

VINDICATING WOMEN THROUGH WORKS OF FICTION

By Jennifer J. McClyman

Mary Wollstonecraft's pamphlet *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* has received a vast amount of recognition since its publication in 1792. My thesis surveys how three novels – Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria*, Amelia Alderson Opie's *Adeline Mowbray; or the Mother and the Daughter*, and Helen Craik's *Stella of the North; or, the Foundling of the Ship* – align with Wollstonecraft's political arguments in *Vindication*. I survey how each text, in its own unique way, negotiates Wollstonecraft's philosophy, and I argue that each novel both asserts the need for a more formal education for women and advocates for the improvement of women's position in society. I suggest that through their works of fiction all three women authors may be seen to speak to their female audiences, encouraging them to challenge current educational practices and to work together for change to occur. I contend that these novels did not just serve as tales of either struggling or flourishing women; instead, these texts had the potential to transform readers' minds by providing examples of both struggling and strong women as a means to effect social change. Furthermore, I argue that all three texts establish the need for a sense of community, or unity, amongst women. In such a society women might embrace their education and support one another rather than engage in distracting rivalries with one another that deter their intellectual advancement. Throughout, I maintain that the groundbreaking philosophy Wollstonecraft articulates in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* lives on through fictional stories that were all designed to revolutionize the social hierarchy of society and to ensure a better life for women overall.

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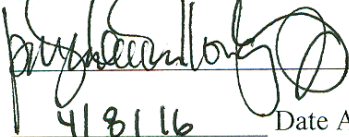
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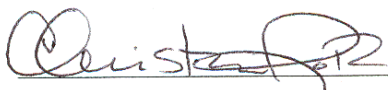
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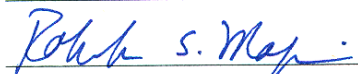
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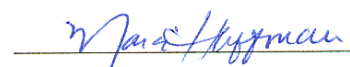
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Introduction

Tracing the initial, monumental steps toward securing a more rigorously academic education for women in the late 18th and early 19th centuries easily leads to the texts of Mary Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) inspired discussions on women's rights and the possibility of women receiving a better education. *Vindication* became the backbone for these discussions and thus also serves as the backbone for this thesis because a study of women's views on the education of women must emerge out of a scrutiny of *Vindication*. Wollstonecraft's pamphlet on the *Rights of Woman* helped to ignite a revolution in which writers, particularly British women writers, focused on female characters, female communities, and the interaction between the two. In doing so, writers like Mary Wollstonecraft herself, as well as Amelia Alderson Opie and Helen Craik, used their fiction to demonstrate how a lack of a formal academic education leads to the subjugation of women.

Women's education in the 18th century was guided by assumptions based on their potential intellectual ability and by their position in society. Phyllis Stock states, "Women were not destined to learn anything in depth. The study of religion and the accomplishments was to be enriched by the 3 Rs," or reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as "grammar, geography, history, and natural science. . . .[but] women should never appear learned" (110). There was fear with providing women with the same education as men and some cautioned that "it was dangerous to expose women to the perils of a life

that their constitution could not support without being denatured” (Frize 93). The thought was that if women were to be educated similarly to men, they would become “denatured” and lose their feminine qualities. In his ever-popular *Emile*, Jean-Jacque Rousseau insists, “A perfect man and a perfect woman should no more be alike in mind than in face, and perfection admits of neither less nor more” (322). In contrast, Wollstonecraft believed that both men and women needed an equal share of education. She states, “I will venture to predict that virtue will never prevail in society till the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason” (*Vindication* 260). She was also determined to show that having more formally educated women would not mean men would have to surrender their control. In fact, she writes, “Women cannot be confined to merely domestic pursuits, for they will not fulfill family duties, unless their minds take a wider range” (270). Her beliefs were centered on the idea that women need to be well-rounded in order to fulfill their roles as wife, mother, and above all, teacher in the capacity of mother. She believed that boys and girls needed to be educated together in subjects such as

botany, mechanics, and astronomy. Reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and some simple experiments in natural philosophy, might fill up the day, but these pursuits should never encroach on gymnastic plays in the open air. The elements of religion, history, the history of man, and politics, might also be taught by conversations, in the socratic form. (263-264)

If they had great intelligence or wealth, they could also be taught “the dead and living languages, the elements of science, and continue the study of history and politics, on a more extensive scale, which would not include polite literature” (264). Furthermore, she stressed that women needed to “be taught the elements of anatomy and medicine” so that they could care for their families, and she also spoke of the importance of women exercising both mind and body so that they might “acquire that mental activity so necessary in the maternal character” (275). In essence, she believed that women were capable of learning the same material and at the same rate as men, and that it was essential for women, comprising one-half of society, to exist beyond a superficial level. She also wanted free education for everyone (263). All of her ideas for educational reform—more challenging academic curriculum, physical activity, and free, public education—are addressed in Wollstonecraft’s, Opie’s, and Craik’s novels.

In Wollstonecraft’s *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) and Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* (1805), a heroine is ostracized by her society, whereas in Craik’s *Stella of the North* (1802), a heroine epitomizes the educated woman, a vision that Wollstonecraft promotes in *Vindication*. The genre of fiction allows Wollstonecraft, Opie, and Craik to experiment with theoretical ideas through fictional scenarios. These authors construct fictional landscapes in which they ventriloquize their beliefs through their characters rather than directly state a set of beliefs in a political tract. Women in 1792 were not as likely to read *Vindication* or other nonfiction texts as they would have been to read a novel because their educational and social training led them to fiction. Essentially, I

argue that fiction was the most effective genre for social change and helped to shape the beliefs of women readers about the need for women to be better educated. Whereas *Vindication* was geared toward a predominantly male audience and emphasized the benefits of having more educated wives and mothers, the novels in this thesis speak to a female audience and encourage them to challenge current educational practices and to work together for change to occur. All three fictional texts unify the readership in a bid for social change by providing a heroine and other women characters who share their unconventional experiences in order to influence and expand the mind of the female audience. The fictional texts did not just serve as tales of struggling or flourishing women; essentially, these texts had the potential to transform readers' minds by providing examples of strong women as a means to effect social change.

Three fictional texts, Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*, and Helen Craik's *Stella of the North*, offer a dialogue that responds to Wollstonecraft's pamphlet, and each novel negotiates the pamphlet slightly differently. Each of these fictional legacies to *Vindication* features a main female character whom the reader sympathizes with due to that female character's experience of maltreatment. All of their mistreatment could have been avoided if they received a more formal education. Wollstonecraft creates examples in *Maria* of women who would have benefited from a more academically charged education while she also manages to question the social mores of an oppressive society against women. Opie aligns her text with the ideas of Wollstonecraft and even Wollstonecraft's real life to highlight the importance of women

attaining a logically sound education in an unjust world. Craik provides the example of Stella, educated by women, who is self-reliant and confident as she encounters obstacles created by a regimented, patriarchal society. All three works of fiction correspond to *Vindication* in unique yet closely united methods. Wollstonecraft's philosophy is not being allowed to dwindle into obscurity because it is being embodied and engaged in fiction.

In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft unveils a conflict between women's expected behavior and the limitations of a structure of education that does not invite intellectual thought. Specifically, she writes, "[i]t seems a little absurd to expect women to be more reasonable than men in their *likings*, and still to deny them the uncontrolled use of reason" (180). She writes of a world plagued by an inability to conceptualize females as intelligent, capable beings. With persuasive argumentation explicitly directed at a male, middle class, educated audience, she questions the societal constraints placed upon women. Women could not receive an education equal to men nor were they encouraged to pursue anything beyond domestic duties. Wollstonecraft implores her readers to consider the positive effects of having academically-educated women, arguing that a woman who is given such an education could discern a male suitor's malicious intentions. Without this ability to discern between lust or love, a woman could suffer dire social consequences, such as ostracism, for a decision that her education did not prepare her to make. Additionally, a woman would become a better wife and mother because she would be able to use her reason to support her husband and act as an example for her

children, thus ensuring them a sounder upbringing. Wollstonecraft's influence as both a non-fiction and fiction writer and her influence on two other female authors will serve as the main focus for my argument.

Literature Review

A variety of scholarship has contributed to the core arguments that guide this thesis. The life of Mary Wollstonecraft and her philosophy in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* have been discussed for over two centuries. At the center of these discussions on Wollstonecraft is the potential influence she had on improving women's education and by effect, securing an improved position for women in society. Janet Todd, one of the most prolific writers on Wollstonecraft, summarizes Wollstonecraft's core belief in the power of the individual. Todd states, "Wollstonecraft believed in individual progress, a sense that with some changes everyone could improve. . . . Society could not progress if half its members were kept backward" (*Vindication* Introduction, 19). Additionally, Devon Sherman asserts Wollstonecraft's need to above all, establish women as fully human before entering into the conversation of education. He states, "To declare women's rights first requires that they become part of the human species. Before they can wear the political mask, a mere base level of humanity must be determined even to merit the declaration or denial of rights" (102). Rashmi Sahni further explains that Wollstonecraft, "contends with varied patriarchal texts in her attempt to locate a space and an identity for women in the eighteenth century masculine public sphere" (2). I build

on all of these ideas as I argue that *Vindication* promotes these sentiments and ultimately becomes the foundational philosophical text for fictional women writers like Opie and Craik in the early 19th century. Additionally, I discuss how Wollstonecraft and Opie demonstrate that marriage subjugates women and reduces them to less than human as they become the subordinate to and quite literally the property of their husband. As Ann Sumner Holmes shows, the double standard of adultery made this clear. She states, “Under the provisions of the 1857 act, then, adultery continued to resemble another ancient civil wrong: trespass. The image of woman as the property of man was clear” (606). Women could not pursue divorce based on their husband’s infidelity, but men could pursue divorce if their wife was unfaithful. Rashmi Sahni also discusses how “[m]arriage is one such institution that involves a negation of woman’s identity” (3). In my discussion of Maria and Adeline in Chapters I and II of this thesis, I focus on how their marriages place them in a position of subjugation. I argue that both Wollstonecraft and Opie use their heroines in order to have a discussion about the injustices women can suffer when they become wives.

