym for "subject." As gender/sex is naturalized according to the ideology of sexual difference, it follows that the souls of men and women are intrinsically different.

In *The Rights of Woman,* Wollstonecraft recognizes that the 'Rights of Man' refer only to men – that women are deemed somehow less than "human" and are no better than "abject slaves" (196). Wollstonecraft argues for women's enfranchisement by contesting "the prevailing opinion, that [women] were created rather to feel than to reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained through charms and weaknesses" (*Vindications* 178). Wollstonecraft, desiring "to see the distinction of sex confounded in society," asserts that women's faulty education is responsible for their foolish behaviour such that "novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is thus formed in the mould of folly" (*Vindications* 172, 177). Wollstonecraft further debunks the "sexing of souls" by taking the ideology of sexual difference to its logical extreme, absurdly stating, "I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentrical directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were *male* spirits, confined by mistake in female frames"

Jacobin Review of 1798.

(*Vindications* 145).[24] When a rational woman expresses a 'manly' character, she represents a challenge to the sexed nature of the bourgeois subject, and if she is not denigrated, then certainly she will certainly be ignored: "It has been shrewdly observed by a German writer, that a pretty woman, as an object of desire, is generally allowed to be so by men of all descriptions; whilst a fine woman, who inspires more sublime emotions by displaying intellectual beauty, may be overlooked or observed with indifference, by those men who find their happiness in the gratification of their appetites" (160). Making explicit the gender politics in Kant's aesthetic discourse of the sublime and the beautiful and employing the bourgeois logic of supply and demand, Wollstonecraft proposes that a change in men's taste along with "a revolution in female manners" will produce women worthy of admiration, rather than Burke's loveable beauties "in distress" who "learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness" (*Enquiry* 100).[25]

It is by striving to look beautiful in men's eyes that women participate in their own degradation. Wollstonecraft's astute critique of sentimental fiction reveals an aspect of eighteenth-century literature that continues to interest scholars, namely its visual economy.[26] Female characters appear predominantly as objects of male desire; even when narrated from a female point-of-view, sentimental heroines can best attain status as aesthetically-pleasing bodies and then, only through the responsiveness of heterosexual men who gaze upon them. Wollstonecraft observes that women who internalize the sentiments of the "herd of Novelists" value themselves only in relation to men: "I own it

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[24] Susan Wolfson's article, "Gendering of the Soul," further discusses the debate over the sexing of souls among the Romantic writers.

[25] For a discussion of how the cultural construction of "beauty" determined acceptable female behaviour and how "taste" sought to regulate culture according to bourgeois values, see Robert W. Jones. Barker-Benfield claims that "taste" was the province of women who could reform male manners by referring to "civilized culture" (206).

[26] See Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel.*

frequently happens that women who have fostered a romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling, waste their lives in *imagining* how happy they should have been with a husband who could love them with a fervid increasing affection every day, and all day" (*Vindications* 142). Women's reading and education is not only confined to "the reveries of the stupid novelists" but it also alters women's thinking patterns; "the effect which an early association of ideas has upon the character" is to give most women "a romantic twist of the mind," which to alter would be equivalent to performing "an herculean task" (*Vindications* 107, 330, 282). Consequently, such women are not solely "objects of desire" as Kant, Burke, and Rousseau would have them; because they do not inspire any lasting respect, writes Wollstonecraft, they are really "objects of pity, bordering on contempt" (*Vindications* 113, 107). Wollstonecraft clearly connects the sentimental idealization of women to their hyperfeminization which leads to sexual oppression.

With few exceptions, eighteenth-century sentimental fiction allows for two types of women: the poor maniac with sensibility too exquisite for her frail, female body to withstand (Sterne's Maria; Polwhele's Wollstonecraft); and the blushing beauty who inspires men to higher levels of morality by embodying virtue (Goethe's Charlotte; Richardson's Clarissa; Burke's Marie-Antoinette). While the latter seems to grant a woman some degree of moral authority, her power over men remains contingent on their capacity to sympathize, on *their* sensibility towards her trembling virtue. For men, exquisite sensibility is a spur to moral action; for women, it is debilitating, and their expressions of sensibility are represented as "inferior, unconscious, unruly, or even criminal" (Johnson 14). Sentimental fiction rarely depicts a rational woman, what

Wollstonecraft considered herself;[27] women who threatened to de-gender the (male) universal subject could only be deemed monstrosities of nature.

The fact that the most popular sentimental works were written by men leads critics to question whether or not the discourse of sensibility and its expression in epistolary fictions is, in fact, a "feminist" countering of masculine rationality or quite the opposite.[28] Claudia L. Johnson, for example, suggests sentimental fiction encoded a "'masculinization' of formerly feminine gender traits," not a "'feminization' of culture" (14). Rather than a mere semantic rearrangement, Johnson's emphasis lies upon the way in which sentimentalism, while purporting to valorize women, actually infantilizes and domesticates them further. Authored and celebrated by men, "the discourse of the heart" turns men in to moral agents of "willful engagement and self-fashioning" and women into enervated victims who "suffered the experience of the world" (Barker-Benfield xviii). Despite the potential for sensibility to liberate both men and women from the constraints of class and gender, its manifestation in sentimental fiction reinscribes patriarchal ideals of womanhood; men may become more "feminine" with their sentimental displays, but women are not allowed to be more rational. The narrator Scandinavian *Letters* adopts the discourse of a sentimental traveller, thereby becoming a

[27] Wollstonecraft's contemporaries ridiculed her for being too masculine. Perhaps Godwin's repeated emphasis on Wollstonecraft's femininity in the *Memoirs* indicated his desire to counter the reactionary views expressed in such poems as William Roscoe's "The Life, Death and Wonderful Achievements of Edmund Burke" that called Wollstonecraft "an Amazon" (quoted in Tomalin 97) and Richard Polwhele's "The Unsex'd Females" (1798) that characterized Wollstonecraft as the "intrepid champion of her sex" who "slight[s] the timid blush of virgin fame" (13). Unfortunately, after the publication of the *Memoirs*, Godwin's intentions backfired when writers claimed that Wollstonecraft's efforts to flout conventional femininity (particularly what was perceived as her aggressive sexuality) were thwarted by "Nature" when she became the "victim of despair" and when, in childbirth, she "died a death that strongly marked the distinction, by pointing out the destiny of women, and the diseases to which they are liable" (Polwhele 30).

[28] Most critics consider sensibility and sentimental fiction the domain of women writers. In addition to Johnson, Janet Todd (*Sensibility)* and Mary Favret trace the popularizing of sentimental and epistolary fiction to male writers, namely Richardson, Rousseau, Goethe, and Sterne.

'man of feeling' in order to demonstrate that one's subjectivity need not be confined by one's sex.

III. Travel Literature: Imperial Discourse and Her Ambivalence

The epistemology of sight dominates British discourses during the eighteenth century. As early as 1689, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* characterizes perception as "the inlet of knowledge" (91). This Lockean epistemology is the philosophical foundation upon which are built eighteenth-century notions of sensibility. This visual economy dominates sentimental fiction, landscape aesthetics, and travel literature. The latter develops tropes of visuality in conjunction with imperial and colonial ideologies. Looking is a symbolic and literal act of possession and mastery. The power of the gaze fixes its Objects and enables "speculation," whether that speculation refers to pictures of the landscapes and bodies of the foreign 'other' or to commercial investments in business and property. For the imperialist, the land is something to view, possess, and transform into an economical venture.

According to Percy Adams, two types of travel narratives emerge during the eighteenth century: one dominated by scientific observations of the foreign country and the other dominated by personal experiences (146). Similarly, Per Nystrom comments on travel literature with specific reference to the Scandinavian *Letters*:

> The literature of travel had developed in two directions. On the one hand there was the informative literature, on the other the romantic and sentimental. Informative literature constituted the larger group. Here, Linné was the great master in Sweden. This kind of literature could be scientific or politico-geographical, could deal with the history of culture or ethnography, but the traveller's adventures in foreign countries, his encounters with interesting people and his impressions of the countryside played a greater or

> less part in the writer's picture as interruptions in ambitious scientific reports.
>
> The other line of development has been considered to have had its starting-point in Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey,* but it also took in patterns from the Romantic literature of confession and wanderings on the whole, of the Rousseauesque type. (33)

As a critic, Mary Wollstonecraft was well acquainted with both these genres. In Letter XIII, she refers to William Coxe's *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark* (1784), a lengthy work of the informative or scientific type dealing with the standard topics of geography, history, and economic analysis (Holmes 19). The scientific travel narrative usually included the taxonomic index made popular by Swedish botanist, Carl von Linné (Linnaeus), who developed the Linnaean system of nomenclature by genus and species. According to Mary Louise Pratt, "the flowering of natural history made [interior travel] increasingly desirable, and the emergence of new narrative paradigms made such travel increasingly writable and readable" (50). Pratt further describes the ideology behind such writing:

> [For] these Linnaean emissaries, the narrative of travel is organized by the cumulative, observational enterprise of documenting geography, flora, and fauna... Several pages of such benign proceedings are enough to call up again the image of the naturalist as Adam alone in his garden. Where, one asks, is everybody? The landscape is written as uninhabited, unpossessed, unhistoricized, unoccupied even by the travelers themselves...As embodied in the naturalist, European authority and legitimacy are uncontested, a vision undoubtedly appealing to European readers. (51-2)

The British traveller's eye is thus accorded the ultimate authority and is the means by which the "I" can dominate the surroundings. The Englishman's observations must be eye-witnessed as vision authorizes the power of representation. In the *Letters,* for

example, Wollstonecraft discounts the folkloric tales of infamous Norwegian sea-monsters because she cannot uncover any visual evidence to support their existence:

> I did not leave Norway without making some inquiries after the monsters said to have been seen in the northern sea; but though I conversed with several captains, I could not meet with one who had ever heard any traditional description of them, much less had any ocular demonstration of their existence. Till the fact be better ascertained, I should think the account of them ought to be torn out of our Geographical Grammars. (XV:153)

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write that viewing the landscape "became a significant method by which European explorers and travelers could obtain a position of panoramic observation, itself a representation of knowledge and power over colonial space" (227). The object of the gaze acquires meaning only in relation to the specular subject. The foreign 'other' can then be rendered completely powerless, static, and two-dimensional. Thus, the imperial gaze achieves the simultaneous subjection and objectification of the colonized body under its surveillance.

The knowledge/power relationship involved in the specularization of 'others' also operates in imperial contexts where sight becomes the source of the imperialist's domination over the land. The correlation between surveillance and the emergence of cartography and landscape painting reflects a desire on the part of the British colonizer for visual mastery over his/her surroundings, which includes asserting capitalist ownership over the land and people inhabiting those surroundings. [29] The "I am the master of all I survey" syndrome results in the exploration of "undiscovered" territories and in the elaborate mapping/naming of those places, thereby appropriating them as

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[29] See Gillian Rose, "Looking at the Landscape: The Uneasy Pleasures of Power," *Feminism and Geography* (86-112).

colonies for the empire. Surveillance implies a certain positionality wherein the person looking is figuratively and literally above the object or person being looked upon.

Sara Mills further observes the polarization of gender roles in imperial contexts: "The empire is generally considered to be a place of masculine endeavor, where heroic individual males behave in adventurous ways, exploring undiscovered countries and subduing the inhabitants" (*Discourses* 36). Wollstonecraft's assumption of a male subject position thus enables her to assume a British traveller's discursive voice and ideological perspective. Her gazing on the Scandinavians often assumes cultural (if not natural) superiority.[30] The imperial spectator inscribes his acquired ethnocentric assumptions onto the landscape, constructed in and by familiar discourses. As such, the "novelty" of the exotic land and its inhabitants can only be figured as similar to or different from what is already "known" to the traveller.[31] The inadequacy of linguistic representation is acknowledged by Wollstonecraft in the *Letters*: "There is an individuality in every prospect, which remains in the memory as forcibly depicted as the particular features that have arrested our attention; yet we cannot find words to discriminate this individuality so as to enable a stranger to say, this is the face, that the view" (V:85). Unable to generate language specific enough for accurate descriptions,

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[30] Although critics have paid considerable attention to Wollstonecraft's use of aesthetic philosophy in the *Letters,* very few have considered the text within the context of British imperial discourse. Granqvist insists Wollstonecraft's *Letters* epitomize the British imperialist and racist agenda. The one-sidedness of Granqvist's critique is obvious; however, it does address issues that other critics have glossed or ignored. Mills notes that most critical readings of women's travel writing focus on the female narrator as a "feminist precursor" and fail to acknowledge the ways in which she was complicit in the expansion project of the British empire ("Knowledge, Gender and Empire" 40). This reading hopefully captures the complexity of Wollstonecraft's ambivalence towards nationalist and imperialist discourses without eliding the fact that her position towards the inhabitants of Scandinavia is not unambiguously anti-imperialist.

[31] See Barton (1998) for the ways in which Scandinavian countries were described by eighteenth-century British travellers, often using figurative language such as "Northern Arcadia," the title of Barton's book.

empirical observations must be articulated with reference to several other discourses, including fictional ones. Thus, as Abdul R. JanMohamed writes,

> While the surface of each colonialist text purports to represent specific encounters with specific varieties of the racial Other, the subtext valorizes the superiority of European cultures, of the collective process that has mediated that representation. Such literature is essentially specular: instead of seeing the native as a bridge toward syncretic possibility, it uses him as a mirror that reflects the colonialist's self-image. (19)

Characteristic of travel literature is the mixing of several generic forms or discursive modes, not unlike Bakhtin's description of novelistic heteroglossia.[32] Kelly distinguishes "philosophical" from "sentimental" travel narratives by the latters' dialogical mixture of "styles, modes or discourses," stating that "this 'novelization' of travel writing was part of literary Sensibility" (178). In addition to facilitating the popularity of these writings, what Kelly calls the "*embourgeoisement* of travel writing," sentimentalized narratives recognize the fictionality and subjectivity of travel accounts and challenge the imperialist ideology that invests such accounts with scientific objectivity and authority.

An indirect reference to Linnaeus appears in the *Letters* when Wollstonecraft writes, "Sweden appeared to me the country in the world most proper to form the botanist and natural historian: every object seemed to remind me of the creation of things, of the first efforts of sportive nature," but she typically eschews taxonomic references in favour of describing nature in more literary terms (X:87). Rousseau's *Reveries* (1782) praise Linnaeus and include descriptions such as "here I found seven-leaved coral-wort,

[32] Terry Castle also explains the "'sampling' of the poetic" that occurs in Radcliffe's novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), with reference to Bakhtin: "Mikhail Bakhtin has suggested that since its beginnings the novel's great power as a literary form has been its uncanny ability to 'incorporate' – and thus render obsolete or superfluous—other kinds of writing through citation" (1998:xiii). Radcliffe's text includes narrative episodes not unlike travel writing and has a similar incorporative style to that employed in the Scandinavian *Letters*.

cyclamen, *nidus avis*, the large *laserpitium* and a few other plants" (109,107).