The crux of my argument focuses on how Wollstonecraft, Opie, and Craik use their fiction to negotiate Wollstonecraft’s philosophy in *Vindication*. Many critics discuss this mobilization of fiction to address the ideas and arguments of philosophy. For example, Gary Kelly states that Wollstonecraft “had learned that autobiographical fiction could be more objective by paradoxically being more personal” (15). Even when the story is told through the voice of various women characters, Wollstonecraft is able to

mimic similar experiences in her life and in the lives of her readers. Elizabeth Johnston discusses how the “novel possesses within itself the potential to challenge the very ideological values it might seemingly uphold” (5). She further suggests that women “likely experienced a communal sense of frustration with their limited agency in society” (5). Nonfiction or philosophical texts could be written, but it was the form of the novel that reached the most women readers, and women could challenge the constructs of society in a theoretical manner through fiction. My argument takes this idea with using fiction as a catalyst for societal change and focuses on Wollstonecraft, Opie, and Craik specifically connecting to the rhetoric in *Vindication*. Through Wollstonecraft’s and Opie’s fiction, they are able to depict all classes of women who experience injustices and use these characters’ experiences to encourage social change. Craik uses her fiction and her characterization of her heroine to embody the ideal “vindicated” woman.

The last decade has seen a surge of criticism written on *Adeline Mowbray*, the majority of which addresses Opie’s relationship with Wollstonecraft or Opie’s intentions with *Adeline Mowbray*. A few scholars like Patricia A. Matthew, Mark Zunac, and Cecily Erin Hill make similar assertions regarding Opie’s work. All three critics speak of Opie demonstrating the impossibility of putting Wollstonecraft’s ideas into practice in the early 19th century. Patricia A. Matthew states, “No world they [women authors] can imagine can sustain the personage or ideas of Wollstonecraft” (383). Zunac speaks of the “impracticability, if not invalidity, of Enlightenment reason as a guide for proper conduct” (262). And Hill claims that “Opie emphasizes the cost of strict or unyielding

readings and engagements with the social sphere” (732). Certainly, Adeline suffers due to her attempt to live as a mistress and still be accepted and embraced by her society. Still, my argument more so focuses on Opie’s unfavorable depiction of different members of society who disrespect the very likable Adeline. Anne McWhir suggests that Opie, “invites us to consider the relationship between theory and practice, between principle and action” (25). Another layer of my argument is centered on Adeline’s inability to understand the difference between theory and practice. Her education does not prepare her to have a full understanding of how society will react to her rejecting the institution of marriage. Opie’s connection to Wollstonecraft’s ideas on the need for a more formal women’s education is a crucial piece of what I argue. Critics like Miriam Wallace also assert that *Adeline Mowbray* is an “ambivalent novel” (204) due to Opie’s criticism of radicalism and her negative representation of marriage. My argument goes beyond these two distinct interpretations as I focus on a third classification of the novel as actually being aligned with Wollstonecraft’s ideas and sympathetic toward the difficulty for women to advance in a conformist society.

The Foundation of *Vindication*

Wollstonecraft’s first major publication, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) opposes some of Edmund Burke’s arguments in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In her pamphlet, Wollstonecraft argues that “Burke had allowed his desire to propitiate his aristocratic audience to lead him to rely on sentiment and verbal

display rather than reason” (Conniff 306). In his tract, Burke clearly aligns with a more conservative, upper class following, and he blames the lower and middle class audience, or the majority of the people of France, for the barbarity of the French Revolution. He predicts the failure of the general population rather than focusing on the roles that the leaders of France played in causing it. When the French Revolution failed to reconstruct the social hierarchy of society, Wollstonecraft and other revolutionaries, or Jacobins, were sadly disappointed that the French Revolution failed to influence the people of England to challenge their political system. In regards to education, Wollstonecraft viewed education for all as essential; Burke disagreed. James Conniff writes that Burke privileges the importance of tradition and of trusting in a well-structured government while devaluing any attempt at leveling the playing field, and that he was “suspicious of any plan to level distinctions among individuals,” and argued that “the attributes necessary for leadership were found primarily among the rich and powerful” (312). In other words, Burke wanted to maintain the type of social hierarchy with the wealthy in control; Wollstonecraft would argue that this type of social structure epically fails. In her own words to Burke, she argues, “You have shewn, Sir, by your silence on these subjects that your respect for rank has swallowed up the common feelings of humanity; you seem to consider the poor as only the livestock of an estate, the feather of hereditary nobility” (*Vindication of the Rights of Men* 16). Wollstonecraft stressed the importance of equality on a variety of levels, and she criticized Burke’s disregard for the common people and for women in general. Burke’s ideal social structure was still patriarchal in nature and people

had little recognition of the role of women in society. Wollstonecraft responds to Burke out of a need to establish a voice for women and thus, a better social structure overall.

Wollstonecraft was not only responding to Burke, but she also engaged writers like Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord. In his report to the French Assembly, he asserts the need for a purely domestic education for women (1791). Wollstonecraft adamantly states, “I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners . . . have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would have otherwise been; and consequently, more useless members of society” (53). Infuriated by the preferred assignment of women to purely household duties such as cooking, entertaining, and mothering, Wollstonecraft devotes herself to making a case for the advancement of the female mind. She structures her argument to appeal to a middle class, educated audience, one that could sympathize with a need for educational reform and consequently, one that could be influential in bringing about that change. Such an audience would be unaffected by either wealth or poverty because they are between the two extremes. Perhaps even ingeniously, she focuses on gaining the approval of her male readers by creating an argument for female advancement that directly benefits men in the roles of husband and son.

Translating the philosophical ideas in *Vindication* into fictional scenarios in *Maria* enables Wollstonecraft to reach a larger female audience, but it also affords her readers the opportunity to see their social situations through “real-world” situations and

to feel what other women feel. In *Maria*, Wollstonecraft portrays the story of Jemima, a servant woman from the lower class who experiences a variety of hardship, including rape, physical abuse, and prostitution. Jemima's story in the real world of the eighteenth century might not have garnered much sympathy from other women because her voice as a lower class citizen would neither have been solicited nor, in all likelihood, heard.

Wollstonecraft also demonstrates how more advanced reading can open a woman's mind to the world around her. At one point, after reading more advanced literature like *Paradise Lost*, Maria exclaims, ““They who make me wish to appear the most amiable and good in their eyes, must possess in a degree . . . the graces and virtues they call into action”” (Maria 58). Maria's words question the potential hypocrisy of people in society.

In a fictional story, this discovery of Maria's is reached through education, and her example becomes arguably more powerful than similar words that Wollstonecraft uses in her nonfiction philosophical tract. Fiction allows the reader to make this discovery with the character and gain Maria's third person perception of the world without the bluntness of first-person philosophy. In *Adeline Mowbray*, Opie creates malicious foils to her noble and likable protagonist. Sir Patrick, one of the most despised characters from the novel, views women as “a race of subordinate beings, formed for the service and amusement of men” (310). There is no characteristic of Sir Patrick that is likable and clearly Opie creates characters like Sir Patrick to evoke sympathy for Adeline. In *Stella of the North* Craik creates a conduct fiction book in which Stella is presented with challenges and always takes the high road or uses her intelligence to make rational decisions. Fiction

forges a relationship between the women characters in these novels and the readers of these novels and gives a realistic representation of the human experience.

At the center of her writing is an intense plea for the scholarly education for women as a way to improve their capacity for reason, to exercise their logic, and to maintain their virtue. As a Jacobin, Wollstonecraft supported a revolution in England similar to the revolution in France because she recognized that political change was a necessary means toward a better social structure, particularly for women. Because her argument for women's education is dependent on the notion that society benefits from having women who exercise reason, it is crucial to understand her view of reason and also logic. Reason is the capacity for rational thought while logic alludes to the process of having the ability to think rationally. Wollstonecraft asserts that women "were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weakness. . . . I do not wish for them to have power over men; but over themselves" (137-138). Reason and virtue cannot exist separately as women must have sound reason in order to be virtuous. For Wollstonecraft, "whatever effect circumstances have on the abilities, every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason" (*Vindication* 52). Because virtue and propriety are considered essential to maintaining a respectable reputation in the late 18th century, Wollstonecraft uses this logic to gain the enthusiasm of her male readers. How can a man truly trust his wife to remain virtuous if she could easily be preyed upon and manipulated by other men due to her inability to reason logically? In the same regard, a woman who does not have sound reason cannot be

expected to raise intelligent children. Wollstonecraft makes this clear when she asserts that “in the regulation of a family, in the education of children, understanding, in an unsophisticated sense, is particularly required: strength both of body and mind . . . reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty proper” (109). Making such rational connections between an uneducated woman’s inability to reason and her incapacity to fulfill the domestic roles assigned to her fortify Wollstonecraft’s case in arguing for an academic education for females. She explores the notion of a woman who lacks a good sense of reason and the effects this has in *Maria*, a novel that she started yet was unable to finish before her death. She is able to demonstrate the vulnerability women experience due to their subordinate status in society.

Fictional Works Connected to *Vindication*

The first work of fiction to be discussed alongside *Vindication* in Chapter I of this thesis is Wollstonecraft’s attempt at placing her preaching into practice with *The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria*. In the novel, Wollstonecraft argues that women who have uncultivated reason become susceptible prey to men and society at large. She bases her work of fiction around female characters who struggle due to societal expectations that they be docile, dependent, and dutiful. Men appear to be the villains in the plight of women within the novel, but it is the women’s romanticized expectations that lead to their gullibility, and thus to their ultimate victimization (making them the architects of their own oppression). I argue that *Maria* provides examples of multiple women whose

inability to think critically prevents them from transcending their position in life. I suggest that Wollstonecraft uses her fictional text to garner an empathetic response in readers in order to advance her case for women's education. Maria, the titular character, is betrayed by her husband and thrown into a madhouse. She never would have been in her predicament if she had the ability to discern her husband's character when he was courting her. Maria is powerless due to her lack of good reason and the actions of female characters who are vicious toward their own sex. Women, whom Wollstonecraft describes in *Vindication*, are "very differently situated with respect to each other—for they are rivals" (286). Wollstonecraft uses her fiction to generate support for the academic education of women and she parallels her political arguments in her fiction with providing female characters who are powerless due to their lack of good reason and who can be vicious toward their own sex. This viciousness inhibits any progress women can make and creates rivalry among women while it promotes disunity. She addresses this rivalry in *Vindication*:

But women are very differently situated with respect to each other – for they are all rivals. . . . Is it then surprising that when the sole ambition of woman centres in beauty, and interest gives vanity additional force, perpetual rivalships should ensue? They are all running the same race, and would rise above the virtue of morals, if they did not view each other with a suspicious and even envious eye. (87)

Without having an education rich with training in critical thinking, women, she argues,

can only focus on surface-level attributes like looks, and this limited scope sets them up to destroy each other. Despite the novel remaining unfinished due to Wollstonecraft's premature death, it still manages to correlate with a significant number of her arguments that an academic education for women would be beneficial for society as a whole. She uses a variety of female characters who occupy different social stations to illustrate that a lack of education affects women (and men) of all ages and classes. Contemporaries like Amelia Alderson Opie and Helen Craik, whose works were published during the same period of time that Wollstonecraft's most famous works were circulating widely, also appealed to all classes while they advocated for women's education. Additionally, Opie uses the idea of the importance of educating women to show how society reacts to a woman who does not follow societal norms and chooses to live as a mistress rather than a wife, and Craik provides a strong example of a woman protagonist who ideally embodies Wollstonecraft's philosophy.

The second work of fiction discussed in this thesis in Chapter II, Amelia Alderson Opie's novel *Adeline Mowbray: or, the Mother and the Daughter*, offers a narrative that illustrates the consequences of female mis-education, the potential cost of marriage for women, and the need for a supportive female community that transcends class. Opie creates a fictional account of a woman who chooses to follow her beliefs, and details the consequences she faces. Like Wollstonecraft, Opie addresses her text to a middle class, educated audience and readers follow Adeline as she encounters different forms of evil; we sympathize with Adeline through Opie's narration. This interpretation of Opie's

political alignment with Wollstonecraft is quite different from the argument of many critics, like Mark Zunac or Janet Todd, who interpret Opie's work as a cautionary tale in alignment with the perceived benefits or dangers associated with social change. In fact, many critics either focus on the text as being anti-revolutionary or view *Adeline Mowbray* as ambiguous with its politics and remain neutral on the topic. To provide one example of a more conservative reading, Zunac argues that Opie "identifies two of the main characters as the embodiment of the tension between untried policy as a means to revolutionary ends and those historically rooted institutions seen by many to preserve a natural, practically guided social order" (261). The bulk of his argument centers on the idea that Opie created this story of Adeline to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of seeking to elicit change with extreme ideas. In other words, Zunac argues that Opie does not align herself with enlightened ideas like those of Wollstonecraft, which, if adopted, would bring about an educational reform for women, because Opie privileges a more traditional, structured system in order to maintain an orderly society. In contrast to this common approach, I argue that Opie uses *Adeline Mowbray* to sympathize with the plight of women during a time of extreme inequality and prejudice. As readers, we sympathize with the protagonist's inability to penetrate the barriers of an unforgiving society. Opie explores the consequences of living as an independent woman in early 19th-century society, especially when that woman cannot foretell the malicious behavior directed toward her. Wollstonecraft writes, "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” (*Vindication* 104). Without an education founded in logic, women are trained to focus on the immediate ends of their short-term goals and are unable to foretell the effects of their actions. Adeline cannot anticipate that her decision to remain unwed will result in suffering and such harsh consequences because she lacks a broad social awareness. Opie uses Adeline’s ignorance to emphasize the need for a better education, a more “Wollstonecraftian” education, one that is free from romantic ideas or irrational influences and focuses instead on more formal, in-depth training in a variety of subjects. By encountering Wollstonecraft’s theories through a fictional narrative, readers see the world through Adeline’s eyes and may sympathize with Adeline’s stupidity because of her innocence and likability, and readerly ill will more likely to be directed at those in society who slight or oppress her.

In contrast to Wollstonecraft’s Maria and Opie’s Adeline, Helen Craik creates a female character who embodies Wollstonecraft’s and Opie’s vision of the logical female. In Chapter III of this thesis, I discuss Helen Craik’s *Stella of the North*, which features a woman who embodies Wollstonecraft’s prediction of what women can achieve when they have the opportunity to obtain a more formal education. Craik highlights the life of an orphan girl, Stella, who is well-educated and surrounded by women who inspire rational thought. In contrast, she is confronted with both men and women who seem determined to obstruct her path in life, but her education gives her the ability to decipher malign intentions and becomes her saving grace. It is Stella’s keen ability to reason that guides her moves while she maintains the respect of her microcosmic society. She

echoes Wollstonecraft's vision of a woman who is able to think rationally and who still retains the gentleness and physical beauty associated with femininity. Wollstonecraft states, "Let [women's] faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale" (*Vindication* 70). Like Wollstonecraft, Craik suggests that only when women are given a fair chance and are able to expand their minds through education can we begin to understand their intellectual capabilities – and through Stella, Craik conceives of these capabilities as being considerable. Raised in a remote cottage, Stella blossoms intellectually because of her strong sense of self and her educational foundation. Craik's novel serves as the example of what women could attain if they are allowed to flourish academically, free from societal constraints based on gender. She creates a powerful example that serves as an advocate for the advancement of female education, and clearly aligns with Wollstonecraft and Opie in their effort to promote social awareness of the unlimited ability of the female mind.

All three texts *Maria*, *Adeline Mowbray*, and *Stella* revolve around female protagonists whose journey through life is directly governed by their level of education and association with other female characters. The female authors offer many examples of how the lack of a proper, rational mindset—education—easily dooms females into being susceptible to manipulation and hardship. The novels, published within just fifteen years of one another, put Wollstonecraft's theory into practice and constitute a collective, strong argument for the importance of a more academic education for women. With the

first two texts, the reader is given countless examples of the negative consequences that rebellious women with limited education encounter in a society which inhibits the education of women; in the third text, the rational thinking of an educated female gives her the ability to maintain her virtue and uphold her status as a strong female role model. All three novels not only highlight the need for educated women to be logical thinkers, but they also establish the need for a sense of community, or unity, amongst women. In such a society women could embrace their education and support one another rather than establish distracting rivalries with one another that deter their intellectual advancement.

As a result of their general lack of formal, rigorous education, and as Wollstonecraft foresaw, the women in the Regency novels under consideration in this thesis reflect the disunity that occurs within the confines of a patriarchal society. In addition to education, each novel portrays the negative interactions between women when it comes to societal expectations of acceptable behavior and personal jealousies. In such a society, women identify with or are labeled as either good and pure or bad and whorish. Women assume these roles and reject those who do not align themselves with the “good” and “pure” according to social mores. Spitefulness and petty jealousies overcome their sense of right, and they are guided by “values” that are designed to produce rivalries. Wollstonecraft writes, “They [Women] are all running the same race, and would rise about the virtue of morals, if they did not view each other with a suspicious and even envious eye” (*Vindication* 286). Thus she criticizes women for being competitive with each other rather than seeking unity and true friendship. She argues that it is women who

become their own greatest obstacle. Women need a sense of unity in order to move forward and better their situation, but Wollstonecraft insists that this simply cannot be done if the cycle of dissension between women continues. All three fictional texts demonstrate this need for female unity: Maria has to depend on another woman to attain her freedom; Adeline is pushed into a loveless marriage, due partly to an inability to socialize with women due to having the social status of mistress; and Stella must survive the constant envy and jealous tactics of a female rival in order to retain a good reputation. Both education and female unity share responsibility in the survival of women in a patriarchal society. Without a reformation of women's education, Wollstonecraft predicts that men "will be worse than Egyptian task-masters, expecting virtue where nature has not given understanding" (294). Society will continue down a path of self-destruction and people will have nothing to blame except their own prejudices and lack of compassion.

Chapter I

The Subjugation of Women in Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria*

The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria focuses on the naïveté of women who cannot rationally detect men's false intentions. Mary Wollstonecraft fashions the women in her novel into archetypes for each social class to highlight the pitfalls that all women in her society were subject to because of their inability to decipher wicked intentions by men. In writing of women's need for a better education, Wollstonecraft wonders in *Vindication*,

Where are [women] suddenly to find judgment enough to weigh patiently the sense of an awkward virtuous man, when his manners, of which they are made critical judges, are rebuffing, and his conversation cold and dull, because it does not consist of pretty repartees or well-turned compliments?
(203)

Without having a proper ability to reason and assess the reality of situations, women are incapable of distinguishing between a man of good character and the contrary. As a treatise for the importance of women's education, she divides her novel *Maria* between different female narrators and delivers different examples of how the narrator or another woman close to her is duped by a man. Most male characters are portrayed as conniving seducers or swindlers of some sort. Some might question why Wollstonecraft, who believes in the potential for strong, independent women, would write a fictional text that

portrays weak-minded women. I argue that Wollstonecraft uses the examples of her characters to show how lack of control over oneself, lack of power in one's society, and lack of unity among women can contribute to a vicious cycle where women are consistently taken advantage of and placed in precarious circumstances. Wollstonecraft makes a great case for a more academic education for women so that they can avoid the consequences faced by her female characters; she argues, "I, therefore, will venture to assert, that till women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks" (*Vindication* 111). She is able to use her fiction to demonstrate that a lack of a rigorous education for women subjugates them and thus inhibits the advancement of society as a whole. As women are wives, mothers, and sisters and one-half of the population, it is logical to conclude, she argues, that improvement of the female mind can and will lead to a stronger family unit and stronger morals overall in society.