Wollstonecraft, however, describes flowers in a much less scientific way:

> Straying further, my eye was attracted by the sight of some heart's ease that peeped through the rocks. I caught at it as a good omen, and going to preserve it in a letter that had not conveyed balm to my heart, a cruel remembrance suffused my eyes; but it passed away like an April shower. If you are deep read in Shakespeare, you will recollect that this was the little western flower tinged by love's dart, which 'maidens call love in idleness.' The gaiety of my babe was unmixed; regardless of omens or sentiments, she found a few wild strawberries more grateful than flowers or fancies. (I:67)

The narrator's alludes to Shakespeare's comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* in which the flower is used to make a love potion. This citation provides readers with an intertext that explains in part the sexual context of her relationship to the "you" as well as hinting at her estrangement from him. This reference to "Shakespeare," which appears in this first letter, also anticipates all of the later quotations and imagery that fills the *Letters* (see Section V below). Wollstonecraft's landscape descriptions often include fantastic elements, such as the "spirits unseen" that seem "to walk abroad, and flit from cliff to cliff." The atmosphere of the *Letters* is often more like "Shakspeare's magic island" than a geographical textbook (XI:134). The references to the English bard also give the *Letters* a nationalistic appeal for British readers (discussed in Section IV below) while the allusion to the colonized island in *The Tempest* figures Scandinavia as a potential colony with a sort of exotic 'otherworldliness.' Indeed, the "the Northern kingdoms seemed a Hyperborean wilderness" to the eighteenth-century foreigner, a stereotype that Wollstonecraft rarely challenges (Barton 1).

Prior to the eighteenth-century, travelling had been the privilege of the aristocracy and landed gentry. It becomes, however, an increasingly fashionable activity among

members of the rising middle class in eighteenth-century England. According to Hunt, "the 'typical' traveler is a respectable private citizen with some sort of business interest in the country or peoples being described" (337). But even with larger numbers of British tourists, male and female, Karen Lawrence claims that very little changed to divorce travel from "its historical association with a Western, white, middle class and with a generally male, privileged ease of movement" (xii). Wollstonecraft's "Advertisement" is an appeal to a group of readers with whom she shares leisure time as well as an affinity for reading travel literature.

> My plan was simply to endeavour to give a just view of the present state of the countries I have passed through, as far as I could obtain information during so short a residence; avoiding those details which, without being very useful to travellers who follow the same route, appear very insipid to those who only accompany you in their chair. (62)

Wollstonecraft's *Letters*, however digressive or "desultory," are not only addressed to an armchair reader but are accompanied by an assertion of bourgeois utility. For although the narrator's sentimental responses often challenge commerce, the narrator's ambivalence towards capitalism signals her inevitable complicity (see Section IV below).

According to Margaret Hunt, eighteenth-century travel literature was "especially associated with, and increasingly addressed to, the interests of the trading, commercial, or 'middling' classes" (335). In the *Letters*, the relationship between the narrator and her readers is implicitly middle class. Furthermore, the bourgeois subject writing and reading is *explicitly* male: "A person has a right, I have sometimes thought, when amused by a witty or interesting egotist, to talk of himself when he can win on our attention by acquiring our affection. Whether I deserve to rank amongst this privileged number, my readers alone can judge - and I give them leave to shut the book, if they do

not wish to become better acquainted with me" ("Advertisement" 62). Even if we read the masculine pronoun as generic rather than gender-specific, Wollstonecraft repeatedly describes herself in contrast to other women, not simply to set herself off from certain female individuals or to present herself as *uniquely* female, but to dissociate from femaleness completely. Already, the narrator describes for her readers a "self" that is an object, and as the heading "Advertisement" suggests, a "self" that is a commodity.

Mills claims the Scandinavian *Letters* subvert the typical travel narrative by reconfiguring the landscape as "a relational zone where rather than human relations being excluded as in the masculinist sublime ego, relations to other humans are seen to be an integral part of the landscape" ("Written on the Landscape").[33] Of course, written more in the style of a sentimental travel narrative, the *Letters* do not read like a natural history of an expanse emptied of people. This is not to say that sentimental travellers have less ideological baggage. Wollstonecraft is concerned with aesthetic representations of the Scandinavians' work ethic and taking pleasure in the sight of the labouring class. Romanticizing the Scandinavian farmers as the pastoral counterpart to merchants and townsfolk, Wollstonecraft delights in what she perceives as their rustic simplicity. Ironically, she turns the peasants into aesthetic objects commodified by her sentimental gaze. For example, Wollstonecraft states that while the middling class is "apish," "the sympathy and frankness of heart conspicuous in the peasantry produces even a simple gracefulness of deportment, which has frequently struck me as very picturesque" (IV:84).

[33] For further criticism on the *Letters* as travel narrative, see Conger, "Three unlikely fellow travellers: Mary Wollstonecraft, Yorick, Samuel Johnson"; Perkins, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian Journey"; Lawrence, "Composing the Self in Letters: Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark," Penelope Voyages* (74-102); Jones, "Romantic Women Travel Writers and the Representation of Everyday Experience" and ""When a Woman So Far Outsteps Her Proper Sphere": Counter-Romantic Tourism"; Bowerbank, "The Bastille of Nature: Wollstonecraft versus Malthus in Scandinavia."

The use of aesthetic discourse to describe human beings undoubtedly reinforces their objectification. The people of other cultures are rendered as innocuous as a landscape in the following sentimental description of the Norwegian countryside:

> We glided along the meadows, and through the woods, with sun-beams playing around us; and though no castles adorned the prospects, a greater number of comfortable farms met my eyes, during the ride, than I have ever seen, in the same space, even in the most cultivated part of England. And the very appearance of the cottages of the labourers, sprinkled amidst them, excluded all those gloomy ideas inspired by the contemplation of poverty. (XIII:138)

Wollstonecraft's idealization of the state of existence of the rural farmers, particularly their "independent" lifestyle, allows her to ignore the farmers' use of cottagers for cheap labour. Elizabeth Bohls warns against reading aesthetic passages such as this one without considering its imperialist connotations. Bohls writes, "Aesthetic discourse disclosed a heightened potential for contributing to the colonial project…as travellers began to inscribe the concept of disinterested contemplation on the landscape through scenic tourism. The effect was to distance spectators from their surroundings and obscure the connection between topography and people's material needs" (48). The aesthetic (and emotional) distance in the passage cited above allows Wollstonecraft to follow with an unabashedly condescending comment: the scene would remind "a stranger," she says, "of the first attempts at culture" (XIII:138). In the *Letters*, "culture" seems to be coterminous with "learning" or the knowledge produced by literature and science under the guidance of reason. The sort of culture associated with "civilization" is Eurocentric – the "progress" of nations, their "virtues…bear an exact proportion to their scientific improvements" (XIX:173). Wherever taste is not advanced enough to appreciate 'high

art,' Wollstonecraft seems to perceive "a remnant of barbarism" (III:76). In the *Letters*, it is difficult to distinguish among observations indicative of the Scandinavians' *apparent* inferiority and observations that suggest an *innate* inferiority.

To give a complex example of this ambiguity, the Scandinavian *Letters* postulate that climate has as much to do with the development of individuals as society and culture, a sort of determinism that comes dangerously close to entrenching 'difference' as absolute. The mental development of Swedish people seems hindered by the surroundings they inhabit. A passage in Letter XI states,

> We were a considerable time entering amongst the islands, before we saw about two hundred houses crowded together, under a very high rock – still higher appearing above. Talk not of bastilles! To be born here, was to be bastilled by nature—shut out from all that opens the understanding, or enlarges the heart. (130-31)

In this case, the surroundings in which people live unjustly jail their minds and hearts as well as their bodies. Although assertions such as "an absence of genial suns" accounting for the sexual reservation of English women are stated in a satirical manner (IV:82), the idea of climate determining national and individual character is informed by British sensibility. The proliferation of travel writing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is complicit in the project of representing and justifying British imperialism by creating 'others' who need civilizing. Moreover, travel literature can be read as fabricating and propagating a self-image of the English whereby they represent the pinnacle of the civilized world. Britishness (and British sensibility) is thereby constructed as 'normative' for readers of travel literature. Ironically, Wollstonecraft valorizes a retention of "the primitive delicacy of our sensations," made possible through the sheer diversity she locates in "civilization" (II:72). Because middle-class 'England'

and 'civilization' are coterminous, Swedish cottagers are inevitably and almost hopelessly underdeveloped:

> I did not immediately recollect that men who remain so near the brute creation, as only to exert themselves to find the food necessary to sustain life, have little or no imagination to call forth the curiosity necessary to fructify the faint glimmerings of mind which entitles them to rank as lords of the creation. – Had they either, they could not contentedly remain rooted in the clods they so indolently cultivate. (I:65)

This passage further supports the notion that personal and moral development correlates directly with one's physical responses to environmental stimuli. There is a tension or contradiction in Wollstonecraft's agenda: she presents the human mind as socially constituted (therefore alterable through social change) but she also assumes that moral and mental development will inevitably be hindered by cultural and environmental inferiority.

In addition to viewing landscapes, Wollstonecraft turns her gaze upon women of different classes; the result is that the *Letters* seem obsessed with the female body and anglocentric standards of beauty. David Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire* notes the tendency in travel literature to focus on the body, particularly the female body. He writes, "The eye treats the body as a landscape: it proceeds systematically from part to part, quantifying and spatializing, noting color and texture, and finally passing an aesthetic judgement which stressed the body's role as an object to be viewed" (23). Wollstonecraft descriptions of the Scandinavian women's bodies repeat the textual conventions of the other "scenes" she observes (I:63). We are not given such lengthy, detailed portraits of men; the imperative informing travel writing is to construct exotic 'objects' for English readers to imagine and Wollstonecraft seems more than aware of the

ways in which female bodies and their dress are discursively and literally objectified, her own body included. This awareness is demonstrated by an incident where Wollstonecraft deliberately selects "the eldest and prettiest" among a group of Swedish "girls" as a travelling companion, knowing that this "beautiful face" would divert the men's attention away from herself and she would be free to explore the country (V:91). Regarding this girl, Wollstonecraft states, "I invited her, because I liked to see a beautiful face animated by pleasure" (V:91). In this passage and a later one concerning a German waitress with "languishing eyes," Wollstonecraft seems to take a transgressive pleasure in appropriating a 'masculine' viewing position even to the extent where her gaze is homoerotic (XXII:188). In a later passage, Wollstonecraft mentions the "beauty" of a lady she meets in Christiania but rather than catalogue her physical features or her dress, she notices the dignity of her manners (XIII:120-21). Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft's criteria for judging the "quality" of the women she meets in Christiania is certainly anglocentric; they only gain her approbation insofar as she "almost imagined [herself] in a circle of English ladies, so much did they resemble them in manners, dress, and even in beauty" (XIII:144).

In *The Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft comments on how learned differences between the sexes colour their perceptions. It is women who earn her disapproval not men.

> A man, when he undertakes a journey, has, in general, the end in view; a woman thinks more of the incidental occurrences, the strange things that may possibly occur on the road; the impression that she makes on fellow travellers; and, above all, she is anxiously intent on the care of the finery that she carries with her, which is more than ever a part of herself, when going to figure on a new scene; when, to use the apt French turn of expression, she is going

> to produce a sensation. – Can dignity of mind exist with such trivial cares? (*Vindications* 176)

It is not surprising, therefore, that the *Letters'* narrator transforms herself into the sentimental male traveller, the "hero" of the "Advertisement," rather than a sentimental heroine. Such a transformation allows Wollstonecraft to assume the conventional positions of a British travelling subject, albeit at the cost of abjecting femaleness. She takes pride in the fact that a Swedish man tells her she is "a woman of observation" who asks "*men's questions*" (I:68). Wollstonecraft's racism is apparent in her efforts to distinguish herself from the French maid, Marguerite, and from Scandinavian women of all classes. The force of her desire to abject her femininity even leads Wollstonecraft to abandon one of the key principles in *The Rights of Woman* – the social construction of sexual character – in favour of essentializing sexual difference: "In the article of cleanliness, the women, of all descriptions, seem very deficient; and their dress shews that vanity is more inherent in women than taste" (IV:83). Granted, however, the narrator of the *Letters* does not often echo this dominant cultural view of women because her disdain is usually at least partially directed at a patriarchal social structure that constrains women's behaviour and narrows their experience. It is from this tension between her masculinist position and her feminist politics that Wollstonecraft's ambivalence surfaces in the *Letters.*

Wollstonecraft repeatedly sets off English culture from that of the "vulgar" Scandinavians, but her efforts to do so are continually undermined because she feels oppressed by her own nation, which results in her partial identification with, and sympathy for, what in other travel journals tends to remain solely the 'other' culture, class, or gender. In fact, she frequently identifies with what *should be* 'otherness.' For

instance, Wollstonecraft seems to anticipate criticism for the bold assumption of a masculine perspective and uses with the qualifier, "little," to describe her heroism ("Advertisement" 62). The expression suggests proper feminine self-debasement but also perhaps indicates a woman writer's ambivalence towards a masculinist conquest narrative. In the Scandinavian *Letters,* Wollstonecraft employs the rhetoric of imperial discourse as a vehicle to further her anglocentric political views; yet such views are presented ambivalently at best. Her ambivalence towards the objectified Other reveals not only the ambivalence underlying colonial discourses generally, but occasionally confounds her own dualistic constructions of self/other, subject/object.[34] Consequently, a strictly imperialist agenda is problematized: first, by virtue of Wollstonecraft's critiques of British/European as well as Scandinavian patriarchal customs and bourgeois capitalist trade, and second, by the text's vacillating identificatory positions. For example, although the narrator criticizes Swedish mothers for their "ignorance" (IV:82), she also claims that "men are domestic tyrants" (XIX:171). And although she assumes the progressiveness of British social and political structures, she states, "From what I have seen throughout my journey, I do not think the situation of the poor in England is much, if at all superior to that of the same class in different parts of the world" (XXII:187). Wollstonecraft attempts to provide a global basis for her observations – she constantly invokes 'humanity' as a universal signifier and presents her idea of moral virtue as *the* 'progressive' ethical system but she also chastises "travellers who require that every nation should resemble their native country" (V:93). She suggests that Europe has much

[34] Homi K. Bhabha discusses the ambivalence of colonial discourse in two major essays, "Signs taken for wonders: questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi" and "Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse," both published in *The Location of Culture*.

to learn from Scandinavian cultures. If her ambivalence prevents her from fully acquiring an absolute (patriarchal) authority, Wollstonecraft also points out that the ideological power of the traveler's gaze and pen does not necessarily translate into the inhabitants' material powerlessness: "Indeed they seem to consider foreigners as strangers whom they should never see again, and might fairly pluck" (X:125). Thus, even as Wollstonecraft disseminates (and reinscribes) English views of sensibility, her philosophy of cultural exchange seems to encapsulate Pratt's notion of "transculturation," understood as the interactive and mutually constitutive (if assymetrical) relation between the ethnographer and the culture she seeks to represent (6). This suggests that post-colonial readings of the Scandinavian *Letters*, rather than oversimplify the relation as one between dominator/dominated, should account for the complex reciprocal process between British travellers and the cultures they seek to represent.