The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria is the last of Wollstonecraft's publications before her untimely death, and it keenly emphasizes women's lack of power and their need for a better education. The novel culminates her influential collection of texts where she aimed to establish a better educational foundation for women. The story commences with the protagonist, Maria, recently involuntarily parted from her infant daughter and placed in a madhouse. Maria's story unfolds only after the reader learns of the unfortunate history of the female servant, Jemima, who has the charge of watching over Maria among the other madhouse clientele. Throughout the novel, nearly every woman's

personal history involves a similar situation to Maria's where a deceitful husband or lover uses the female for money or desire (or both) before discarding her. No stranger to this concept, Wollstonecraft manages to produce in a work of fiction a piece that delivers a more effective argument than *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. As a work of nonfiction, *Vindication*, by necessity, was forced to be more appealing to male readership and critics during her time. In other words, Wollstonecraft had to be mindful that in order to elicit change in beliefs, she had to choose instances where a better education for women equaled a benefit for men in the form of good wives and mothers. Patricia Johnson argues that "Wollstonecraft selects the genre of the novel in order to speak to her readers first at the level of their passions," and she "wants people to begin to think about the ways in which society wrongs women by entering into the experience of those wrongs" (74). People, particularly men, would conceivably find it difficult to understand the extent of the limits faced by women. In recognizing this, Wollstonecraft uses her fiction to show that perspective through the experiences of her female characters. It is much more effective to do this through fiction rather than to put it in an essay where certain ideas on the need for the educational advancement of females would be identified as her opinion only. Instead, through the lens of fiction, Wollstonecraft is able to develop characters who live and suffer consequences because of their complete lack of power and control within their relationships due to being women. With the anticipation of a dominantly female readership, she crafts characters who evoke sympathy from the reader with their countless examples of suffering injustice.

Wollstonecraft also combines autobiography with her philosophically feminist ideas. Janet Todd, perhaps the most prolific Wollstonecraft scholar, discusses Wollstonecraft's fictional works. Todd states, "As the closeness of the novels to the lives of the authors and to the often self-pitying grumblings of their letters suggests, there is here an acceptance of fiction as autobiography, the tradition of literature as therapy" (*Angelica* 252). While Wollstonecraft certainly did not experience all of the specific events that unfold in *Maria*, she experienced struggles in her own life similar to those of her female characters in *Maria*. Her experiences of being abandoned by a man and feeling powerless in a patriarchal society are just two of these struggles. As I have argued above, Wollstonecraft emphasizes the importance of women obtaining a sound, logical education in order to help decipher male intentions. She also depicts multiple examples of female solidarity, or lack thereof, which highlights the significance of maintaining strong female alliances for female empowerment. Furthermore, a side-by-side comparison of her fiction with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* clearly reveals her ideas for the academic advancement of women and the call for women to end their rivalries that constantly defeat their own cause.

A Female Servant's Life of Mistreatment and the Education that Enlightens Her

Wollstonecraft prefaces the main story of *Maria* with the story of a servant woman in order to argue the need for educational reform for all women, regardless of class or station in life. This servant, Jemima, works at the madhouse where *Maria* is

placed, and after establishing friendship, Jemima divulges the story of her life – one of continual hardship, disappointment, and rejection. Wollstonecraft uses Jemima's story to demonstrate various examples of women who fall victim to the seduction of male pursuers. The first of these, Jemima's mother is seduced by her father and promised marriage, only to find dejection and hostility due to this seduction: "My mother, grieved to the soul by his neglect, and unkind treatment, actually resolved to famish herself; and injured her health by the attempt" (*Maria* 84). Jemima's mother, a servant girl with a presumably small amount of education, if any at all, is seduced by Jemima's father, a fellow servant, and became pregnant. Her mother is promised marriage but soon finds that it was a ruse to have sex with her. Without an education that could prepare her to avoid being easily manipulated or one which is grounded in reality rather than sensibility, it is of no surprise that her ignorance is preyed upon. Sensibility, or as Wollstonecraft terms it "the manie of the day" or madness of the head, was a topic she explored frequently (*Rights of Men* 6). In referring to women, she states, "Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling" (*Vindication* 136). Women's reason was most influenced by their feelings or emotions rather than rational thought. Jemima's mother assumes the role of this "woman overcome by her sensibility" and serves as the first example in the novel of a woman manipulated by a man. Her need for outside approval and a solid reputation outweighs any morsel of logical intellect. Wollstonecraft begins with the story of Jemima's duped

mother to expose the intellectual weakness of women as compared to their male seducers. Without the ability to assess circumstances and anticipate possible outcomes, women are prey to any male with ill intentions.

After telling the story of her mother, Jemima progresses to the story of her stepmother. Wollstonecraft shows through the character of Jemima's stepmother how cruel and selfish an uneducated woman can be and how a lack of maternal acceptance can have a negative effect on young women. The stepmother becomes a rival to Jemima rather than a loving parental figure. After entering the world as an unwanted burden, Jemima is raised by an unfeeling nurse during her infant years and then is recalled by her stepmother to help care for her well-loved and preferred half-sister. Her stepmother prevails in destroying Jemima's hopes of any maternal love, and in effect destroys the only means of female support in Jemima's life. In an innocent attempt to feel motherly affection, Jemima runs to her only mother figure and tries to show her affection. Her stepmother responds with, "I do not want you, pert thing!" (*Maria* 86). In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft explains that, "Whilst they [women] are absolutely dependent on their husbands they will be cunning, mean, and selfish" (101). Her stepmother, a servant by station, exudes all feelings of contempt toward Jemima instead of embracing her. Wollstonecraft devotes little explanation of Jemima's father other than to explain his maliciousness and physical abuse toward her, and instead focuses on the stepmother. Emphasis placed on Jemima's lack of female support clearly signifies the vital role that women can play in each other's lives. Her stepmother becomes the only viable support

for Jemima and without this support, Jemima is lost in the world. This is the first of many examples in the novel where a lack of support and solidarity between women contributes to a woman's failure to advance successfully in life.

In late-18th-century British society, where men held the power in most arenas of life, women had no choice sometimes but to project their frustrations with their lack of power onto other women. Wollstonecraft creates an example of this misdirected angst between the nonwhite Jemima and her white mistress. Jemima is raped repeatedly by the mistress's husband and becomes pregnant. At the age of 16, and with no hope of an improved situation, Jemima finds herself in a hopeless position. Her mistress eventually discovers her husband with Jemima, and the mistress immediately turns to scorn and blame the woman. Jemima explains,

She tore off my cap, scratched, kicked, and buffeted me, till she had exhausted her strength, declaring as she rested her arm, 'that I had wheedled her husband from her' and then until almost breathless, she concluded with saying, that I was 'born a strumpet; it ran in my blood, and nothing good could come to those who harboured me.' (90)

Clearly the victim, Jemima is labeled as a temptress by a mistress who easily dismisses the filthy behavior of her husband and shifts blame onto a sixteen-year-old-girl.

Wollstonecraft acknowledges women's inability to evaluate cause and effect successfully: "They [Women] dwell on effects, and modifications, without tracing them back to causes" (*Vindication* 89). The wife is unable to sympathize with Jemima's

situation because, as Wollstonecraft indicates, all the mistress can do is process what is right in front of her in the moment. Even though the husband is the problem, the wife's allegiance and duty is to him, and thus, Jemima becomes the target for her blows. The wife is in no position to turn her scorn on her husband as she is powerless and lacks control over almost every aspect of her life. Powerlessness can be offset by education; education would give the wife the ability to understand that she and Jemima are both in powerless positions. She would understand that her husband is at fault and direct her anger and frustrations toward him. Essentially, education would reshape the social hierarchy of men and women in society.

Wollstonecraft attempts to garner sympathy for a servant girl who turns into a prostitute in her fiction; the reader sympathizes with Jemima's cause because her lack of power and control becomes the focus of the narrative. Fiction becomes a necessary medium to convince readers of Jemima's desperation and how independence is not an option afforded to her as a woman in that time. Jemima is turned out from her quarters at her mistress's residence and is faced with being alone, poor, young, female, despised, and pregnant. She swallows poison to abort her baby and soon becomes entrapped in the world of prostitution. Jemima is not a typical example of a prostitute at the time because, as Janet Todd points out, "prostitution . . . is most frequently seen as a resort not of the lower but of the lower middle class—Wollstonecraft's sympathetic depiction of the working-class prostitute Jemima . . . is an exception" to historical norms (204). To most modern readers, Jemima's unfortunate turn to prostitution would almost seem like a

predictable sequence in a piece of narrative fiction, but during Wollstonecraft's time, choosing to focus on a woman of the lower class who turns into a prostitute is more significant. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft very clearly explains how a desperate woman could easily transform into a prostitute: "Losing thus every spur, and having no other means of support, prostitution becomes her only refuge, and the character is quickly depraved over which the poor wretch has little power. . . . Necessity never makes prostitution the business of men's lives; though numberless are the women who are thus rendered systematically vicious" (99). Through the fictional character of Jemima, Wollstonecraft is able to build up sympathy so that the reader, especially one during the late 18th century, can fully understand, through first-person narration, the extent of this woman's degradation. In Jemima's explanation of her position as prostitute, she recalls, "Fate dragged me through the very kennels of society; I was still a slave, a bastard, a common property" (*Maria* 92). Wollstonecraft emphasizes through the character of Jemima that women without the basic means of survival have little choice but to objectify themselves further through prostitution. By detailing Jemima's struggles and justifying Jemima's unfavorable choices, including prostitution, thievery, and lying, Wollstonecraft enables the reader to sympathize with her hopeless and detested position instead of despising her for it. Jemima is unable to advance in life at this point due to having no allegiances, specifically female ones. She has a negative experience with every woman she encounters and this most significantly affects her ability to advance in life. Wollstonecraft uses Jemima's example to propose the idea that women as a gender are all

affected by their powerlessness and inability to advance beyond the barriers of a patriarchal society. This social restraint placed on women escapes no one, and consequently, this form of oppression creates a sense of unified womanhood between women readers and the women in the text. The novel unites all women of different classes together and helps solidify the idea that they are in this fight together.