Moreover, the sentimental narrator frequently draws attention to the instability or subjectivity of the 'I'/eye. The Scandinavian *Letters* are by no means sustained as a linear, seamless narrative. As a set of letters, the text inscribes gaps between its own representations. The partiality of the narrative is highlighted by Wollstonecraft's commentary regarding her selection of "details" she describes for her readers ("Advertisement" 62). The temporality of each "vision" is undeniable even as critics have pointed to the ways in which Wollstonecraft frequently contradicts herself from one letter to the next (Holmes 279). The 'I' of the *Letters* is an ever-changing subject whose multiple positionality thwarts a faultless presentation of 'objective' reality. If the text sometimes strives for objectivity, then the constant interruptions of a perspectival 'I' suggest a shift of focus away from the 'other' to the 'self' and emphasizes the interiority

of the speaker. What occurs more often than not is a conflation of Wollstonecraft's emotionally-charged mindscape with the exterior landscape she seeks to represent. This is indicated by statements such as, "I am perhaps a little prejudiced, as I write from the impression of the moment; for I have been tormented to-day…" and "but let me now stop; I may be a little partial, and view every thing with the jaundiced eye of melancholy – for I am sad – and have cause (XVIII:165, XX:178). The narrator's imagination distorts the landscape and undermines the reliability of the visual epistemology assumed by most travel narratives. Paradoxically, the same sensibility that allows the narrator to sentimentalize Scandinavian "scenes" also fosters a heightened corporeal sensitivity that undermines this sentimentalization. Indeed, despite the privileging of vision in sentimental literature, the intertextual allusions and erotic innuendos suggest that there is always more to something than merely what one *sees*. In the *Letters*, the traveller's imaginative projections break down when her body's senses (other than visual) intrude upon her fictionalized settings and cause her physical discomfort. She cannot, for example, ignore the "putrifying herrings" used to fertilize the "patches of earth" which are lovely to her eyes but whose smell "poison[s]" all her "pleasure" (V:87). When describing the typically quotidian details of her travels, Wollstonecraft depends on *all* of her sensory perceptions which prevent her from fully privileging the visual economy of the sentimental traveller in pursuit of purely aesthetic pleasures. Consequently, the distance between the body of the observer and the object being observed that Bohls' claims is typical of travel literature is narrowed by instances when the narrator describes her embodied state in relation to her environment. During these anti-sentimental descriptions, her tone is often bitter or melancholy. She states, for instance, "The beds

too were particularly disagreeable to me. It seemed to me that I was sinking down into a grave when I entered them; for, immersed in down in a sort of box, I expected to be suffocated before morning" (V:86).

It is necessary to distinguish the writer of the Scandinavian *Letters* from other travel writers, particular men, about whom Pratt writes, "the capitalist vanguardists often relied on the goal-directed, linear emplotment of conquest narrative" (157). As imperialists survey the land as part of their visual "conquest," Wollstonecraft attributes this same habit of paranoid surveillance to commercial speculators: "they are ever on the watch, till their very eyes lose all expression, excepting the prying glance of suspicion" (XXIII:190). Contrasting with the colonial and capital imperatives of these (male) Europeans is Wollstonecraft's desire, not to subdue the Scandinavians by forcing them to become like the British, but rather, for them to acquire a level of learning and progress equivalent to that attained by the British. Wollstonecraft's uneasy appropriation of imperialist rhetoric is reflected by numerous textual contradictions and digressions that undermine her own authority as a representative of Englishness and as a speaker for the 'others' she observes during her "so short a residence" ("Advertisement" 62). In addition to the inclusion of "short" in the title, which again suggests the partiality of her vision and undermines the scientific 'rigour' presupposed by certain travel narratives, the text is full of qualifying statements such as this one regarding her limited (visual) observations of Germany: "I should probably have discovered much lurking misery, the consequence of ignorant oppression, no doubt, had I had time to inquire into particulars; but it did not stalk abroad, and infect the surface over which my eye glanced" (XXII:185). Thus, the mobilizing position of masculine privilege assumed via travel writing is complicated by

ambivalence and transformed by Wollstonecraft's impulse to re-turn the gaze upon her own country and upon herself as traveler and writer.

IV. Melancholy Eyes: Re-Viewing Capitalism and Nationalism

The oft reprinted *Anatomy of Melancholy* (ca. 1621) is described by its author, Robert Burton, as written "in an extemporean style," that is, transcribing a spontaneous outflow of words and eschewing revision and polish (17). Burton examines sensibility, or corporeal responses to external stimuli which, taken to extremes, are expressed as melancholy and/or genius. Burton links melancholy to genius by insisting that "our stile bewraies us, and as Hunters find their game by the trace, so is a mans *Genius* descried by his workes" (391). Claiming that "the style is the man" further explicates the connection between melancholy, writing, and individuated subjectivity (13). Burton, professing his own tendency to be melancholy – "I write of Melancholy, by being busy to avoid Melancholy" (6) – provides readers with an "all-inclusive systematic work" that literally incorporates thousands of quotations and citations (Faulkner et al. xxv). The incorporative or explicitly intertextual style of the *Anatomy* suggests that "the man" is always subject to the destabilizing influence of the passions, that he may not be mad but his illness certainly comprises "delusion, obsession and *idée fixe* as well as its other symptoms, all of them coloured by the dominant emotions of depression and anxiety" (Faulkner et al. xxvii). This "man" is gender specific since melancholy, according to Juliana Schiesari, "appears as a gendered form of ethos based on or empowered by a sense of lack" (12). In a phallocentric society, women are already designated as lacking and thus cannot be melancholy because they are not sensibile to any change in status that

would stimulate an awareness of such "lack." The gendering of melancholy is also criticized by Wollstonecraft in *The Rights of Woman*: "Disregarding the arbitrary economy of nature, one writer has declared that it is masculine for a woman to be melancholy" (*Vindications* 144). In contrast to Wollstonecraft's insistence on the arbitrariness of nature, phallocentrism employs a suspect circular logic that assumes what appears 'natural' is true and what appears 'true' must be dictated by nature; naturalizing women's lack and justifying their disempowerment, patriarchy grounds itself in the inconceivability of the proximity of the two sexes. The gendering of melancholy, according to Schiesari, "finds its source of empowerment in the *devaluing* of the historic reality of women's disempowerment" (12). Demanding that her readers recognize that gender/sex is fully contingent on social prescriptions, Wollstonecraft asserts:

> I wish to sum up what I have said in a few words, for I here throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty. For man and woman, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same; the fanciful female character, so prettily drawn by poets and novelists, demanding the sacrifice of truth and sincerity, virtue becomes a relative idea, having no other foundation than utility, and of that utility men pretend arbitrarily to judge, shaping it to their own convenience. (*Vindications* 165)

The gendering of melancholy further justifies the denial of female genius. Like Wollstonecraft, Christine Battersby observes a kind of opportunistic revision of the discourse of genius in order to maintain male dominance:

> For Kant women are passionate creatures; genius is a matter of reason; and women lack reason. For Rousseau passion is valued, and it is therefore passion that women are seen to lack...whatever faculty is mostly highly prized is the one that women are seen to lack. In the case of William Duff [author of *Essay on Original Genius* (1767)], for example, genius is primarily a matter of imagination...but a female imagination is, of course, inferior to

> that of a male…A women can only have a powerful imagination by being unsexed: by being a freak of nature; a kind of mental hermaphrodite. (113-115)

Women may have an exquisite sensibility but they are denied whatever 'divine' attributes thought to produce genius at any given time.

In addition to being gendered, the cultural construction of melancholy is also inflected by class differences. John Mullan's study of eighteenth-century medical treatises suggests that hypochondria and melancholy "are described as types of susceptibility which tend to be evidence of refinement and 'sensibility' and yet which can also be debilitating" (207). The individuals most likely to succumb to the 'vapours' or 'spleen' are valetudinarians, men who cloister themselves in their studies and "remove themselves from a world of trade, ambition, and 'business'" (Mullan 208). It is little wonder, then, that Burton blames the idleness of the rich for the prevalence of melancholy among the English gentry. Guinn Batten explains how Burton's Utopian vision of "a society of healthy workers" shares much in common with Marx's later critique of capitalism.[35] The ideological connection between capitalism and melancholia is based on the tripartite class system allowing a larger proportion of people to pursue leisure. Ironically, the alienated or melancholic subject avoids confronting a loss of meaning and refuses to acknowledge that the 'perfect' life is unattainable by keeping the body and mind active. The ethic that drives capitalism compels a person to work in order to maintain an illusion of betterment and to reenergize any waning desires for

[35] For more information on cultural criticism that deals with melancholia, see Batten 1-20. There are two notable studies on the *Letters* relationship to capitalism: Bohls, "Mary Wollstonecraft's anti-aesthetics," *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics* (140-169) is favourable and reiterates most of Wollstonecraft's critique where as Favret, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the

consumption. In the *Letters,* Wollstonecraft discusses the virtue of exercising to improve health and to ward off melancholic feelings.

> I need scarcely inform you, after telling you of my walks, that my constitution has been renovated here; and that I have recovered my activity, even whilst attaining a little *embonpoint.* My imprudence last winter, and some untoward accidents just at the time I was weaning my child, had reduced me to a state of weakness which I never before experienced. A slow fever preyed on me every night, during my residence in Sweden, and after I arrived at Tonsberg. By chance I found a fine rivulet filtered through the rocks, and confined in a basin for the cattle. It tasted to me like a chalybeate; at any rate it was pure; and the good effect of the various waters which invalids are sent to drink, depends, I believe, more on the air, exercise and change of scene, than on their medicinal qualities. I therefore determined to turn my morning walks towards it, and seek for health from the nymph of the fountain; partaking of the beverage offered to the tenants of the shade. (VIII:111)

If mental and physical activity coincides with good health, then a prevalence of melancholic feelings produces immobility and stasis. Near the end of the *Letters,* Wollstonecraft writes, "my spirits…had been growing more and more languid ever since my return to Gothenburg" (XXII:182). Moreover, the *Letters* not only represent the narrator's melancholic condition but they emerge from it: "loss, bereavement, and absence trigger the work of the imagination and nourish it permanently as much as they threaten it and spoil it" (Kristeva *Black Sun* 9). The *Letters* are described by the narrator as "setting the imagination to work" (V:85).[36] Works written to avoid despair, such as Burton's *Anatomy* and Wollstonecraft's *Letters,* could claim to break out of rigid forms and to be the spontaneous outpourings of genius. The author struggles to produce such a work and it becomes valuable because it is produced by a labouring mind. Paradoxically,

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business of letters," *Romantic Correspondence* (96-132) suggests that the writer of the *Letters* is complicit in the system she wishes to subvert.

melancholy works could be appreciated for purely aesthetic reasons, for their 'genius,' *and* because they reflected a bourgeois work ethic.

Underlying the bourgeois claim to a genius that does not imitate but *originates* are individual property rights. Martha Woodmansee explains how eighteenth-century copyright laws develop in accordance with a changing class structure and the emergence of the bourgeois subject who is deemed the initiator of his own actions. The connection between genius and ownership is made clear by Edward Young's statement in *Conjectures on Original Genius* (1759) that a man's "works will stand distinguished; his the sole property of them; which property alone can confer the noble title of author" (quoted in Woodmansee 39). To designate the works of a particular writer as both owning the writer and being owned by him is to confer the title of "author," rather than mere copyist. The British, suffering from the peculiar affliction of the 'English Malady,' could revel in the creative genius of their nation.

During the eighteenth century, a British middle-class culture emerges with the development of a "literature of manners rooted in feelings, landscape, and the social individual...harbingers of the *national idea"* (Kristeva *Strangers* 174). Benedict Anderson also connects eighteenth-century print capitalism to the "imagined community" of the nation-state, as a common language and rising literacy rates among the middle classes demanded the production and consumption of literature.[37] The formation of British culture through a national canon is exemplified by the Joseph Addison's essay entitled "The Pleasures of the Imagination" (1712) in which he unites aesthetic

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[36] For further discussion of 'Imagination' in the *Letters* and other works, see Whale, "Preparations for Happiness: Mary Wollstonecraft and Imagination."

[37] See Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

principles, assumed to be universal, with British melancholy genius. After discussing the sublime, beautiful, and novel productions of Homer, Ovid, and Virgil, he claims that Milton is "a perfect Master in all these Arts" (391). And in the midst of describing Shakespeare's fantastic creations, written "wholly out of the poet's own invention", he states:

> Among all the Poets of this Kind our *English* are much the best, by what I have yet seen, whether it be that we abound with more Stories of this Nature, or that the Genius of our Country is fitter for this sort of Poetry. For the *English* are naturally Fanciful, and very often disposed by that Gloominess and Melancholly of Temper, which is so frequent in our Nation, to many wild Notions and Visions, to which others are not so liable (397).

This kind of nationalistic sentiment Julia Kristeva describes as "the mystical idea of the nation" that involves "a romantic withdrawal into the mystique of the past, into people's character, or into the individual and national genius – all irreducible, rebel, unthinkable and restorative" (*Strangers* 176-7). Edward Young's admonition to the individual genius – "Thyself so reverence, as to prefer the native growth of thy own mind to the richest import from abroad" (quoted in Woodmansee 39) – anticipates British isolationist policies and alludes to the desire to construct a national character as evolving out of a cultural history that is both mythical (literature) and natural (climate, topography, flora and fauna). The implications of 'natural' genius are taken to an extreme by Johann-Kasper Lavater, whose four-volume *Essays on Physiognomy* (1775-8) elaborated "a 'science' of the external features of humanity as a guide to the inner human nature" (Battersby 137).[38] One can imagine Lavater's philosophy, set alongside the idea of the

[38] Wollstonecraft began a translation into English of Lavater's work but it was never published (Battersby 137).

nation, resulting in a discourse of "race" that provides biological proof of 'difference' and that justifies the enslavement and colonization of non-British peoples.

The emergence of nationalism paradoxically coincides with the development of a universalizing political discourse in the 'Rights of Man.' Kristeva explains how such a discourse inevitably fails to be universal because it depends on the national. Moreover, national rights are grounded in the "political rationalism" of the social contract, that is, on the assumption that human beings form national groups based on "'common sense' inspired by the Cartesian 'free will' and *cogito ergo sum* as the foundation of the national contract" (Kristeva *Strangers* 175). To have rights, then, one must be a moral agent, separate from others, who is capable of independent decision-making. This is the bourgeois subject that disavows any inherent irrationality. The failure of reason must be relegated to others: women and foreigners. Thus, one of Wollstonecraft's comments suggests that some of the people she meets in Sweden are less than human, lacking the Promethean spark that illuminates human reason: "Nothing, indeed, can equal the stupid obstinacy of some of these half alive beings, who seem to have been made by Prometheus, when the fire he stole from Heaven was so exhausted, that he could only spare a spark to give life, not animation, to the inert clay" (XVI:156).

Wollstonecraft's transformation of imperial discourse (discussed in Section III above) works toward destabilizing the foundation of nationhood. In fact, her suggestion that "a great accumulation of knowledge" will "destroy the factitious national characters which have been supposed permanent" agrees with Benedict Anderson's assertion that the nation is an "imagined community," fabricated and promoted for the sake of consolidating capitalist power and nationalist interests (V:93). Wollstonecraft's

admonition to "promote inquiry and discussion, instead of making those dogmatical assertions which only appear calculated to gird the human mind round with imaginary circles, like the paper globe which represents the one [we] inhabit" indicates that geopolitical boundaries (symbolized by the paper globe) produce (dogmatical) nationalisms that allow the human species to self-destruct in wars as princes send soldiers "to slaughter" (V:93, XXII:185).

Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft's nationalism and her critique of commerce and trade are marked by ambivalence. At various points, she articulates strong opposition toward consumer capitalism. She denigrates the women living in Helgeraac, Norway, for "having loaded themselves with finery," concluding, "Taste has not yet taught them to make any but an ostentatious display of wealth" and she scorns the grand bailiffs from Copenhagen for "aping a degree of courtly pride" (XI:133; XIII:144). Even among the lower classes, the sailors who are capable of observing "manners and customs" of other countries and bring them back for "home improvement" are too immersed in profit-making while the farmers smoke and drink too much, being confined to the perpetual ignorance of the small place they inhabit (IX:119). But, despite the remarkable disgust with which Wollstonecraft views extravagant consumerism, she seems to see trade as a necessary evil in order to secure the "future improvement of the world". Indeed, such an "improvement" would foster the development of natural resources and the health of the human species; although "the earth would perhaps be so perfectly cultivated," Wollstonecraft fears these (imperialist) activities might leave the earth insupportable for an expanding human population (XI:130). Similarly, her reluctant concessions to capitalist speculation are tempered by an organic metaphor, suggestive of a parasitical

relationship enacted by those who are concerned only with self-aggrandizement at the expense of 'natural' fellow-feeling; she writes, "mushroom fortunes have started up during the war; the men, indeed, seem a species of the fungus; and the insolent vulgarity which a sudden influx of wealth usually produces in common minds, is here very conspicuous..." (XXIII:191). Neverthless, a desire or "want" to accumulate goods will inspire industry, one side-effect of which is the stimulation of a pursuit of knowledge (XI:133). Wollstonecraft grudgingly concedes that "England and America owe their liberty to commerce" (XIV:150). Here, Wollstonecraft's previous efforts to distinguish between the consumption of "barbaric" goods and the more ephemeral consumption of "civilized" arts and literature is confounded. The "progress" of nations seems to go hand in hand with the spread of the British imperial system of capital exchange and "civilization" with the development of "taste."

With the expansion of the literary marketplace and bourgeois culture in Britain during the eighteenth century, travel literature could unify the nation by establishing the traveller's language and race in contradistinction to 'others.' Moreover, the genre of travel literature enjoyed immense popularity, particularly because it advanced the enterprising interests of commerce and trade. The Scandinavian *Letters* are not unaware of this connection between travel literature and capitalism. The idea of "national character" elaborated by Wollstonecraft in the Scandinavian *Letters* is intimately connected with the consolidation of bourgeois interests of the new trading classes. For, despite the narrator's unbridled attacks on the commercial speculation, the 'Author's Supplementary Notes' include Norwegian rixdollar figures converted to British pounds

and a list of national taxes, thus providing the reader with all the information he would need to know in order to invest in Norwegian enterprises.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note the paradox of a European nationalism that emerges in opposition to the continental wars of empire in turn being used to fuel a new form of expansionism, the colonizing imperialism of the nineteenth century (153). The contradictory strands of nationalist movements are present in the *Letters*, for although Wollstonecraft insists on maintaining national differences, she also believes in the superiority of central European nations over northern ones. Due to the inevitable march of progress, Scandinavian countries will reach the same degree of civilization as other places in Europe. However, the sort of imperialism advocated by Wollstonecraft – the spread of British cultural values and democratic political organization – rejects colonization as a method of "improvement." The *Letters* combine Edward Young's statement regarding original genius with one from Rousseau's treatise on natural education, *Emile* (1762): "God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil. He forces one soil to yield the products of another, one tree to bear another's fruit" (5). The result is the following anti-conquest sentiment:

> An ardent affection for the human race makes enthusiastic characters eager to produce alternation in law and governments prematurely. To render them useful and permanent, they must be the growth of each particular soil, and the gradual fruit of the ripening understanding of the nation, matured by time, not forced by an unnatural fermentation. ('Appendix' 198)

Battersby notes that the use of organic metaphors to describe the nation (and self-generating genius) emerges not only as part of the nationalist project but in reaction to the mechanical modes of production that are beginning to dominate English economy at the

end of the eighteenth century; "urban man began to feel intense nostalgia for the old way of life" (105).

The *Letters* consistently juxtapose organic metaphors with mechanical metaphors. When Wollstonecraft writes that the "idiot" King Christian VII of Denmark "is, in fact, merely a machine of the state, to subscribe the name of a king to the acts of the government, which, to avoid danger, have no value, unless countersigned by the prince royal" (XVIII:167), the implication is that mechanization destroys what makes human beings "human": the ability to feel and to reason. Fearing that British culture is becoming increasingly obsessed with commerce and trade, Wollstonecraft's nostalgia for the "golden age" is characterized by naturalized aesthetic 'tastes' and domestic 'duties.' Nevertheless, her ideological position remains highly conflicted, particularly as her faith in humanity waivers:

> The description I received of them carried me back to the fables of the golden age: independence and virtue; affluence without vice; cultivation of mind, without depravity of heart; with 'ever smiling liberty', the nymph of the mountain. – I want faith! My imagination hurries me forward to seek an asylum in such a retreat from all the disappointments I am threatened with; but reason drags me back, whispering that the world is still the world, and man the same compound of weakness and folly, who must occasionally excite love and disgust, admiration and contempt. (XIV:149)

The interpolated phrase from Milton's *L'Allegro* (1631) alludes to the nymphs Liberty and Mirth who reside in a natural world uncorrupted by "melancholy" (51.1). Thus, Wollstonecraft appropriates the pastoral tradition in order to idealize a pre-capitalist, agrarian society. Her primitivism, however, is undermined by the humanistic 'reason' that compels the narrator to elsewhere claim, "England and America owe their liberty to

commerce, which created a new species of power to undermine the feudal system" (XIV:150). Her attitude towards capitalism is certainly ambivalent, as the examples of landscape gardening, economic development, and domesticity, discussed below, will demonstrate. While Wollstonecraft wants to believe that mercantile capitalism will result in greater social equality, her observations of mercantile capitalism lead to a cynicism regarding its democratizing effects. Her reservations are uttered by the voice of a prophet, warning developing countries to "beware of the consequence; the tyranny of wealth is still more galling and debasing than that of rank (XIV:150). Wollstonecraft's critique of capitalism lies in what she perceives to be its similarities to the past and its failure to revolutionize the social structure: capitalism is the mere replacement of one hierarchical social system with another.

Wollstonecraft's engagement with the aesthetics of landscape gardening further reveals her ambivalence towards trade and commerce. The garden figures as a parable of personal and national development: "cultivation" weeds out "prejudices," but it also smoothes out the attributes that gives us our "original character" (III:80). Thus, Wollstonecraft does not want all cultures to assimilate by adopting European trappings; for example, she laments that "well-bred Swedes" speak French as a language because "it prevents the cultivation of their own" (III:29). Conformity to popular tastes and affectivity are like the "Italian colonnades" and "Venuses and Apollos" she sees in a Swedish garden: they go against what is intended by nature (III:80-81). This notion of an "uncommon taste" that "introduce[s] accommodations and ornaments analogous with the surrounding scene" contests the very basis of mercantile capitalism, trade between nations (III:80). Moreover, it does not support cultural imperialism in the sense of

erasing indigenous cultures by transposing British culture onto other places. But even though Wollstonecraft laments how aberrant an English garden appears among the other features of a Norwegian landscape, the *Letters* do not endorse cultural relativism. Her British 'taste' for the pastoral restores the scene to its natural character (XIII:124). National culture is figured as a garden that is carefully cultivated and landscaped in keeping with the natural surroundings, a sentiment which clearly is lacking among the Scandinavian gardeners. [39]

Here and elsewhere in the *Letters,* 'taste' is an ideologically loaded term used to regulate consumerism and propagate the values of British nationalism. According to Barker-Benfield, the multiple valences acquired by "taste" throughout the eighteenth-century can refer to both aesthetic values and finely-tuned sensibility; these supposedly universal qualities encapsulate the ideals of bourgeois capitalism and the civilizing mission that fuels British imperialism:

> The evident fact of women's appetite for consumer pleasures had always gone hand in hand with attempts to control it. This is the perspective from which one must view the culture of sensibility's insistence on a tasteful relationship with the good and services supplied by 'bourgeois consumerism'... 'Taste' represented one attempt to spiritualize or moralize the new possibilities or even turn them to reform. (205)

The *Letters* echo these ideas and suggest further that women acquire a certain social power by prescribing consumer habits and polite behaviour: "The women seem to take the lead in polishing the manners every where, that being the only way they can better their condition" (XXII:181). Despite Wollstonecraft's attempts to reconfigure 'taste' as a rational tempering of the appetites and to reconfigure sensibility as active moral virtue, it

[39] According to Holmes, Wollstonecraft writes when British taste displays "a growing interest in

is clear England is the center of civilization and the epitome of *good* taste. Scandinavian women especially bear the brunt of Wollstonecraft's anglocentric judgments. Treating these women as local exhibits of cultural norms, she detects grossness in the tastes of women in Risor who wear clothing that is fashionable rather than useful.

> The women were unaffected, but had not the natural grace which was often conspicuous at Tonsberg. There was even a striking difference in their dress; these having loaded themselves with finery, in the style of the sailors' girls of Hull or Portsmouth. Taste has not yet taught them to make any but an ostentatious display of wealth: yet I could perceive even here the first steps of the improvement which I am persuaded will make a very obvious progress in the course of half a century; and keep pace with the cultivation of the earth. (XXI:133)

This desire to see the "cultivation of the earth" paradoxically supports Wollstonecraft's landscaping aesthetics which, although valorizing the season "when nature wantons in her prime"(III:80),[40] nevertheless endorse the idea that human intervention can *improve* nature. Capitalism's enterprising spirit, however, when divorced from the doctrine of utility, can ravage nature. For instance, when Wollstonecraft sees a mine in Norway, she remarks,

> The view, immediately on the left, as we drove down the mountain, was almost spoilt by the depredations committed on the rocks to make alum. I did not know the process. – I only saw that the rocks looked red after they had been burnt; and regretted that

the indigenous English cottage garden" (281).

[40] This quotation represents the only instance in the Scandinavian *Letters* when Wollstonecraft's genders "nature" as female. I feel compelled to point this out because, during the course of my research, I noted that critics often assume that Wollstonecraft identifies with a 'Nature' that is specifically feminine (for examples, see Alexander, Moskal, Hust, and Holmes). Anne Mellor's description of what she calls the "masculine" and the "feminine" responses to sublime nature glosses over the fact that Burke's aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful gendered nature as both masculine and feminine. Although Mellor's readings of the sublime may apply more generally to the later (canonical) Romantics, it ignores the ways in which late eighteenth-century writers like Radcliffe and Wollstonecraft deal with the fact that, to quote Christine Battersby, "raw nature gained a *male* face, as it became more admired: hence contemporary references to the 'Father of nature'" (108). Battersby's interpolated reference is from Wollstonecraft's early work entitled "The Cave of Fancy" (1787) published in Volume 1 of *Works*.

> the operation should leave a quantity of rubbish, to introduce an image of human industry in the shape of destruction. (XIII:142)

Industrialization motivated solely by profit-seeking lacks restraint and rather than establish an equilibrium between the human species and the natural environment, can actually destroy nature.

Rejecting Rousseau's primitivistic "golden age of stupidity" when human beings lived solitary lives of blissful ignorance (IX:122), Wollstonecraft repeatedly professes her belief that human nature is *capable* of improvement. "Civilization" is a horizon projected into the future rather than lost in the past. Although the narrator wants to believe that the exploitation of natural resources will advance civilization – "the world requires…the hand of man to perfect it" (IX:121-2) – her Utopian belief in progress falters:

> The view of this wild coast, as we sailed along it, afforded me a continual subject for meditation. I anticipated the future improvement of the world, and observed how much man had still to do, with astonishing rapidity. I even carried my speculations so far as to advance a million or two of years to the moment when the earth would perhaps be so perfectly cultivated, and so completely peopled, as to render it necessary to inhabit every spot; yes; these bleak shores. Imagination went still farther, and pictured the state of man when the earth could no longer support him. Where was he to fly from universal famine? Do not smile: I really became distressed for these fellow creatures, yet unborn. The images fastened on me, and the world appeared a vast prison. (XI:130)

Morbidly envisioning the human species' outgrowth of nature's capacity to support it, this prophetic voice laments the consequence of unrestrained population growth. Despite this melancholy sentiment, implicit in Wollstonecraft's logic is that resource development and economic prosperity will produce the ideal conditions for human procreation.

Assuming heteronormativity, Wollstonecraft's version of a civil society in both the *Letters* and *The Rights of Woman* is founded on solid domestic ties,[41] not unlike the arrangement Rousseau describes in *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755):

> The first expansions of the human heart were the effects of a novel situation, which united husbands and wives, fathers and children, under one roof. The habit of living together soon gave rise to the finest feelings known to humanity, conjugal love and paternal affection. Every family became a little society, the more united because liberty and reciprocal attachment were the only bonds of its union. The sexes, whose manner of life had been hitherto the same, began now to adopt different ways of living. The women became more sedentary, and accustomed themselves to mind the hut and their children, while the men went abroad in search of their common subsistence. (88)

But as this passage makes apparent, capitalism reinforces a division of labour that relegates individuals to different spheres on the basis of sex. Consequently, it does not receive Wollstonecraft's unqualified approbation. Rather, the pursuit of wealth draws men away from the domestic sphere – and away from domestic soil – thereby thwarting the performance of patriotic and familial duties. Possessive individualism counters sociability and selfish interests replace communal interests.

> Men are strange machines; and their whole system of morality is in general held together by one grand principle, which loses its force the moment they allow themselves to break with impunity over the bounds which secured their self-respect. A man ceases to love humanity, and then individuals, as he advances in the chase after wealth (XXIII:193).

[41] For a discussion of the Wollstonecraft's association between mothering and nationhood, and a critique of this conservatism, see Sudan, "Mothering and National Identity in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft." Wollstonecraft's valorization of domesticity is complex. For example, Wollstonecraft's figures the nation as a mother caring for her children/citizenry. Johnson compares this to Burke's more sexist depiction of the nation as a beautiful woman to whom men owed chivalric loyalty. This suggests that Wollstonecraft's celebration of domesticity is paradoxically a demand for women's civil and political participation.

Wollstonecraft's anti-capitalist sentiments coincide with disillusionment over the prospect of domestic bliss she hopes to share with Imlay. Capitalism not only destroys nature but distorts human nature.