Wollstonecraft also uses the character of Jemima to show that through education a woman's quality of life can be dramatically changed. It is not until Jemima obtains her first dose of education that she develops an intellectual understanding of the world around her. Before Jemima finds herself as Maria's warden at the madhouse, she accepts a servant position for an older gentleman who can best be described as a scholarly libertine: "He was a man of great talents, and of brilliant wit; but, a worn-out votary of voluptuousness, his desires" and "the native tenderness of his heart [were] undermined by a vitiated imagination" (93). Despite Jemima feeling obligated to be the gentleman's sexual partner due to her lack of financial and basic means of survival, he is kind and shows generosity to Jemima on a level she has never before experienced. Even as a mistress in an unfavorable situation, Jemima manages to advance her reading, thinking, and speaking skills through listening to the gentleman's discussions with other male guests and by reading from his library. Jemima recounts: "I now began to read, to beguile the tediousness of solitude, and to gratify an inquisitive, active mind. . . . I had the advantage of hearing discussions, from which, in the common course of life, women are excluded" (93-94). Devon Sherman recognizes how Jemima is empowered by her

education. He states that through it, “she acquires the language of those who hold rights. In Giorgio Agamben’s work, giving language to ‘the just and unjust’ is a first step in acquiring a political persona” (110). The reading and discussions allow Jemima to develop a political consciousness; she can thus imagine reentry into a society where she could in fact exist without being despised. Realistic or not, her first experience with scholarly discourse provides her with a new outlook on her lot in life. Wollstonecraft shows that women are capable of obtaining an education with the same learning targets as men, and through Jemima she provides a great example of a woman whose education teaches her to think more analytically and realistically about her situation.

Jemima’s first dose of education already enables her access to a more political realm, or the true social realm, from which women often found themselves excluded. Through observation and education, Jemima gains her voice as she starts to value herself and more better understand the structure of the world around her. Wollstonecraft states that by “allowing [women] to share the advantages of education and government with man, [people can] see whether they will become better, as they grow wiser and become free” (*Vindication* 107). The argument is further presented in a way that assures a lack of risk; if women prove to be incapable of coexisting with males in the educational realm, then they can go back to how things were beforehand. Jemima is able to improve her intellectual capability only after listening to male discussions and reading books from a gentleman’s library. She is positioned in a positive light to emphasize the power of a good education in a woman’s life, where even someone like Jemima can change for the

better. Interestingly, although Jemima receives this education and reforms her thinking, she is not branching out on her own. Instead, she improves because she becomes more like the gentlemen and has to mold herself according to their thinking.

Even when things seem to be going very well for Jemima, Wollstonecraft takes an opportunity to demonstrate that without a solid education, women are transformed into spiteful, envious creatures who cannot support each other. While men are ostensibly elevated from their baser selves through education, women are left to their own devices. She states, “[W]omen are very differently situated with respect to each other—for they are all rivals. . . . They are all running the same race, and would rise above the virtue of mortals, if they did not view each other with a suspicious and even envious eye” (*Vindication* 286). Just as life becomes fairly stable and rewarding for Jemima, she again finds herself in a position where she has to restart and establish herself. The gentleman she is currently living with passes away, and relations of his come in swiftly to assert their claim to all of his possessions. She describes her surprise when “his heir, a man of rigid morals, brought his wife with him to take possession of the house, before I was even informed of his death,—to prevent. . . such a creature as she supposed me to be, from purloining any of” their possessions (95). The wife then refuses to aid Jemima in finding a new place for employment due to her being a kept mistress. Yet another female is unable to recognize the significant role she can play in helping a seemingly destitute woman. Society’s rejection of the “mistress” interferes with Jemima’s ability to advance further. Wollstonecraft has high hope for a woman like this archetypal wife to become

more compassionate toward other women if this wife is given the opportunity to exist more freely. Wollstonecraft states, “It is reasonable to suppose that they will change their character, and correct their vices and follies, when they are allowed to be free in a physical, moral, or civil sense” (*Vindication* 114). Because the wife exists within a society that holds certain ideals of femininity and wags an accusatory finger at those who are labeled “mistress,” she is molded to act according to conventional precepts. The wife is unable to escape her fate as one who perpetuates a system in which women are not only not looking out for each other’s interests, but are actively restricting each other. She does not have the power to change such an ideal. All women are captives in a patriarchal society; they can either wait for the men to revolutionize men’s thinking or they can band together to combat women’s powerlessness.

Finally, the last part of Jemima’s story further exemplifies the selfishness and egocentric competitiveness of women that Wollstonecraft warns about in *Vindication*. The most ironic and pointed part of Jemima’s story comes as she explains her role in the suicide of a woman who suffered from a similar societal affliction to Jemima’s own. She recognizes the grossness of her actions and cautions Maria before delivering her tale: “I have now to mention a circumstance which fills me with remorse, and feel it will entirely deprive me of your esteem” (102). She then describes how she became involved romantically with a tradesman and how they had a mutual desire to live together. Reluctantly, she recalls an act of selfishness that leads to tragedy. She recalls, “The only reason for not taking me home immediately, was the having a girl in the house, with child

by him—and this girl—I advised him—yes, I did! Would I could forget it!—to turn out of doors” (102). The girl, having no place to go, sits in a horse trough and drowns herself. When Jemima learns of the incident she leaves the gentleman, horrified by the role she played. Through Jemima’s selfish suggestion of tossing the girl out into the world on her own, Wollstonecraft shows how even a woman like Jemima, who has herself suffered from a lack of understanding and sympathy from other women, should be understood and shown sympathy, cannot escape the self-centered, sly nature of a woman situated in an oppressive society. In hindsight, she despises herself for such despicable behavior.

Wollstonecraft includes this part to illustrate how even those women who experience hardship fall victim to a society that shapes them to be competitive, selfish beings. In *Vindication*, she writes, “Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength” (*Vindication* 87). For Wollstonecraft, shrewd women gain a sense of power over their “weaker” counterparts even though, ironically, their very thoughts and actions exhibit the weakness of the female mind. In a patriarchal society, women are automatically positioned below men. Consequently, the woman must assume either the role of the meek and submissive servant or the overbearing and sly calculator. This predicament is portrayed many times over in Wollstonecraft’s fiction, and thus, Jemima acts in a cunning way because she is trapped in a system that is set up for her failure as a rational person. In hindsight she easily recognizes her folly, yet as the incident occurs she

thinks only of how it will help procure a better station for herself. Logical thought would assuredly lead Jemima to disallow a girl to suffer a similar fate to herself, yet Jemima's nature has not been structured to utilize said rational thinking. Gary Kelly speaks of a similar dilemma in Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction*. In this story the heroine's "conflict between sense and sensibility in herself becomes identified with a conflict between self-interest (or 'prudence') and benevolence in social relations, until she rejects society altogether" (11-12). Jemima chooses selfishly and does not foresee the logical consequences of putting this young girl out into the world with no support. It takes an extreme event, the girl's death, for Jemima to recognize with horror the error of her ways. By revolutionizing the way in which women are educated, it would bring about a reformation in the way that women interact with one another. Instead of another woman being automatically branded with the label of rival, women would be able to think rationally and exist independently without the fear of not having a male companion.

Maria's Inability to Decipher Men's Devious Intentions

Wollstonecraft uses the character of Maria, the novel's eponymous protagonist, to demonstrate the dynamics of what would have been a typical marriage during her time. Upon marriage, a woman essentially became the property of her husband and was expected to be an obedient bystander to his agency and subjectivity. Because women could not have professional ambitions in life like men, Wollstonecraft explains, "to rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry

advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed” (*Vindication* 135). Marriage to a well-established gentleman was the career goal of most middle-class women and thus, as Wollstonecraft explains, it created fierce competition within their gender but also gave the men an abundance of control and power.

Maria’s story commences with an explanation of her parentage and the dynamics of the relationship between her father and mother. Her father “was to be instantaneously obeyed, especially by my mother, whom he very benevolently married for love; but took care to remind her of the obligation, when she dared, in the slightest instance, to question his absolute authority” (112). Maria alludes to the duty of the wife to submit to her husband in every manner possible. This “duty” is the product of a society that values the male as the female’s superior in physical and intellectual capacities. This is the example of marriage that Maria is exposed to and Wollstonecraft carefully shows how this cycle of obedience is passed down from mother to daughter. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft further explains, “Most of the evils of life arise from a desire of present enjoyment that outruns itself. The obedience required of women in the marriage state comes under this description; the mind, naturally weakened by depending on authority, never exerts its own powers” (150). While men may appreciate the “present enjoyment” of women being obedient, they fail to see the consequence of then having a wife who plagues them with nonsensical matters and has not been taught to think for herself. A relationship based on such an imbalance is unhealthy and bound to be unsatisfactory. Women are conditioned from an early age to believe that they are the weaker sex and that it is natural for them to

submit to men. Men have the intellectual superiority because they have been conditioned to dominate and educated to think analytically and logically. Maria's parents serve as a typical example of the roles that a man and woman filled as a husband and wife.

Maria's mother is unable to educate her children due to her limited intellectual development, and Wollstonecraft uses this predicament as a representative model for the limitations that mothers faced when it came to educating their children. The bulk of Maria's education in her youth is directed by her rich uncle, between Maria and whom exists a mutual fondness. She recalls how her mother did not assist in her education: "My mother had an indolence of character, which prevented her from paying much attention to our education" (113). Maria's mother is one woman yet is representative of many women during that time who, having obtained a relatively minimal education, consequently feel indifferent about their daughters' education. Wollstonecraft explains in *Vindication* that "not having it in their power to amuse or interest, they feel their own insignificance, or find nothing to amuse or interest themselves" (109). Maria's mother suffers from the same fate of many women and/or mothers as she is unable to provide an educational foundation for her children. Without a properly educated mother, the children are at a disadvantage because they do not have a good model to follow with their educational endeavors. Even sons would profit from a well-educated mother because her influence is the first and one of the most significant in a child's life, as Wollstonecraft argues in *Vindication*:

As the care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties annexed

to the female character by nature, this duty would afford many forcible arguments for strengthening the female understanding, if it were properly considered. . . . To be a good mother –a woman must have sense. (243)

Women need to be more educated and prepared as thinkers in order to become good wives and mothers. The duty of mother would, of course, extend to the upbringing of her sons and, therefore, it would be best for both men and women if mothers could provide a good, educationally sound upbringing. The educated mother would also be a child's first example of a woman. It is a very strong argument for improving the education of women as it directly affects men.