> Men entirely devoted to commerce never acquire, or lose, all taste and greatness of mind. An ostentatious display of wealth without elegance, and a greedy enjoyment of pleasure without sentiment, embrutes them till they term all virtue, of an heroic cast, romantic attempts at something above our nature; and anxiety about the welfare of others, a search after misery, in which we have no concern. But you will say that I am growing bitter, perhaps, personal. Ah! shall I whisper to you – that you – yourself, are strangely altered, since you have entered deeply into commerce – more than you are aware of – never allowing yourself to reflect, and keeping your mind, or rather passions in a continual state of agitation – Nature has given you talents, which lie dormant, or are wasted in ignoble pursuits – You will rouse yourself, and shake off the vile dust that obscures you, or my understanding, as well as my heart, deceives, me, egregiously – only tell me when? (XXIII:191)

Wollstonecraft efforts to naturalize domesticity coincide with the dehumanization of commercial speculators themselves: men are likened to "machines" and Imlay undergoes a *strange* alteration. Despite Wollstonecraft's mockery of Lavater (XXI:179), she believes in his philosophy that human faces reflect inner character as she notices "sensibility in the features and conversation of one of the gentlemen" while among a group of Norwegian lawyers she sees only "visages deformed by vice" (XXII:184, X:123). Furthermore, glue factories that blight the landscape provoke the following ironic comment: "But to commerce every thing must give way; profit and profit are the only speculations – 'double – double, toil and trouble'" (XXIV:194). Money-seekers not only deny natural human sympathies but they are actually transformed into monstrous Shakespearian witches. Wollstonecraft's rant against commerce sounds curiously like a biblical jeremiad as she uses proverbial phrases like "an adoration of property is the root

of all evil" and identifies with King Solomon's "weariness" (XIX:170; II:73). She even proclaims against travel: "This also is vanity!" (XXV:197). Indeed, anti-imperial sentiments are voiced in order to emphasize the importance of focusing on "home," whether family or country. Wollstonecraft interpolates the words of Milton, the British prophet who 'justifies' God's ways to the English, when she comments against the slave trade. Machine-like men no longer have a conscience and can inflict the most inhumane tortures on others:

> During my present journey, and whilst residing in France, I have had an opportunity of peeping behind the scenes of what are vulgarly termed great affairs, only to discover the mean machinery which has directed many transactions of moment. The sword has been merciful, compared with the depradations made on human life by contractors, and by the swarm of locusts who have battened on the pestilence they spread abroad. These men, like the owners of negro ships, never smell on their money the blood by which it has been gained, but sleep quietly in their beds, terming such occupations *lawful callings;* yet the lightning marks not their roofs, to thunder conviction on them, 'and to justify the ways of God to man.' (XXIV:195-6).

Whereas Milton's voice is ignored, Wollstonecraft insists on being heard as a prophet herself. She foresees the downfall of British culture if wars and capitalist exploitation continue, for "the interests of nations are bartered by speculating merchants" (XXIV:195). The narrator also proceeds to chastise her lover for pursuing wealth instead of making a home with her and their daughter:

> A man ceases to love humanity, and then individuals, as he advances in the chase after wealth; as one clashes with his interest, the other with his pleasures: to business, it is termed, every thing must give way; nay, is sacrificed; and all the endearing charities of citizen, husband, father, brother, become empty names. But – but what? Why, to snap the chain of thought, I must say farewell. Cassandra was not the only prophetess whose warning voice has

> been disregarded. How much easier it is to meet with love in the
> world, than affection! (XXIII:193) [42]

By identifying with the classical figure of Cassandra, the female mystic who predicts the fall of Troy but remains unheeded, Wollstonecraft is hardly adopting the voice of the sentimental heroine. Others may perceive her as mad, but she speaks the truth. She is a British "prophetess" whose gift sets her apart from others but is also profoundly isolating.

Wollstonecraft's own feelings of isolation are indicated by her sympathy for the French emigrants living in Hamburg. Despite being a supporter of the Revolution, she pities these former members of a fallen nobility. Referring to Dryden's compassionate account of King Darius in *Alexander's Feast* (1697), Wollstonecraft implicitly laments the transitory nature of life and the severity of a fate that has dislocated these people, herself also having been 'exiled' from France for being British and like Dryden's Darius

> Deserted at his utmost Need
> By those his former Bounty fed;
> On the bare Earth expos'd He lies,
> With not a Friend to close his Eyes.
> With down-cast Looks the joyless Victor sate,
> Revolving in his alter'd Soul
> The various Turns of Chance below;
> And, now and then, a Sigh he stole,
> And Tears began to flow. (199.80-88)

Wollstonecraft (sounding like Burke) contrasts the ancient principles of the French nobility and the superiority of its manners with the vulgar, middle-class upstarts, like Imlay, who profit from exploiting the losses of others during the Revolution. While the vices of the aristocracy stem from custom and ignorance, the crimes perpetrated by merchants and speculators are deliberate contrivances. In this way, both Wollstonecraft and the emigrants are figured as miserable victims of Imlay's designs.

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[42] This passage is one of only two extra-textual references that explicitly feminizes Wollstonecraft.

A wanderer, ostracized in her own country for her revolutionary politics and exiled from France for being British, Wollstonecraft feels the pain of being cut off from other human beings. Seeking solace in nature, she repeatedly anthropomorphizes rocks and trees:

> The continual recurrence of pine and fir groves, in the day, sometimes wearies the sight; but, in the evening, nothing can be more picturesque, or, more properly speaking, better calculated to produce poetical images. Passing through them, I have been struck with a mystic kind of reverence, and I did, as it were, homage to their venerable shadows. Not nymphs, but philosophers, seemed to inhabit them—ever musing; I could scarcely conceive that they were without some consciousness of existence—without a calm enjoyment of the pleasure they diffused. (IX:119)

As natural objects take on human characteristics, so Wollstonecraft imagines herself as part of nature. Unlike the merchants who metamorphose into machines, Wollstonecraft changes into a natural object:

> Sitting then in a little boat on the ocean, amidst strangers, with sorrow and care pressing hard on me, – buffeting me about from clime to clime, – I felt
>
> > *Like the lone shrub at random cast,*
> > *That sighs and trembles at each blast.* (X:126)

Quoting from Oliver Goldsmith's *The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society* (1764),[43] Wollstonecraft reinforces her diatribe against commerce, for in that poem, Goldsmith similarly laments that "As nature's ties decay,/ As duty, love and honour fail to sway,/ Fictitious bonds, the bonds of wealth and law,/ Still gather strength and force unwilling awe" (521-2.27-30). Not only identifying with nature but merging with it, Wollstonecraft conflates the human/animal opposition, thereby challenging the construction of a

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The other reference is to Lady Macbeth (discussed in Section V).

[43] This quotation is identified by Peter Swaab (18).

bourgeois subject whose ability to reason is what sets "him" apart from the rest of creation. In the eighteenth century, reason is considered an essential human faculty – what Pope calls "the God within the mind" (204) – that distinguishes men from brutes. Genius emerges as a secularized version of the *Genesis* story (and *Paradise Lost*) in which Adam's embodiment of the divine image sets him above the rest of creation. Genius is the spark that originates within the individual and yet, according to Edward Young, "has ever been supposed to partake of something divine" (quoted in Battersby 105). A genius is an Adamic figure, equipped with "god-like" attributes, who "frowningly surveys and observes his kingdom" (Battersby 139). Therefore, even as humanism claims that every man had the same innate potential and therefore, the same inherent rights, it simultaneously creates a way to naturalize class differences between men, and gender differences between men and women, by establishing a hierarchy based on 'genius.'

The gendering of genius, according to Battersby, is fraught with contradictions. The same (ill) logic that grants melancholy genius to men denies sublime reason to women. Frail female bodies are susceptible to madness but cannot express the genius or mystical frenzy also associated with nervous diseases. Thus, commenting on Lavater's philosophy of genius, Battersby notes that "Lavater's thoroughly domesticated and coy woman is permanently threatened by mental derangement" while women who express "'passion and threat'" rather than "'tender looks, tears, and sighs'" are "'no longer women, but abortions'" (139; Lavater quoted in Battersby 139). Male philosophers can only explain 'female genius' with reference to a hermaphroditic body. The anonymous essay entitled *Characterism, or the Modern Age display'd: being an Attempt to expose*

the pretended Virtues of both Sexes; with a Poetical Essay on each Character (1750) describes the "Female Pedant" as having "by her much reading spoil'd a good Pudding-maker and neglected those useful, tho' humble culinary Arts, more properly adapted to a female Genius, to make herself that prodigious uncouth kind of Hermaphrodite, a deeply-read Lady" (quoted in Nussbaum 151). It is not surprising, then, that Wollstonecraft, purporting to be such a 'female genius,' attempts to reunite passion and reason in a non-gendered subject; the bourgeois subject needs to be reconstructed in order to accommodate the enfranchisement of women. If women are inherently passionate creatures, then so is Wollstonecraft's universalized human subject: "We reason deeply, when we forcibly feel" (XIX:171). As Freud reinstates the "animal" passions to human subjectivity, Wollstonecraft deconstructs the animal/human dualism and insists on the passionate nature of human beings. Such an inclusion of the irrational or the feminine into the bourgeois subject produces a subject that is necessarily trans-gendered by eighteenth-century standards.

V. Uncanny I's: The Autobiographical "Hero"

The nature of subjectivity is a topic of ongoing scholarly debate throughout the eighteenth century. According to Felicity Nussbaum, increasing secularization leads to a crisis over the meaning of "identity." For example, Hume's controversial essays, "Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (1782), not only defend a person's moral right to commit suicide and challenge the religious doctrine of the immortality of the soul, but they take Lockean empiricism to an extreme by asserting that a belief in a coherent, unified self is nothing more than a belief in "the fiction of continued existence"

(quoted in Nussbaum 43). The various sense perceptions that constitute one's identity from moment to moment imply that the subject, like his temporal and successive perceptions, is in "perpetual flux and movement" (Hume quoted in Nussbaum 43). Nussbaum's study of eighteenth-century autobiographies do not inscribe Humean beliefs in a subject constantly threatened with disintegration but rather espouse the idea of stable subjecthood: "In sum, the eighteenth-century diary produces and reflects an individual who believes she or he is the source and center of meaning; it inscribes the dominant ideologies of empiricism and humanism while it also, through its discontinuous and fragmentary form, may disrupt the ideologies it seems to espouse" (28). The tendency for the form of autobiographical narratives to belie their stated aims is reflected in the narrator's "Advertisement":

> The writing travels, or memoirs, has ever been a pleasant employment; for vanity or sensibility always renders it interesting. In writing these desultory letters, I found I could not avoid being continually the first person - 'the little hero of each tale.', I tried to correct this fault, if it be one, for they were designed for publication; but in proportion as I arranged my thoughts, my letter, I found, became stiff and affected: I, therefore, determined to let my remarks and reflections flow unrestrained, as I perceived that I could not give a just description of what I saw, but by relating the effect different objects had produced on my mind and feelings, whilst the impression was still fresh. (62)

Transcribing the "association of ideas" produced by "new scenes," the narrator assumes the stability of the "I" in this passage (XIII:145, I:63). But the way in these "memoirs" depend on "desultory" narrative episodes – "tales" – suggests that, fundamentally, the *Letters* record "multiple and serial subject positions that may not add up to a coherent self" (Nussbaum 21). Moreover, the narrator's self-description as a "little hero" concedes that certain fictional motifs colour her accounts. This approach is not inconsistent with

the ideas presented by David Hume in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1748). Hume suggests that "identity" is nothing more than an imagined "quality" attributed to "different perceptions, and uniting them together"; the imagination, therefore, connects discrete, memorable perceptions in order to create "the fiction of continued existence" (quoted in Nussbaum 43). Although the autobiographical writer may attempt to explain or gloss the contradictions in his or her character, Nussbaum explains that the very form of the narrative thwarts such desires: "Dividing the self from the self, the diary sets out an alternative self to ponder. And by declaring that divided self textually, autobiography renders self-division increasingly commonplace and natural" (127).

Although autobiographical narrative claims to express the intellectual agency or 'original genius' of its writer, the language and style of melancholy writing (connected to genius, as discussed in Section IV above) nevertheless indicates a subject constantly embattled from within by a melancholy disruptiveness. The intertexts appearing in the *Letters* suggest that the text and the autobiographical writing subject are both affected by melancholy. For example, Wollstonecraft alludes to melancholy when she quotes from Pope's *Essay on Man* in the following passage:

> I have sometimes thought it a great misfortune for individuals to acquire a certain delicacy of sentiment, which often makes them weary of the common occurrences of life; yet it is this very delicacy of feeling and thinking which probably has produced most of the performances that have benefited mankind. It might with propriety, perhaps, be termed the malady of genius; the cause of that characteristic melancholy that 'grows with its growth, and strengthens with its strength' (XX:176)

Although Pope describes the importance of the passions coexisting with reason, he does not mention "melancholy." Wollstonecraft, however, reunites melancholy and genius as

does Edward Young who argues that genius is the "stranger within," the melancholic incorporation of an unknown 'other' into oneself (quoted in Battersby 104).

Facing Imlay's absence and loss, the autobiographical narrator of the *Letters* sets up the beloved object within the text, formalizing the melancholic ego-defense that incorporates the other, thus establishing a self-division that it constantly tries to suture through writing. The melancholic incorporation of the lost object into the subject creates a fundamentally ambivalent state of pleasure (through the perpetuation of the beloved object) and pain (through the remembrance of its irremediable loss). The implied addressee of the *Letters*, the recurring "you," is never named, indeed *cannot* be named, because he no longer possesses his name: Wollstonecraft *is* Imlay. And even as the name "Imlay" undergoes erasure in *Letters*, so does the signature "Wollstonecraft," for the subject that trangresses gender boundaries also troubles its very status as a subject. Refusing to name the object of the *Letters* as the object of her love, Wollstonecraft incorporates "Imlay" into her own subjectivity which produces a subject that is fundamentally divided, in conflict with itself: melancholic incorporation-introjection-projection enables Wollstonecraft (1) to produce a coherent narrative when speaking from "his" subject position; and (2) to nurture the illusion of Imlay's presence which manifests as a dialogue with/in herself (Kristeva *Black Sun* 11). The *Letters*, seemingly directed outward, in actuality represent the subject turned inward, which explains why their features have more in common with a journal than "sent" letters (dated, addressed, and signed). Moreover, the subject speaking as Imlay can only emerge through his displacement, a displacement that cannot be made permanent as long as he is still alive.

The subject-who-writes, therefore, breaks down pending a reunion with Imlay; the letters break off abruptly at the end of the journey.

Nussbaum claims that ideological contradictions "allow subjects to misrecognize themselves in prevailing ideologies and to intervene in producing new knowledge" (36). These misrecognitions or disidentifications reveal a subject's incomplete subjectivation. The narrator of the *Letters* comments on the elusive nature of self-knowledge:

> What a long time it requires to know ourselves; and yet almost every one has more of this knowledge than he is willing to own, even to himself. I cannot immediately determine whether I ought to rejoice at having turned over in this solitude a new page in the history of my own heart. (IX:122)

This passage analogizes subjectivity and textuality: the narrator views her life as a written "history" suggesting that the subject ("heart") is always already written or determined by discourse. An incorporative melancholic style and affective sentimentality provide several discursive modes for the narrator of the *Letters* to both convey her experiences and her skepticism regarding knowledge and the efficacy of linguistic representation. The resulting subject may be racked with self-doubt but remains faithful to her melancholy condition. In general, sentimental fiction, with its fragmented narration and slippage between gender roles tends to point to its own lack, to the narrator's inability to convey an experience or how his feelings remain inexplicable even to himself. For a critic, however, this self-reflexivity is not a failed account but a more faithful portrayal of the unstable subject. Nevertheless, the sentimental hero – the feminized man of feeling in *A Sentimental Journey* or the masculinized woman of feeling in the Scandinavian *Letters* – must be suitably self-deprecating if s/he is not to unravel the social fabric knit together by sexual difference.

The relationship between the language of melancholy and gender transgression in sentimental fiction relates interestingly to Judith Butler's explanation of "melancholy gender" in *The Psychic Life of Power,* which asserts that the process through which a gendered subject emerges entails a disavowal of homosexual desire (132-150). In other words, the subject's interpellation into a heterosexual economy follows the same mechanisms of unacknowledged loss and repeated acts of repudiation characteristic of melancholia. Acknowledged melancholy allows for gender cross-identifications. Consequently, melancholy narrative, which suggests that the subject can at least *speak* its loss, constructs the pathology of a subject without a stable gender position (and thus, without a stable subjectivity). According to Kristeva, "a written melancholia surely has little in common with the institutionalized stupor that bears the same name" (*Black Sun* 8). By articulating an unstable or melancholic subjectivity, a writer not only develops a means of representation that counters mute depression but validates his or her own genius – the innate and ephemeral quality that unifies the vacillating subject. The resolution, however, required to completely dispel melancholy is the assumption of a stable and appropriate gender position. For example, Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* problematizes gender only to reiterate the protagonist's undeniable heterosexuality (the novel closes with Yorick's seduction of the Fille de Chambre). Similarly, Wollstonecraft's *Letters* end by having the female protagonist succumb to a melancholy silence. Her final self-objectification in the signature "Mary – [blank]," leaves her without a patronymic alliance and, therefore, unable to speak/write within a phallocentric symbolic economy. This reinforcement of binary gender roles makes inevitable the return of melancholic disposition and makes impermanent any feelings of plenitude or stability.

According to Nussbaum, the divided subject is a common trope in eighteenth-century autobiographies which figure the narrative as a conversation between more than one 'self,' which together form the subject. An example of such a division occurs in Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782) when the narrator writes, "Let me give myself over entirely to the pleasure of conversing with my soul, since this is the only pleasure that men cannot take away from me"(32). Because the illusion of the subject's integrity depends on the projection outward of the other or fixation on an object, the "solitary" writer imagines his or her readers as textually present, although physically absent. Indeed, both the *Reveries* and the *Letters* engage with the problems faced by a subject who feels exiled and maligned by others, by a subject who desires autonomy more than anything else but cannot attain it.[44]

Wollstonecraft's ambivalent attitude towards solitude is encapsulated by the following passage:

> I am, my friend, more and more convinced that a metropolis, or an abode absolutely solitary, is the best calculated for the improvement of the heart, as well as the understanding; whether we desire to become acquainted with man, nature, or ourselves. Mixing with mankind, we are obliged to examine our prejudices, and often imperceptibly lose, as we analyze them. And in the country, growing intimate with nature, a thousand little circumstances, unseen by vulgar eyes, give birth to sentiments dear to the imagination, and inquiries which expand the soul, particularly when cultivation has not smoothed into insipidity all its original character. (III:79-80)

Wollstonecraft's valorization of solitude seems disingenuous amidst an explanation directed to her "friend." In a later passage, Wollstonecraft describes the temporal Norwegian summer as "passing sweet," a citation from William Cowper's poem, "The

[44] For a discussion of Rousseau's *Reveries* with respect to the problem of solitude, see Davis

Retirement," in which the poet expresses a desire for a "friend in my retreat" (396.741). Indeed, solitude seems to Wollstonecraft a living death: "I am your's, wishing that the temporary death of absence may not endure longer than is absolutely necessary" (VII:108). The *Letters* are full of melancholy images of sterility, death, and decay. The narrator cannot endure the thought of being without social ties. Wollstonecraft's strategy for dealing with the literal or figurative deaths of her loved one is to "embalm" them in her "heart" (VII:109). Although acknowledging dependence on others makes the subject more vulnerable to feelings of pleasure and pain, the soul cannot realize a sense of individuated completeness without such connections. Moreover, severed ties may fatally injure the soul: "I then supped with my companions, with whom I was soon after to part for ever – always a melancholy, death-like idea – a sort of separation of soul; for all the regret which follows those from whom fate separates us, seems to be something torn from ourselves" (XXII:183). Solitude represents the potential independence sought by the subject but inevitably threatens the very basis of subjectivity by removing the requisite otherness upon which the subject is founded. This pattern of seeking and spurning others is repeated throughout the *Letters*:

> How frequently has melancholy and even mysanthropy taken possession of me, when the world has disgusted me, and friends have proved unkind. I have then considered myself as a particle broken off from the grand mass of mankind; – I was alone, till some involuntary sympathetic emotion, like the attraction of adhesion, made me feel that I was still a part of a mighty whole, from which I could not sever myself – not, perhaps, for the reflection has been carried very far, by snapping the thread of an existence which loses its charms in proportion as the cruel experience of life stops or poisons the current of the heart (I:69-70).

(1999), especially pages 269-71.

In this passage, melancholy feelings are related to the subject's dependence on others and a corresponding lack of agency despite the narrator's claim that her solitary situation is volitional. Alone, the subject is alienated from the structures that support its existence; thus disillusioned, it attempts to communicate with an/other in order to reestablish the fantasy of the self.

The dialogue constructed by the *Letters* opens up the possibility for the writer not only to address her beloved but to speak from his point of view. This narrative stance allows Wollstonecraft to distance her 'self' from herself and to describe scenes in which she presents herself as an object before the readers' gaze. Granqvist describes the narrative technique as follows: "Regularly [Wollstonecraft] positions herself in front of her own creation, to admire it or comment on it, thus dislodging the narrative voice from her authored pictorial scene. This operation makes it also possible for her to enter the scene and become its chief participant or protagonist, its pining heroine" (22). As Granqvist suggests, the discourse of landscape aesthetics enables the construction of the narrator's perception "within the strict frame of a foreground, a middle ground and a background, precisely as a landscape painter would do" (22). To develop these ideas further, it becomes clear that the narrative movement inscribed by these descriptive passages indicates the movement from masculine to feminine subject positions, thereby revealing the gender ideology underlying aesthetic discourses. In the aesthetic philosophies of Burke and Kant, for example, the viewer of the landscape is unequivocably male. John Pipkin argues that the "rhetorical maneuvers" which establish the sublime as manifest masculinity and the province of men renders "female experiences and articulations of sublimity as 'unnatural'" (598). Women are present in aesthetic

discourses only in so far as they remain sexualized objects within a heterosexist landscape. This is perhaps no where more apparent than in Burke's impassioned description of the eyes wandering over the neck and breasts of a beautiful woman: "[T]he smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried" (*Enquiry* 105). Seeking out novel combinations of images, and the feelings of pain and pleasure they inspire, is the objective of the sentimental traveller. This sentimental traveller perceives in nature and humanity both the sublime and the beautiful and exhibits a sensibility akin to the *man* of feeling since dominant ideology claims that women are incapable of such heightened experiences of reasonable passion.

The typical Lockean investment in the procurement of knowledge/power through sight is evident in the Scandinavian *Letters*. Wollstonecraft repeatedly celebrates the superiority of the sentimental response with statements like the following: "And, now I recollect, it seems to me that the most genial and humane characters I have met with in life, were most alive to the sentiments inspired by tranquil country scenes" (XI:131-2). Both nature and human beings are objects; within a visual economy, all objects represent resources – creative capital.[45] When the narrator of the *Letters* adopts a male traveller's point of view and the scopophilia of sentimental literature, the resulting narrative splits off the "I" from the female protagonist, "Mary," who is then constructed by the writing subject as the conventional female object of the sentimental gaze.

[45] Thomas Weiskel describes the sublime in similar terms: "We hear in the background of the Romantic sublime the grand confidence of a heady imperialism, now superannuated as ethic or state of mind – a kind of spiritual capitalism, enjoining a pursuit of the infinitude of the private self" (6).

There is a remarkable incident in the *Letters* during which the gaze of the narrator/spectator is directed onto the female protagonist at the expense of turning her into a spectacle. In Letter VI, Wollstonecraft begins by representing the curiosity of the Norwegians who "do not frequently see travellers," particularly "a woman, coming alone" (96). Yet she construes their hospitality as a kind of reverence, likening herself to a divine messenger: "And I know not whether my weariness gave me a look of peculiar delicacy; but they approached to assist me, and enquire after my wants, as if they were afraid to hurt, and wished to protect me. The sympathy I inspired, thus dropping down from the clouds in a strange land, affected me more than it would have done, had not my spirits been harassed by various causes" (VI:97). Wollstonecraft's condescending tone dramatically changes, however, when she perceives herself and her company (including a half-drunk driver) being watched by a group of people. Wollstonecraft is no longer an angelic presence being worshipped by the natives; rather she is an object of *their* observation. Her position of power over the Norwegians is further inverted by her own appearance, in which she finds "something so grotesque " (VI:56). Wollstonecraft shares in what she perceives to be the revulsion of the watchers and paints a vivid tableau incorporating this emotional response to seeing herself from the point-of-view of the "gentleman-like man" (VI:56). Needless to say, Wollstonecraft's horror and self-disgust increases from a class consciousness, so much so that being under the eyes of the Norwegian "man" (who does not quite qualifying as a "gentleman") makes her "shrink" into herself. Rendered totally powerless, her last resort is to burst into laughter at her own expense, expecting the "man" and her readers to do the same.

When sentimental rhetoric is employed in the *Letters*, however, it is typically spoken from the subject position of the male traveller not the helpless heroine. The epistle-writer presents herself as the model of 'masculine' moral sensibility, thereby educating Imlay and her readers in the appropriate sentimental responses.[46] The dialogic narrative enables the splitting of the subject and also forces the narrator to confront a female-identified self. This confrontation is more often than not antagonistic as the narrator ventriloquizes dominant ideology in her depictions of femininity, manifest as the narrator's hostility toward Scandinavian women. Wollstonecraft's descriptions of grotesque and repulsive Scandinavian women contrast dramatically with her effusive, even lustful, descriptions of northern beauties.

> The Swedish ladies exercise neither [body nor mind] sufficiently; of course, grow very fat at an early age; and when they have not this downy appearance, a comfortable idea, you will say, in a cold climate, they are not remarkable for fine forms. They have, however, mostly fine complexions; but indolence makes the lily soon displace the rose. The quantity of coffee, spices, and other things of that kind, with want of care, almost universally spoil their teeth, which contrast but ill with their ruby lips (IV:83).
>
> I have before mentioned to you the lilies of the north, I might have added, water lilies, for the complexion of many, even of the young women seem to be bleached on the bosom of snow. But in this youthful circle the roses bloomed with all their wonted freshness, and I wondered from whence the fire was stolen which sparkled in their fine blue eyes. (V:90-1)

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[46] Throughout the *Letters to Imlay,* Wollstonecraft professes over and over her belief that Imlay is a 'man of feeling' but his true nature has been increasingly distorted by commerce and trade. Her persistent desire to see expressions of his love for her are tied to her efforts to awaken his heart to a more expansive sensibility. See in particular *Works* 373-4, 376-7, 387-8.

These extreme responses narrate the subject's response to its abject; adopting the viewpoint of a man, Wollstonecraft sees women as either loathsome or fascinating.[47] In the latter case, her descriptions suggest an eroticism characteristic of Sternesque sentimental fiction: "These women...gathered round me – sung to me – and one of the prettiest, to whom I gave my hand, with some degree of cordiality, to meet the glance of her eyes, kissed me very affectionately" (VIII:113). Adopting the man of feeling's point of view allows Wollstonecraft to express homoerotic desire.

If subjected to the roaming and consuming eyes of the male gaze, the appropriate female response is a modest retreat. Vulnerable when exposed, the *Letters'* narrator indulges in the fantasy of the unseen watcher – Dryden's "Lady in the Arbour" who with "Ease" could see "all that pass'd without" but who "no Foreign Eye...could espy" (327:ll.86-88). The solitary woman must guard against the dangers of male predation, particularly when she ventures onto the heath without an escort for protection:

> Here I have frequently strayed, sovereign of the waste, I seldom met any human creature; and sometimes, reclining on the mossy down, under the shelter of a rock, the prattling of the sea amongst the pebbles has lulled me to sleep - no fear of any rude satyr's approaching to interrupt my repose. Balmy were the slumbers, and soft the gales, that refreshed me, when I awoke to follow, with an eye vaguely curious, the white sails, as they turned the cliffs, or seemed to take shelter under the pines which covered the little islands that so gracefully rose to render the terrific ocean beautiful (XIII:110).

[47] Per Nystrom recounts how Jacques-Louis de la Tocnaye travelling in Sweden a few years after Wollstonecraft reported that that the ladies in Gothenburg were "scandalised" by Wollstonecraft's book (Nystrom 47; see also Holmes 37). Holmes translates another of de la Tocnaye's comments on Wollstonecraft as follows: "In her book [Mary Wollstonecraft] often makes use of that special new vocabulary which is deemed *sentimental*, the grotesque linguistic garb adapted from Lawrence Sterne, and the new-fangled 'moonlight and apparitions' style of writing" (37).

Such passages reveal the splitting of the subject induced by gendered discourses. Presenting herself as an object of pity– an example of Burke's "beauty in distress"– evokes sympathetic responses from readers of the *Letters*. The narrator may not be calculating a seduction of her readers, as Godwin suggests in the *Memoirs,* but the sentimental economy transposed in the *Letters* makes inevitable the dramatization of the plight of a woman abandoned by her lover. The *Letters to Imlay* contain sentimental tableaux celebrating domestic bliss – sketches of husband, wife, and children sitting by the hearth (*Works* 6.XIV:380) – where as the Scandinavian journal paints domestic scenes with the melancholy nostalgia of one whose dream has been shattered:

> It was Saturday, and the evening was uncommonly serene. In the villages I every where saw preparations for Sunday; and I passed by a little car loaded with rye, that presented, for the pencil and heart, the sweetest picture of a harvest home I had ever beheld! A little girl was mounted a straddle on a shaggy horse, brandishing a stick over its head; the father was walking at the side of the car with a child in his arms, who must have come to meet him with tottering steps, the little creature was stretching out its arms to cling around his neck; and a boy, just above petticoats, was labouring hard, with a fork, behind, to keep the sheaves from falling.
>
> My eyes followed them to the cottage, and an involuntary sigh whispered to my heart, that, I envied the mother, much as I dislike cooking, who was preparing their pottage. I was returning to my babe, who may never experience a father's care or tenderness. The bosom that nurtured her, heaved with a pang at the thought which only an unhappy mother could feel. (XVI:158)

In the *Letters,* the protagonist shifts between reiterating and contesting the sentimental, epistolary tradition of the abandoned heroine writing letters to her lover, a tradition that

represents one of the few modes of discourse constitutive of a specifically female subjectivity, but remains fully invested in a heterosexual status quo.[48]

The absence of signature throughout the *Letters* as well as the narrator's uneasy allusions to sentimental fiction signal a resistance to amorous epistolary discourse. This resistance is evident in the following passage when Wollstonecraft anticipates and protests the reader's paternalistic response. The introspective voice rationalizes the persistence of Wollstonecraft's affection despite being aware of how she has been misused by others by claiming that passion is natural.