Wollstonecraft uses the example of Maria's rivalry with her stepmother to unveil the competitive nature of the female who must fend for her place in a society where she is virtually powerless. After the death of her mother, Maria's father soon allows for his mistress to come and live with the family. Feelings of disdain are mutual between Maria and her newfound stepmother. Maria is mortified when she witnesses her stepmother flirting with her younger brother. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft addresses the idea that women see themselves as sexual objects due to their limitations for advancement in a male-dominated system. She states, "By allowing women but one way to rise in the world, the fostering the libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as proof of inferiority of intellect" (125). While Maria's stepmother is flirting with a young man who couldn't necessarily help her "rise in the world," she epitomizes the idea that women need male attention in order to feel

validated. She, like many women, continually seek the male gaze in order to confirm their existence. Women are sexual objects and their sexuality first appears to be power status; however, their sexuality is equated with a weakness of character and women are shamefully looked upon as play things. Wollstonecraft writes, “Pleasure is the business of woman’s life, according to the present modification of society, and while it continues to be so, little can be expected from such weak beings” (*Vindication* 96). If a woman is taught from a young age to be nothing but pleasing to males, is it any wonder when she becomes a coquette? Most assuredly, Wollstonecraft questions the trustworthiness of such a female who is trained with the man-pleasing agenda and lacks any logical, sound education. Maria’s stepmother finds her place in life by having an affair with a married man, getting pregnant, and then, subsequently, assuming Maria’s mother’s position. If she has been educated to do nothing but please males, then she will naturally seek gratification from one male to the next, especially after the honeymoon period has ended.

Novel reading was a subject that Wollstonecraft discussed frequently in *Vindication*. She takes multiple opportunities to warn her readers of the negative consequences that follow from women reading fantasy novels because then women without logical reasoning, like Maria, will not decipher between reality and fantasy in their real lives. With her uncle as her only instructor, Maria eagerly absorbs his teachings and beliefs, which consist of a mixture of independent thinking and romanticized views of society. Wollstonecraft explains the influence of Maria’s uncle: “He inculcated, with great warmth, self-respect, and a lofty consciousness of acting right, independent of

censure or applause of the world. . . . he brought me books, for which I had a passion, and they conspired with his conversation, to make me form an ideal picture of life” (115). Her uncle inspires confidence, which shows his belief in Maria’s intellectual capacity, yet he brings her novels that leave her romanticizing the world around her. Novel reading was a common pitfall for women as their expectations for their future rarely matched the possibilities open to them in the reality in which they found themselves. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft writes of the effect that novels have on women: “Their senses are inflamed, and their understandings neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling” (97). She also makes it a point to emphasize that “sensibility is not reason” (140). Gary Kelly asserts this point on novel-reading as he states, “Many women in late eighteenth-century England took to fiction as imagination’s escape from the impossibilities of their moral and social condition, but few admitted the fact that escape was itself a fiction” (12). As a result of reading novels, women create unrealistic expectations for their lives and those around them. They are filled with “sensibility,” which during this time period was defined as the “capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also readiness to feel compassion for suffering, to the pathetic in literature or art” (OED). It is this “sensibility” that leads Maria into a marriage that logic would have prevented. Maria has lofty expectations for a romanticized relationship with a man she barely knows. Wollstonecraft uses the unfortunate example of Maria to highlight the need for women to be more formally educated in order to think logically and discern

the world more realistically. This education would train their minds to think critically and women would be more apt to deal with everyday occurrences more efficiently. It is perhaps suitable that a male leads Maria into an education wrought with problematic teachings and expansion of her imagination, of which poor judgment is the result.

Maria mentions her “imagination” multiple times throughout her story and stresses how it leads her into troublesome situations, which aligns very closely with Wollstonecraft’s argument that novel reading leads women to unwittingly mistake fantasy for reality. She also maintains that women in these novels are unsuitable models for behavior due to primarily being written as sexual objects. As a young woman, Maria develops feelings for George Venerables: “Whither did not my imagination lead me? In short, I fancied myself in love—in love with disinterestedness, fortitude, generosity, dignity, and humanity, with which I had invested the hero I dubbed” (117). She sees her reality in comparison to the novels she reads and expects her future husband to come galloping in on his white horse. Maria’s romantic mind—as well as her inexperience and youth—leads her to “love” George Venerables and blinds her to potential danger. She ignores defects in his character because she has learned through her reading to expect the best; she focuses on just his positive attributes. Wollstonecraft asserts that women will continue to be unable to discern a man’s malign intentions as long as they are kept from proper education. She also addresses novels that include the characterization of women, specifically done by male authors. She states, “One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject

by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers” (*Vindication* 85). By depicting a very limited ideal of the female character in novels, one in which a woman’s physical and mental capacities are primed for men, and especially in a society that is more heavily dependent on the novel as entertainment or proof of life elsewhere, young women naturally emulate the characteristics of female characters. The logical mind understands the difference between fiction and real life; thus, women during this time, without that sense of logic, often had idealized or romanticized expectations of the men in their lives. Maria lacks the rational mindset needed in order to fend off or judge against men with ill intentions. Wollstonecraft uses the character of Maria and her bad experiences with men to not only demonstrate the consequences of Maria’s limited education but also to provide a good example to her female readership of mistakes to avoid in their own lives. Ultimately, it makes a strong case for the revolution of female education.

Wollstonecraft argues that it is nearly impossible for a man and woman to have an intimate relationship beyond sexual gratification due to their inability to interact on an intellectual level because of their difference in educational preparation. Maria accepts George’s proposal and soon finds her partner to be disagreeable—to put it nicely. Once the honeymoon period dissipates, Maria feels trapped in a marriage marked by disillusionment. She explains,

With all my attention and affectionate interest, I perceived that I could not

become the friend or confidant of my husband. . . . The very countenance of my husband changed; his complexion became sallow, and all the charms of youth were vanishing with its vivacity. (131)

She quickly perceives both mental and physical changes in her husband. He is not the ideal mate she had thought him to be and instead, she feels no connection to him, not even as a friend. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft addresses this disconnect between a wife and husband:

The affection of husbands and wives cannot be pure when they have so few sentiments in common, and when so little confidence is established at home, as must be the case when their pursuits are so different. That intimacy from which tenderness should flow, will not, cannot subsist between the vicious. (113)

Wollstonecraft's fiction allows her to show how George, educated to use reasoning and critical thinking, is unable to (indeed, does not even attempt to) relate to Maria. Maria explains,

I perceived that I could not become the friend or confidant of my husband. Everything I learned relative to his affairs I gathered up by accident. . . . Returning from the theatre, or any amusing party, I frequently began to relate what I had seen and highly relished; but with sullen taciturnity he soon silenced me. (130)

George's educational training prepares him to be in the position of power and Maria to be

in the position of the submissive, complacent wife. They lack an intellectual congruency—even though most readers would argue her intellect to be far superior to that of George Venerables. He cannot recognize her intellectual ability because he has been conditioned to dismiss her. His formal education, although academically focused, was void of women and, thus, his education in itself contributes toward the subjugation of women. Wollstonecraft insists that it is an unreal expectation for a married couple to have a good marriage if the husbands and wife's educational preparation and interests are so dissimilar. While Maria and George's intellectual differences surely create separation between them, George's true character is soon revealed as Maria learns more about who her husband actually is.

The Negative Effect of Too Much Complacency in Men

Wollstonecraft discusses how a society that glorifies women as merely pleasure-givers contributes to the corruption of young men who cannot escape their days of bachelorhood when entering into a marriage. She states, "Our young men become selfish coxcombs . . . from the lax morals and depraved affections of the libertine. . . . — a finical man of taste, who is only anxious to secure his own private gratifications, and to maintain his rank in society" (*Vindication* 22). George Venerables demonstrates his "coxcomb" and "libertine" ways early in the marriage when it becomes apparent that his interest and sexual appetite go beyond what his good wife can offer. Maria speaks to the reader about George through a lens similar to denial until she is unable to euphemize his absences or

disconnection to her. Often, in drunken escapades, he would parade around town, reliving his bachelor libertine days with prostitutes. In one instance, Maria speaks with her husband during one of his drunken rants. Of this, she states, “I discovered even, by his conversation, when intoxicated, that his favourites were wantons of the lowest class, who could by their vulgar, indecent mirth, which he called nature, rouse his sluggish spirits” (132). George’s own inadequacy as a human being leads him to the arms of those he—and society—has deemed beneath him. The shock of his revelation is twofold: he boasts of his disgusting indiscretions with the most vulgar women and he does not care that he is telling his wife of such betrayal. The likelihood of these situations arising in actual society is great, according to Wollstonecraft, if women are educated to live for men. She claims, “But Rousseau, and most of the male writers who have followed his steps, have warmly inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed at one point: to render them pleasing” (*Vindication* 96). A huge adversary to Rousseau’s idea that the sole purpose of women’s education should be to “render them pleasing,” Wollstonecraft asserts that women who are only taught to be agreeable, satisfying, or entertaining will seek approval from men, time and time again. If women have been systematically disabled by the education structure that forms them and their entire education has consisted of being trained to please men, women could potentially seek approval from men outside their marriage. In addition, George has no qualms about divulging his activities with his wife because as a woman, she is supposed to accept her husband’s indiscretions without questioning him. Essentially, he lords his power over her.

In the case of prostitution, while it could certainly be—and often times was—instituted by a woman out of necessity for sustenance, it is not surprising that women entered into the business with the bulk of their education revolving around their function in society as men pleasers. A woman's subject hood depended on the extent to which her existence was ratified by the men around her. Perhaps the strongest argument for better female education could hit at the pride of a man who does not want his reputation tarnished due to his wife's infidelities. If he can rest assured knowing that his wife does not seek the approval of other men and uses logic and reasoning to decipher manipulation, he would most definitely agree with a solid, foundational education for women.