> You have sometimes wondered, my dear friend, at the extreme affection of my nature – But such is the temperature of my soul – It is not the vivacity of youth, the hey-day of existence. For years have I endeavoured to calm an impetuous tide – labouring to make my feelings take an orderly course. – It was striving against the stream. – I must love and admire with warmth, or I sink into sadness. Tokens of love which I have received have rapt me in Elysium – purifying the heart they enchanted. – My bosom still glows. – Do not saucily ask, repeating Sterne's questions, 'Maria, is it still so warm!' Sufficiently, O my God! has it been chilled by sorrow and unkindness – still nature will prevail – and if I blush at recollecting past enjoyment, it is the rosy hue of pleasure heightened by modesty; for the blush of modesty and shame are as distinct as the emotions by which they are produced.[49] (VIII:111)

In this passage, Wollstonecraft quotes directly from Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), alluding to the passage in which the protagonist, Yorick, the self-proclaimed "Knight of the Woeful Countenance, in quest of

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[48] Both the positive and negative ramifications of reading "the letter as a 'feminine' genre" is discussed in Favret (12-24).

[49] Eleanor Ty's reading of the *Letters* suggests that such passages reveal the semiotic (read feminine) utterance breaking through the symbolic. But there is no reason to assume that the broken style of such addresses – the interruptions, pauses, and abundance of dashes – is particularly feminine. In fact, it is very similar to the conversational style employed by Sterne in *A Sentimental Journey.* Nevertheless, the overtone of pious didacticism combined with pitiful lament is also characteristic of the epistolary discourses of desire described by Linda Kauffman (177).

melancholy adventures," searches for Maria, the poor girl who has lost her senses because she is abandoned by a faithless lover (88). The way in which Wollstonecraft interpolates the quotation is particularly interesting because she seems to identify with the character Maria as a victim of others' insensitivity, yet she also resists the infantilization of irrational femininity implicit in Yorick's description of his encounter with Maria:

> I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe [the tears] away as they fell, with my handkerchief. I then steep'd it in my own, and then in hers, and then in mine, and then I wip'd hers again, and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion...
>
> Nature melted within me, as I utter'd this; and Maria observing as I took out my handkerchief, that it was steep'd too much already to be of much use, would needs go wash it in the stream. And where will you dry it, Maria? said I. I'll dry it in my bosom, said she; 'twill do me good.
>
> And is your heart still so warm, Maria? said I.
>
> I touched upon the string on which hung all her sorrows. She look'd with wistful disorder for some time in my face; and then without saying any thing, took her pipe, and play'd her service to the Virgin. The string I had touch'd ceased to vibrate: in a moment or two Maria returned to herself, let her pipe fall, and rose up. (91)

This scene from Sterne repeats the sentimental pattern of objectifying and eroticizing a pitiful figure and engaging in sympathetic tearful episodes, seemingly unaware of a dependence on the exploitation of others' suffering.

A later episode in the *Letters* repeats Yorick's encounter with Maria but suggests a difference. Rather than divulging in self-indulgent tears and paternalistic fantasies, Wollstonecraft admires the woman's resilience. The difference between Wollstonecraft and the typical male traveller is analogous to the difference between a sympathetic

response à la Sterne and an empathetic response, with "sympathy" understood as "a (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another, or attract or tend towards each other" and "empathy" as "the power of projecting one's own personality into, and so fully understanding, the object of contemplation." [50] According to Syndy McMillen Conger, it is precisely a "crafted blend of the affective and the cognitive" in the *Letters* that allows for the dialectical shift "between observer and observed" (*Mary Wollstonecraft* 153). The consolidation of the writing subject's identification with masculinity is undermined by her partial identification with other women. Struggling to disavow of her femininity, however, these identifications are typically oblique and always temporal. Nevertheless, they do allow for the blurring of the distinction between self and other.

If a female writer can only assume a coherent, unified subject position by repudiating her sex, then it should not be surprising that moments of empathy are rare in the *Letters*. However, such moments indicate that the process of repudiation is never complete and must be acted out time and again. When self/other, subject/object oppositions approach collapse, the woman writer's repudiated female identity returns. Such a return allows for a temporary empathetic response such as the one described below:

> A young woman, who is wet nurse to the mistress of the inn where I lodge, receives only twelve dollars a year, and pays ten for the nursing of her own child; the father had run away to get clear of the expense. There was something in this most painful state of widowhood which excited my compassion, and led me to reflections on the instability of the most flattering plans of happiness, that were painful in the extreme, till I was ready to ask

[50] Definitions from *The Oxford Universal Dictionary* (2110, 601).

> whether this world was not created to exhibit every possible combination of wretchedness. I asked these questions of a heart writhing with anguish, whilst I listened to a melancholy ditty sung by this poor girl. It was too early for thee to be abandoned, thought I, and I hastened out of the house, to take my solitary evening's walk – And here I am again, to talk of any thing, but the pangs arising from the discovery of estranged affection, and the lonely sadness of a deserted heart (VIII:114-15).

The quixotic, satirical tone characteristic of Sterne is replaced by a kind of poignant melancholy. Nevertheless, what evokes the empathetic response from Wollstonecraft remains unspoken; the identification remains incomplete. The narrator denies the possibility that she *is* the young woman abandoned by her lover.[51]

Elaine Showalter's study of nineteenth-century madwomen suggests that the "victimized madwoman" becomes a stock character in eighteenth-century novels and later Romantic writings: "Late-eighteenth-century novelists depicted the madwoman as the victim of parental tyranny and male oppression, and as an object of enlightened sensibility; thus Henry Mackenzie's man of feeling weeps over a madwoman he sees in Bedlam" (10).[52] Underpinning the representations of madwomen is the unquestioned legacy of medieval humoural theory, namely that innate sexual and anatomical differences made women more susceptible to madness than men. Not surprisingly, Showalter traces such representation back to the figure of Shakespeare's Ophelia. The

[51] This is fully consistent with Freud's claim that "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" ("Mourning" 245). Kristeva describes the melancholia that refuses to even articulate the loss in words, "denial," and the melancholia that disavows of the loss, "negation" (*Black Sun* 44).

[52] Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* argues that the Age of Reason coincides with the institutionalization of "madness." At the end of the eighteenth century, the schism between reason and passion widens and madness emerges as a disorder that needs to be studied and feared. The "insane" are viewed as a threat to the order and stability of society; this justifies their confinement. Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel, *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, deals with a

constant allusions to Hamlet and Ophelia throughout sentimental and Romantic literature reinforce a sexual dichotomy,[53] for Hamlet's melancholy is characterized as "universalized metaphysical distress" while the suicidal Ophelia epitomizes "the feminine and the irrational" (Showalter 11).

There are several indications that the narrator of the *Letters* refuses to identify with the abandoned Ophelia, the quintessential sentimental heroine, this refusal being but a manifestation of the denial characteristic of melancholia. Clinging to rationality, she also contests the ruminations of the mad and suicidal Werther who states, "the life of man is but a dream" (Goethe 9).

> I suffered the boat to be carried along by the current, indulging a pleasing forgetfulness, or fallacious hopes. – How fallacious! yet, without hope, what is to sustain life, but the fear of annihilation – the only thing of which I have ever felt dread – I cannot bear to think of being no more – of losing myself – though existence is often but a painful consciousness of misery; nay, it appears to me impossible that I should cease to exist, or that this active, restless spirit, equally alive to joy and sorrow, should only be organized dust – ready to fly abroad the moment the spring snaps, or the spark goes out, which kept it together. Surely something resides in this heart that is not perishable – and life is more than a dream. (VIII:112)

The narrator's efforts to stay reasonable despite her melancholy emotions produce contradictions. For example, the above passage maintains optimistic "hopes" by

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female protagonist who is imprisoned in an asylum by her husband for failing to behave like a proper wife. See *Works,* Vol.1.

[53] Sterne's Yorick, for instance, is named after the dead jester in *Hamlet;* Shakespeare's play is used with comical intent as an intertext throughout *A Sentimental Journey* (see particularly 51, 64-68). In Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), the protagonist tells the story of a young girl who drowns herself after being abandoned by her lover (34-5). Furthermore, Jonathan Bate describes the 1790s and early 1800s as "the age of Bardolatry," arguing that "while Milton was profoundly important, especially in matters of politics and prophecy, it was above all Shakespeare who provided the Romantics…with 'basic analogies for the poet and his poem', with crucial 'tenets of poetical theory' and, most importantly, with raw materials for poetic practice" (6, 2). Holmes also makes the following comment: "The great vogue for

asserting the narrator's belief in the immortality of her soul; this belief, however, provides a rationale for committing suicide: Werther also justifies suicide by figuring it as the release of "imprisoned soul" into eternal "bliss" (Goethe 70).

Elsewhere in the *Letters,* Wollstonecraft compares herself to the afflicted King Lear. Appearing in Wollstonecraft's footnote to Letter XV is the citation from Shakespeare's play: "When the mind's free,/ The body's delicate" (III.iv.11-12). Lear speaks these lines while he is wandering over the heath; the "tempest" in his mind makes him insensible to the "contentious storm" that rages around him (III.iv.12, 6). In the text of the *Letters*, Wollstonecraft writes, "My imagination has never yet severed me from my grief – and my mind has seldom been so free as to allow my body to be delicate" (XV:151). Wollstonecraft's interpolation suggests a wish for the mental freedom and calm that accompanies Lear's later madness; instead she remains embroiled in the psychical turmoil caused by her melancholic loss. Although the narrator describes herself as "musing almost to madness" (VI:97), she still rejects the idea that she could be insane:

> How much of the virtue, which appears in the world, is put on for the world! And how little dictated by self respect - so little, that I am ready to repeat the old question - and ask, where is truth or rather principle to be found? These are, perhaps, the vapourings of a heart ill at ease - the effusions of a sensibility wounded almost to madness. - But enough of this - we will discuss the subject in another state of existence - where truth and justice will reign. How cruel are the injuries which make us quarrel with human nature! - At present black melancholy hovers round my footsteps; and sorrow sheds a mildew over all the future prospects which hope no longer gilds. (XIII:141)

Hamlet, and identifying oneself with the Prince, is a Romantic phenomenon, well expressed in the Shakespearian lectures of Coleridge (1811-12) and Hazlitt (1817)" (293).

By referring to "melancholy," the narrator aligns herself with Shakespeare's melancholic characters, thus rationalizing and masculinizing her grief by adopting the voice of the tragic hero. *Hamlet* does indeed seem an appropriate intertext for the melancholy narrator who visits Elsinore on her way through Denmark and writes,

> My oppressed heart too often sighs out,
>
> *How dull, flat, and unprofitable*
> *Are to me all the usages of this world –*
> *That it should come to this! –* (XXI:181)

Wollstonecraft again alludes to Hamlet's "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (III.i.66) while ventriloquizing Jaques' melancholy "All the world's a stage" from *As You Like It* (II.vii.139):

> The sight of the presence-chamber, and of the canopy to shade the *fauteuil,* which aped a throne, made me smile. All the world is a stage, thought I; and few are there in it who do not play the part they have learnt by rote; and those who do not, seem marks set up to be pelted at by fortune; or rather as sign-posts, which point out the road to others, whilst forced to stand still themselves amidst the mud and dust. (XXII:186)

By appropriating the voice of Shakespeare's male characters and by lending tragic weight to her situation, Wollstonecraft resists the sentimental trivialization of her melancholy circumstances. She also garners the authority of Shakespeare's genius, claiming that she is a sign-post – the "first of a new genus" – whose brilliant foresight is not appreciated. It is ironic, however, that she criticizes others for playing the parts they learn "by rote" in the midst of the phrases that she is quoting "by rote" (she often misquotes the lines she appropriates from Shakespeare). While a person has no choice but to perform the gender roles prescribed by existing discourses, Wollstonecraft will play out the roles designated as 'male' rather than female – an act of defiance against authority that does indeed point

in new directions. But perhaps Wollstonecraft protests too much against femininity and madness. Only once does Wollstonecraft refer to a female character from Shakespeare: the hallucinating Lady Macbeth who suffers from "thick-coming fancies" (V.iii.37). She cites from *Macbeth* in order to distance herself from the female character:

> At Gothenburg I shall embrace my *Fannikin;* probably she will not know me again – and I shall be hurt if she do not. How childish is this! still it is a natural feeling. I would not permit myself to indulge the 'thick coming fears' of fondness, whilst I was detained by business. (XII:136)

Wollstonecraft associates what should be the most "natural feeling" of anxious "fondness" for one's own child with the most unnatural murderess, Lady Macbeth. But even as Wollstonecraft denies to herself indulgence in irrational "fears," she also denies maternal affection, thereby 'unsexing' herself much like Lady Macbeth.

Alternately accepting or denying the similarities between herself and other female *or* male subjects with no apparent consistency, the narrator of the *Letters* ends up constructing a strange subject and an even stranger subjective reality. For example, Wollstonecraft frequently blurs the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, Wollstonecraft writes, "But these evanescent graces seemed the effect of enchantment; and I imperceptibly breathed softly, lest I should destroy what was real, yet looked so like the creation of fancy. Dryden's fable of the flower and the leaf was not a more poetical reverie" (X:123). Referring to Dryden's imagery in order to describe what she sees, Wollstonecraft can only describe the material world in terms derived from literature. By projecting onto nature certain mystical qualities, the tangible world is invested with a symbolic power that surpasses even the symbolic itself – unbelievably real, the scene becomes more unreal ("poetical") than the un-real. Implicit in Wollstonecraft's logic is

that every "poetical reverie," whether describing a visible object or not, becomes a "real" world in itself and conversely, the visual embodies or reproduces discourse. This act that inverts the normative dualism of fact versus fiction works to simultaneously literalize the image/imagination and (re)image/imagine the literal. This conflation of the real and the imagined exemplifies what Freud refers to as the "uncanny." Like the severed hand that comes to life, when "a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes," the result is uncanniness ("The 'Uncanny'" 367). The uncanny, according to Julia Kristeva in *Stranger to Ourselves,* unsettles the foundation of bourgeois rationalism by making "real" what must be relegated to the realm of irrationality – fantasy, perversion, and otherness. Terry Castle, in *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny,* also draws out parallels between the scientific and rational pursuits of the Enlightenment and the development of the eighteenth-century Gothic. The bourgeois subject thereby establishes his own "sanity" or normativity in contradistinction to "madness." The reactionary exclusion of passion from the bourgeois subject coincides with the extreme reaction against the unnatural horrors of the French Revolution and the 'revolutionary' cult of sensibility. The feminization of sensibility casts women as always already non-rational, inferior, insane; a woman who 'pretends' to reason cannot be a real woman after all. Phyllis Rooney argues that "the politics of 'rational' discourse has been set up in ways that still subtly but powerfully inhibit the voice and agency of women" and that "reason has regularly been portrayed and understood in terms of images and metaphors that involve the exclusion of some element – body, passion, nature, instinct – that is cast as 'feminine'" (77). Thus, asymmetric gender relations and the ideology of sexual difference create dilemmas for women writers

who do not admit their feminine inferiority. In the *Letters,* the narrator's assumption of a masculine subject position exacts a psychological toll by requiring the abjection of her femaleness. This is paradoxically both liberating (rational) and debilitating (anti-feminine) for the female author. Castle writes, "The more we seek enlightenment, the more alienating our world becomes; the more we seek to free ourselves, Houdini-like, from the coils of superstition, mystery, and magic, the more tightly, paradoxically, the uncanny holds us in its grip" (*Female Thermometer*15). In the cases of the *Letters,* the more masculinized the narrator becomes, the more she is haunted by figures of the feminine.