Wollstonecraft maintains in *Vindication* that when a society places high value on the physical beauty of women men feel infatuation or lust but cannot really feel love toward a woman. Even when married, George views his wife as a sexual object and selfishly seeks gratification by even the lowest means. Maria struggles with thoughts of divorcing George because people around her view the divorced man “with lordly dignity,” as one who “has shaken off a clog; . . . A woman, on the contrary, resigning what is termed her natural protector . . . is despised and shunned, for asserting the independence of mind distinctive of a rational being, and spurning at slavery” (149). Thus, it was determined that the brand of a divorce was placed solely on the wife because it was her duty to submit to the will of her husband. Divorce exposed her non-adherence to this unwritten rule. In one particular incident, Maria gains the resolve she needs in order to firmly pursue a final separation from her detestable husband. George asks a

friend, who has recently befriended Maria, to come to dinner. When the friend exposes his feelings of love to Maria, and she questions his friendship with her husband, the man shows her a letter written to him by her husband. With disgust, Maria recalls, “He assured him, ‘that every woman had her price,’ and, with gross indecency, hinted, that he should be glad to have the duty of a husband taken off his hands. He advised him to . . . attack my credulous generosity, and weak pity” (153). George’s genius plan to prostitute his wife to his friend is enough reason for Maria to want to terminate the marriage. He views her as no better than disposable property and even gives his friend advice on how to seduce her. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft addresses this inability of men to conceptualize women as more than sexual beings. She states,

To adulterous lust the most sacred duties are sacrificed, because before marriage, men, by a promiscuous intimacy with women, learned to consider love as a selfish gratification—learned to separate it not only from esteem, but from the affection merely built on habit. (*Vindication* 292)

Maria’s husband cannot love his wife according to the truest definition of love where she would be treated as an equal and valued for her complete self. Instead, he loves the pleasure she represents and views her as a sexual object. With the improvement of women’s education, the perception of females as sexual objects would change because women would have more to offer than their physical desire.

A Wife’s Lack of Power

Wollstonecraft also discusses the powerless position that a woman can find herself in if she decides that she is going to leave her husband. Because women were dependents in Wollstonecraft's society, they had very little options when it came to leaving a bad marriage. Maria decides to leave George and she discusses the experience of fleeing her husband as he pursues her around London. She is able to procure the opinions of various women in relation to her situation, and the first place Maria escapes to a woman whom she knows through a local business. The woman, she says, "agreed to conceal me for the present; yet assuring me at the same time, shaking her head, that, when a woman was once married, she should bear everything" (163). Maria then goes on to explain how the woman worked diligently while her husband took everything she had and beat her whenever he deemed necessary. While the woman does show some understanding by agreeing to let Maria stay with her, she disagrees with a woman leaving her husband for any reason. Regardless of the ill treatment and abuse that the woman has to endure, she sees it as a part of her duty as a woman and wife. She cannot unite with Maria's attempt to divorce her husband because in the woman's mind, a wife must remain at her husband's side despite even the worst of transgressions on the part of the husband. It was an ideal created by the society in which they lived; women were not considered to be an equal in marriage and were expected to dote on their husband and submit to any of his requests. Wollstonecraft writes, "I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government" (102). Wollstonecraft advocates

for women to have the power to govern themselves instead of submitting to the authority of their husband and having no voice in any decision, minor or major. She is quick to suggest that women should have a male representative for protection rather than be completely independent in order to avoid distancing her ideas too much from her male readers. Still, the example with Maria's landlady demonstrates the inability of females to unite due to beliefs too heavily imposed on them in a patriarchal society. Not only does the landlady allow her husband to mistreat her, but she thinks it is warranted and acceptable because she is a woman, and thus by definition a lesser half. She is convinced that females are lesser beings; therefore, it is of no surprise that she cannot feel compassion toward Maria or unite with her beyond providing a place for her to stay.

Wollstonecraft further explores the reality of women having to be dependent on their husbands and explains why it is a pernicious phenomenon with the example of Maria's landlady. George discovers Maria's place of hiding and insists on her coming home. Instead, Maria asks her landlady to promptly find another residence for her. The landlady, no stranger to a bad marriage, gives Maria advice: "Women must be submissive. . . . Who had they to maintain them, but their husbands?" (169). The landlady then divulges a history with her husband in which he has an affair with a materialistic, and so-called "impudent slut," and squanders her landlady's earnings to afford the wants and needs of his mistress. She and her husband separate, only to be united later after she manages to establish herself again and he convinces her of his "sincere" desire to be together. A week later she is "once more reduced to beggary" (170). She tells her story to

Maria and gives advice because she has no faith in the laws that repeatedly fail women due to women's lack of voice and defense in judicial matters. Although the landlady understands Maria's situation and sympathizes with her, it is still apparent to the landlady that Maria needs to stop running and go back to her husband. The landlady sees Maria's cause as hopeless and knows far too well that as a married and pregnant woman, Maria would be better situated with her husband. Wollstonecraft asserts that men value their sense of dominance over women and are aware of a woman's inability to provide for her own happiness or well-being. She states, "Let men take their choice, man and woman were made for each other, though not to become one being; and if they will not improve women, they will deprave them!" (*Vindication* 109). Women did not have a separate identity from the men in their lives because any important decision was dictated for them by either their father or husband. Once a woman is married, she has no legal rights because her identity is nonexistent; she is her husband's property. Maria finds herself in a dilemma where she wants to remain separated from her husband, but the law guarantees her no rights. She is, according to law, her husband's property. One has to look no further than William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* from the 18th century where he defines the position of a woman after marriage. He states, "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband" (433). Essentially, wives became a part of their husband, similar to a piece of property. The husbands were legally responsible for the wives, and in many

cases the husband had rights to do whatever he chose while wives were extremely limited. Even though The Marriage Bill of 1857 (a document detailing the legal implications of the marriage contract) came after Wollstonecraft's time, it simply verbalized what was already known and accepted to be legally binding regarding a woman's position in the marriage contract. It revealed that women were not viewed as equals to men and it moved divorce proceedings from the church to the civil court. As part of the Marriage Bill, the Divorce Law asserted that "a woman's adultery was a more serious offense than a man's" (Holmes 603). Accordingly, a divorce was granted to a husband based solely on his wife's act of adultery while a wife could not divorce her husband due to the same offense. Because the woman could produce a child as a result of her sin, adultery was looked upon as the ultimate insult to a husband. And "more subtle than fears regarding inheritance was the idea that a husband had a property interest in his wife; her adultery decreased the value of that interest" (Holmes 605). This example of a double standard and subordinate existence is shown with Maria. While she empowers herself by leaving George, she is still bound by marriage laws that favor her husband. Her landlady sympathizes with Maria yet cannot agree with Maria's feelings to leave her husband. Even though the landlady has experienced sheer misery by the trickery and thievery of her husband, she feels hopeless in a society that shields men and assumes the guilt of women.

Wollstonecraft recognizes that an essential source of independence comes from control over one's finances, and women usually did not have the means to be financially

independent. This lack of financial power for women created an inevitable cycle of helpless dependence on men and it contributed toward transforming women into more selfish, materialistic people. Maria decides to take her infant daughter and leave England and enlists the help of a maid who comes highly recommended. When Maria awakens and finds her baby and the maid missing, she realizes her folly. Painfully, she recalls, “The maid—the plausible woman I had hired—put, doubtless, some stupefying potion in what I ate or drank, the morning I left town. . . . How could a creature in a female form see me caress thee, and steal thee from my arms!” (176). All women should respect the sanctity of the bond between mother and child; it is generally inconceivable that this maid could take an infant from her mother for what presumably was a nice payment from Mr. Venerables. Lacking any sense of compassion for Maria, the maid chooses not to align with a fellow female. It is yet another example of a female choosing a male, or something of material worth and benefit to her, over helping one of her sex. Wollstonecraft discusses in *Vindication* how a woman in the maid’s position has three choices. She can perform the task out of a sense of powerlessness, she can decide to go through with it because it enables her social survival, or she can choose a third option, which would entail not stealing a baby from her mother’s arms. Wollstonecraft recalls, “My very soul has often sickened at observing the sly tricks practised by women to gain some foolish thing on which their silly hearts were set. Not allowed to dispose of money, or call any thing their own, they learn to turn the market penny” (*Vindication* 108). Giving women no authority over their finances leads them to be selfish and place unnecessary value and

emphasis on material wealth. Wollstonecraft asserts that education for women needs to be more directed at women learning basic skills in order to properly manage a household, which would include the finances. Female unity could not flourish in a place where women are desperate to have some financial control.

Women's Inability to Support One Another

Wollstonecraft asserts that society, particularly women in society, lack the ability to truly unite and comfort a woman in distress; instead, they shun or reject those women who are different or who do not abide by the societal expectations that maintain that women should be obedient and submissive. Because most women lack the analytical skills to process and accept something different than what they are told is acceptable, they contribute to the cycle that places women in a powerless position with men. Wollstonecraft writes of Maria falling in love with another resident during her time in the madhouse. When Maria flees the madhouse, she is accused of adultery and must remain in England until the trial is resolved. It is explained that

[s]he visited some ladies with whom she had formerly been intimate, but was refused admittance; . . . they could not recollect her Had she remained with her husband, practicing insincerity and neglecting her child to manage an intrigue, she would still have been visited and respected.

(186)

Maria's society encourages women to banish those women from company who do not

abide by the feminine ideals of the time. There is no reason great enough for Maria to leave her husband, and regardless of any compassion the women might have for her, conversing and visiting with Maria is out of the question. In her treatise Wollstonecraft asserts this same idea, stating,

Women, in general, as well as the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization, and missed the useful fruit. . . . Ever restless and anxious, their over exercised sensibility not only renders them uncomfortable themselves, but troublesome, to use a soft phrase, to others.
(*Vindication* 97)

Lack of a proper education influences women to adopt characteristics that are less than ideal and leads to a lack of unity amongst women. Only when women can think logically and be rational creatures will they be able to be good human beings. They turn on each other because their preparation and/or environment leads them to be egocentric and self-serving. In such a society, women are set up to compete with one another due to their strictly physical value. Insecurities arise due to having such a superficial relationship with men and these insecurities are then directed verbally toward other females.