Richard Holmes comments that the *Letters* are "a brilliant piece of emotional projection" (37). He claims that Wollstonecraft draws a portrait of Imlay "that is both haunting and convincing": "Imlay is slowly transformed into her demon-lover, and his shadow comes to brood over the Scandinavian countryside…he tempts her over dizzy gulfs or the edge of precipitous waterfalls; he tortures her with the delusive promises of love and treasure and happiness" (35-6). Later, Holmes qualifies this claim, stating, "I do not want to over-emphasize this aspect; it is nothing more than a mist that occasionally thickens around the largely factual and inquiring style of the narrative" (35-6). Nonetheless, this critical observation is one of the most astute comments made on the text. Imlay *is* present in the text; but what Holmes' assumes to be a ghost-like character hovering around Wollstonecraft is actually the imago of Imlay that resides in her own ego having undergone melancholic incorporation. Wollstonecraft does not project Imlay outside herself; rather the repudiated feminine takes the shape of a spectralized other. That is, the disavowed feminine part of Wollstonecraft's subjectivity returns in the form

of uncanny female "doubles." It is not Imlay, therefore, who haunts the narrator of the *Letters:* "Poor Matilda! thou hast haunted me ever since my arrival; and the view I have had of the manners of the country, exciting my sympathy, has increased my respect for thy memory!" (XVIII:166).[54] Wollstonecraft explains how Matilda introduced various liberal reforms in domestic and political spheres, but was "hurried into an untimely grave," and remained "charged with licentiousness" by the public who should have treated her with gratitude (XVIII:166-7). Wollstonecraft's sympathy for Matilda is characteristic of the "doubling, dividing, and interchanging of the self" that gives the double its uncanny effect (Freud "The 'Uncanny'" 356). Wollstonecraft identifies with Matilda, who is also ostracized for her revolutionary ideas and for her unconventional love life. The doubling effect allows Wollstonecraft to maintain a masculine subject position by projecting her femininity onto a spectral other.

The narrator of the *Letters* also describes the apparition of another woman, a dead friend who Wollstonecraft's biographers suggest is Fanny Blood:[55]

> When a warm heart has received strong impressions, they are not to be effaced. Emotions become sentiments; and the imagination renders even transient sensations permanent, by fondly retracing them. I cannot, without a thrill of delight, recollect views I have seen, which are not to be forgotten, – nor looks I have felt in every nerve which I shall never more meet. The grave has closed over a dear friend, the friend of my youth; still she is present with me, and I hear her soft voice warbling as I stray over the heath. Fate has

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[54] Queen Caroline Matilda, the sister of England's George III, was married at fifteen to the Christian VII of Denmark, but was removed from the throne by the Prince Frederik, escaping into exile only to die at the age of twenty-four, while her lover, Struensee, was beheaded (Holmes 290).

[55] I am fascinated by a passage in Godwin's *Memoirs* about Wollstonecraft's relationship with Fanny Blood. Godwin's describes Fanny as an eighteenth-century ideal of femininity: "slender and elegant form" and "minute and delicate propriety" (210-11). He recreates the moment when Wollstonecraft first sees Fanny, who was "busily employed in feeding and managing some children," as the first encounter of "Werther with Charlotte" (210). This analogy between same-sex and heterosexual relationships not only figures Wollstonecraft's feelings for Fanny Blood as erotic but also places Wollstonecraft in the subject position of a man.

> separated me from another, the fire of whose eyes, tempered by infantine tenderness, still warms my breast; even when gazing on these tremendous cliffs, sublime emotions absorb my soul. And, smile not, if I add, that the rosy tint of morning reminds me of a suffusion, which will never more charm my senses, unless it reappears in the cheeks of my child. Her sweet blushes I may yet hide in my bosom, and she is still too young to ask why starts the tear, so near akin to pleasure and pain? (VI:99-100)

In this passage, both Fanny Blood and Gilbert Imlay are "present" with the narrator but in different ways. Fanny Blood remains a ghost-like presence whose distinct voice is heard by Wollstonecraft, whereas Imlay's presence is figured more like a possession of her body by warmth. The equivocation between the warm breast and sublime soul begs the question: is Wollstonecraft's "sublime" response produced by another's "eyes" gazing on her body or by her eyes gazing on "tremendous cliffs"?

Wollstonecraft's "spectres of fancy" are uncanny because the *Letters* purport to transcribe the traveller's real experiences. When the writer "pretends to move in the world of common reality," as in a realistic genre like travel writing, then supernatural things and events are uncanny to both the reader and the writer ("The 'Uncanny'" 374). The phantoms, spirits, and apparitions in the *Letters,* however, never seem to elicit a fearful response from the autobiographical narrator. By representing the uncanny as normative, the text itself becomes uncanny.

Wollstonecraft does not fear the apparitions, the return of the repressed, because she does not fear death: "Who can avoid *ennui?* I enter a boat with the same indifference as I change horses; and as for danger, come when it may, I dread it not sufficiently to have any anticipating fears" (XXII:182). She is already entombed in the world: cadaverized. Her increasing insensibility towards the end of the *Letters* suggests "an irremediable dissociation between herself and everything else, and also with what should have been

'she'" that is characteristic of melancholia (Kristeva *Black Sun* 72). The blissful domestic arrangement that a life with Imlay would have provided is replaced by a numbing, hollow despair that can only end with death. The listless narrator has only "an amorphous imagination, a muddled representation of some implacable helplessness" (Kristeva *Black Sun* 73). Nearing the end of her journey, Wollstonecraft writes:

> I can scarcely say why, my friend, but in this city, thoughtfulness seemed to be sliding into melancholy, or rather dullness. – The fire of fancy, which had been kept alive in the country, was almost extinguished by reflections on the ills that harass such a large portion of mankind. – I felt like a bird fluttering on the ground unable to mount; yet unwilling to crawl tranquilly like a reptile, whilst still conscious it had wings. (XIII:144)

The melancholic narrator of the *Letters,* with her imaginative existence in a "psychic tomb," finds comfort dwelling among the loved ones she has "embalmed" in her heart. Her embrace of the dead is an embrace of death that promises to provide a long-awaited reunion. The images of sterility and decay do not necessarily carry negative connotations as they would typically. Rather, death is the natural order of things. All human constructions and material objects will degenerate:

> A stupid kind of sadness, to my eye, always reigns in a huge habitation where only servants live to put cases on the furniture and open the windows. I enter as I would into the tomb of the Capulets, to look at the family pictures that here frown in armour, or smile in ermine. The mildew respects not the lordly robe; and the worm riots unchecked on the cheek of beauty...(IX:118)

Gothic ruins are sublime because they remind Wollstonecraft that the body will die but the soul will live on into eternity. Such reminders of mortality provoke an ambivalent response: the *Letters* become increasingly melancholy as the subject dwells on morbidity and the prospect of her own death.

By identifying with Imlay and repudiating her femininity, Wollstonecraft defers the moment when she will have to accept the loss of her beloved object and admit what she previously denied: her circumstances are identical to those experienced by Dido, Sterne's Maria, and the "young woman." Read retrospectively, the acknowledgement of Wollstonecraft's identification with these women is merely deferred. The *Letters'* commentary on involuntary widowhood foreshadows their ominous ending when the narrator weeps, wanders without direction, becomes insensible, and then falls into silence.

> Adieu! My spirit of observation seems to be fled – and I have been wandering round this dirty place, literally speaking, to kill time; though the thoughts, I would fain fly from, lie too close to my heart to be easily shook off, or even beguiled, by any employment, expect that of preparing for my journey to London. – God bless you!
>
> Mary – (XXV:197)

In this final letter, the blank surname indicates not only Wollstonecraft's inability to speak of her relationship with Imlay to the reading public but the narrator's desire to retain Imlay's name (although the *Letters* are later published under the name "Mary Wollstonecraft"[56]). In the final letters, the narrator becomes precisely what she has been struggling all along to disavow: the child-like sentimental heroine who evokes so much compassion from Godwin and other contemporaries.[57]

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[56] The subsequent editing of the *Letters* replaces "Imlay" with a "—," signalling the excision of his presence within the text, an excision that coincides with the exorcism of Imlay from Wollstonecraft's divided subjectivity.

[57] Godwin writes, "The occasional harshness and ruggedness of character, that diversify her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* here totally disappear. If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book. She speaks of her sorrows, in a way that fills us with melancholy, and dissolves us in tenderness, at the same time that she displays a genius which commands all our admiration. Affliction had tempered her heart to a softness almost more than human; and the gentleness of her spirit seems precisely to accord with

By polarizing 'male' and 'female,' sentimental fiction and eighteenth-century autobiographical writing can produce subjects who shift between these gender positions. Such shifting that suggests not only the radical de-naturalization of sex but also the fundamental instability of subjectivity. Nevertheless, the woman writer cannot ignore her subjectivation as "female," the subjectivation that coincides with the initial emergence of a culturally-viable subject. Thus, a woman writer who adopts a male subject position is constantly negotiating her "femininity" in relation to the cultural objectification and subordination of women. The resulting narrative is like the Scandinavian *Letters*, full of gaps and unresolved contradictions, all of which point to how gender impacts writing. The *Letters* foreground what Homi K. Bhabha calls "the *productive* ambivalence...that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" (*Location* 67). The narrator's ambivalent and affective responses towards the objectified and feminized Other temporarily confound the binary oppositions of self/other and subject/object. The male/female divided self maintain the "fantasy" of stable selfhood nor a supposed "difference" from Scandinavian others. The male traveller may be able to view those around him as absolute foreigners, but the introspective female traveller sees herself as an anomaly, foreign to the place she traverses, and identifiably 'other.'

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all the romance of unbounded attachment. Thus softened and improved, thus fraught with imagination and sensibility, with all, and more than all, 'that youthful poets fancy, when they love,' she returned to England, and, if he had so pleased, to the arms of her lover. Her return was hastened by ambiguity, to her apprehension, of Mr Imlay's conduct" (149).

Conclusion: Mobilizing the Subject

Like Mrs. Radcliffe, other authoresses also adopted the persecuted woman as a character; but there may be nothing more in this than another of the many manifestations of feminine imitativeness. As the literary tradition has been the monopoly of man, at any rate up till the present, it is natural that women writers should slavishly adopt in their works the masculine point of view. – Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (115)

All writers, whether male or female, rely on the cultural discourses in circulation at the time when they produce an "original" work. Intertextuality is a necessary condition for textual production. This thesis demonstrates the diversity of eighteenth-century travel literature – incorporating and transforming discourses as varied as aesthetics, nationalism, British imperialism, sensibility, and bourgeois capitalism – while also showing that its consistency on two basic points: the assumption (1) of heterosexual normativity with its dependence on the fundamental oppositions between the sexes; and (2) that the subject who writes is a "male" subject. While literary criticism has hopefully moved beyond patronizing claims like the one above that basically says women writers only ventriloquize their male betters (a comment that sounds curiously *imitative* of eighteenth-century assertions regarding 'female genius'), it does indicate that the historical and cultural conditions surrounding female authorship differ from those surrounding male authorship.

Sex and gender in Western culture emerge from a phallocentric, heterosexual matrix. Subjectivation by and subjection to discourse demands that a person fully identify with only one sex in order to be culturally viable as a subject. The gendering of cultural discourses as well as the instability of female subjectivity allow women writers to adopt subject positions that are, in fact, "masculine," and it is precisely a reinscription of dominant discourses that enables such gender cross-identifications. Admittedly, such a subject is thoroughly un-Romantic. The woman who writes autobiography from the

perspective of a man, as does Wollstonecraft in the Scandinavian *Letters*, is divided against herself and this fragmentation undermines the very stability of the subject.

The *Letters'* narrator assumes various "male" subject positions, the assumption of which coincides with a denial of the stereotype of the "persecuted women" and with attempts to abject her femininity, neither of which can be fully achieved due to the narrator's empathetic response towards 'other' women. Moreover, the *Letters* enact the melancholic incorporation of the narrator's male lover, demonstrating that the interpellative apparatus of compulsory heterosexuality – particularly, a belief in the complementarity of the sexes – when realized *within* a subject, can undermine sexual difference even as it reveals the "individuated" subject's fundamental intersubjectivity. The resulting contradictory narrative discloses the implicit ideology of gender inherent in eighteenth-century cultural discourses and, through the transposition of these discourses, produces a gender matrix from which emerges a mobile, counter-normative textual subject.

Thomas Brown's preface to his poem, *The Wanderer in Norway* (1816), describes the narrator of the *Letters* as follows:

> Mary was more than a *sentimental* traveler; she was truly an *impassioned* traveler – a traveler suffering deeply, and seeing Nature in those wildly contrasted views, with which Misery looks on it, in the moments of its greatest anguish, and in those strange gleams of hope, which sometimes fling a brightness more than natural on every object, – even when Misery herself is the gazer. (quoted in Holmes 42)

Both the figure of Wollstonecraft and the text of the *Letters* become supernatural – "Misery herself." Wollstonecraft's contemporaries resort to unconventional tropes to explain the protagonist of the *Letters,* perhaps due to the fact that in the eighteenth

century, female genius is a conceptual and cultural impossibility. Wollstonecraft is either a monstrous hermaphrodite or "more than human" (Godwin 149). The narrator of the *Letters* embodies excess; because she is both male *and* female, both rational *and* passionate, "Mary" cannot be contained by bourgeois subjectivity. Like the grotesque caricatures of revolutionary women that appear on the title page – savage Justice wielding a knife, gluttonous Philanthropy squeezing the world, weeping Sensibility crushing the severed head of Louis XVI – Wollstonecraft *is* uncanny.

Is it any surprise, then, that current literary criticism, adhering to the stability of "sex," abiding by the ideology of sexual difference, and failing to deconstruct Romantic subjectivity, responds to the *Letters'* narrator with the same ambivalence as eighteenth-century readers, constructing her as either a hyperfeminized madwoman or an unsexed female propagating masculinist views? Wollstonecraft's "uncanniness" threatens us with the possibility of radically destabilizing the subject and undermining the very subjectivity we all need and hope is more than just a fantasy. To explain the subject of the *Letters* within the confines of the normative is to explain away the transgressive potential of the *Letters*. Admittedly, however, to embrace the subject of the *Letters* is to admit our own monstrosity – our otherness – and to become the hideous offspring of "the first of a new genus."

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