Unfinished yet Full of Promise

The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria is left unfinished and thus the story is left inconclusive. Mary Wollstonecraft passed away before its completion, and so the reader has no true sense of closure with the story of Maria. Perhaps, though, it is fitting that Maria's story does not end. Wollstonecraft uses Maria as a catalyst to voice her

frustrations and rage with her post-French-Revolution disappointment. Her hopes of having an alternative social structure in place (as opposed to a patriarchal structure) were quashed. Even in an unfinished text, Wollstonecraft manages through countless examples to show how women need education in order to become better human beings. Her fiction allows her to further this argument in relation to women gaining sovereignty over themselves. She also demonstrates a pressing need for women to unite in their common cause to overcome the injustices they face. Patricia Altenbernd Johnson, in her book *On Wollstonecraft* writes of Wollstonecraft's intentions with her female characters. Johnson asserts that "woman is a universal category in the novel. Each character represents the experiences of what Wollstonecraft calls 'woman'" (74). There are a variety of women in the novel with diverse backgrounds and yet they can all be linked together due to their experiences of being dominated by men. Regardless of class, age, race, or social status, women are at the mercy of men for so long as society supports such a system.

Chapter II

An Unconventional Woman Ahead of Her Time in Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*

In *Adeline Mowbray*, Amelia Alderson Opie demonstrates the consequences of going against the rules of society, particularly when an unmarried woman chooses to live as a “mistress” with a man. Due to Adeline’s choice to remain unmarried, she is constantly subject to poor treatment by members of all social classes. With Adeline, Opie creates a strong, self-reliant character and demonstrates the rejection of a society that is blinded by ritualized rigidity with respect to the expectations of what constitutes a lady. Adeline remains strong throughout the book until she chooses to marry. She is then forced to submit to a husband who, after making her his wife, loses interest in her and strays. The critic Janet Todd claims that “there is no doubt that [Opie] genuinely intended her tale as a warning, drawing on the actual experience of Wollstonecraft and other friends to point her lesson” (237). While Todd is one of the most prolific writers on Wollstonecraft, she fails to see the larger scheme of what Opie was trying to accomplish in her text. Opie highlights the pitfalls of marriage by creating a heroine who loses her sense of control over her life only after entering into a marriage. Thus, she is not using her text as a warning to women that they should not test the limits of their society. Instead, she is demonstrating the long journey that women will inevitably face as they challenge a system that is overwhelmingly oppressive and unjust. Opie also uses the example of Adeline to depict the result of placing theory into practice. Anne McWhir

acknowledges that “Adeline’s blindness to the tension between principles and practice operates in almost every episode” (16). Adeline does not have enough experience in the outside world to realistically predict people’s reaction to her choice to remain unwed. In addition to Todd’s and McWhir’s perception of the text, there are many other critics who view Opie’s *Adeline* as more ambiguous with Adeline’s education and her positive and cheery depiction of an out-of-wedlock relationship. One of these critics includes Miriam Wallace, who states, “It thus seems imperative to resist easy resolution of *Adeline Mowbray* into a simple *roman á clef* or biographically determined production, while at the same time attending to the particular ideological contexts that produced this ambivalent novel” (204). My argument is different from other critics in that I focus exclusively on Opie’s alignment with Wollstonecraft’s revolutionary ideas. In *Adeline*, Opie creates a very sympathetic character and uses foils to highlight her good qualities while ridiculing the behavior of various members of society. Creating Adeline as a sympathetic character despite the fact that she transgresses social mores presents an argument that remains unseen in the critical world: Opie is not using Adeline’s story to convey a mere cautionary tale to warn a female readership away from transgressing against social norms; instead, she demonstrates the oppressive traditions and hypocrisies of a society that easily contrasts with that of the righteous and pure Adeline. In creating a sympathetic character with Adeline, Opie shows the importance of having female unity to help support and overcome obstacles while she also depicts the need for a more structured, logical, female education.

In order to assess what Opie produced with *Adeline Mowbray*, it is imperative to assert Opie's connection with the Jacobins and, essentially, with Wollstonecraft. The English Jacobins were comprised of many different groups, though all espoused similar ideals. In general, Jacobins

opposed tyranny and oppression, be it domestic, national or international, spiritual or temporal; they were against all distinctions between men which were not based on moral qualities, or virtue; and they were utterly opposed to persecution of individuals, communities, or nations for their beliefs on any subject. (Kelly 7)

They shared liberal beliefs that originated during the French Revolution and which supported a potentially violent approach to achieving civil liberties. Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband, William Godwin, were well-known Jacobins of their time who supported radical ideas (Carlson 48, 90). Opie found the thoughts and ideas of Wollstonecraft to be particularly interesting and "liked Wollstonecraft quite a bit" (Matthew 385). Indeed, Opie wrote to Wollstonecraft, admitting, "You are one of the few objects of my curiosity who in gratifying have not disappointed it also—you and the Lakes of Cumberland have exceeded my expectations" (Eberle 126). While Opie admired Wollstonecraft, she did not openly support the latter's Jacobin ideas and could not openly show agreement with Wollstonecraft's views. Patricia A. Matthew confirms this, stating that "[t]he only way for women like Opie . . . to engage with [Wollstonecraft's] ideology and explore her personal story was from the safe distance of fiction" (387). There is little

doubt concerning the connection between Opie's work and Wollstonecraft's, especially with the heroine's out-of-wedlock relationship that is presumed to be loosely based on the relationship between Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. The disagreement among critics surrounds two diverging interpretations of *Adeline Mowbray*: She either created the text as a cautionary tale to all those, namely women, who wish to test the boundaries of society or she is criticizing the limitations and prejudice that women face when they attempt to break free from those boundaries. The latter interpretation is more readily provable.

With *Adeline*, Opie highlights the folly or misdirection of a young woman who, after reading philosophy that opposes marriage, determines to live a life as an unwed, respectable woman; however, it is not Adeline's lifestyle that Opie is criticizing. Opie provides countless examples of individuals and groups in society who ignorantly prejudice Adeline based on her convictions. All other characters are willing to disregard their personal beliefs in order to comply with society's unwritten rules. Adeline is not willing to make that sacrifice and when she finally does agree to marry, it initiates her downfall. The tragedy does not lie with Adeline's unconventional choice to remain unwed but with society's oppression of the unwed female or, indeed, females in general. This is precisely why I propose that Opie actually presents Adeline as a sympathetic character, and why Opie pessimistically depicts the talk and actions of those who chastise her. The character of Adeline embodies many of Mary Wollstonecraft's core ideas, one that specifically supports women as independent thinkers who should not view marriage

as their only avenue for climbing the social hierarchy. Furthermore, *Adeline Mowbray* clearly aligns with Wollstonecraft's stance on the need for women to have a more academic education and with the assertion that women need to unite as a gender in order to advance collectively.

Radical Theory Meets the Untrained Mind in Adeline

The obstacles that a young woman can face in obtaining a more academically challenging education serve as a major theme in *Adeline*, which easily aligns with Wollstonecraft's sentiments on the difficulty of advancing the education of women. Wollstonecraft affirms, "The little knowledge that [women] are led to acquire, during the important years of youth, is merely relative to accomplishments; and accomplishments without a bottom. . . . Superficial and monotonous is every grace" (*Vindication* 265). These accomplishments, primarily domestic in nature, consisted of basic reading, basic mathematics, sewing, cooking, and art. The title character Adeline is raised and educated by her mother and grandmother, which would have been an accepted practice of that time. Opie explains, "All Mrs. Mowbray's ambition had settled in one point, one passion, and that was EDUCATION" (277). Mrs. Mowbray, a self-proclaimed genius, is well-versed in scientific and philosophic readings; as a result, she lacks some of the domestic inclinations of her sex. Unbeknownst to her, Adeline's grandmother manages to educate Adeline in the affairs of the household when it comes to cooking and managing finances (281). Her grandmother manages to teach Adeline arithmetic and upon Mrs. Mowbray's

discovery of Adeline's acquired knowledge, the grandmother states, "but I, thinking it a pity that the poor girl should learn nothing, like, till she was to learn everything, taught her according to the old way; and I cannot but say she took to it very kindly" (289). Mrs. Mowbray, planned on teaching arithmetic to her daughter at a later time and is pleased yet hesitant when learning of Adeline's new knowledge. This ambivalence could be partially due to the fact that women were "forbidden from learning subjects considered too masculine, such as theology, Latin, and Greek, Ancient History, Mathematics, and Natural Philosophy" (Wallace 283). Adeline's mother, although familiar with all of the "masculine subjects," is still cautious about educating her daughter with knowledge that could potentially make her seem masculine or un-ladylike. Accordingly, "Mrs. Mowbray's inconsistency, vacillation, and impracticality make her an inadequate parent, a foolish woman, and an irrational thinker" (McWhir 13). Editha's failure to put her own theories into practice contributes toward her uncertainty with her daughter's education, and this lack of action remains a theme throughout the duration of the book. In a society where the education of women is devalued, it is imperative that women support one another in their attempts to achieve equality. Adeline's own mother cannot support Adeline with her education, and it is a precursor to the maltreatment that Adeline is subjected to by other members of society, particularly women.

Most significantly, Opie demonstrates what a radical education can do to a woman's thoughts and reputation. We are told, for example, that Mrs. Mowbray "loved the information which she acquired, less for its own sake than for the supposed

importance which it gave her amongst her acquaintance, and the means of displaying her superiority over other women” (Opie 295). Adeline, however, acquires knowledge for its own sake and chooses not to boast. The main conflict in the book revolves around the idea of Adeline getting married. Due to her radical education, achieved not only through reading but also through conversations with her mother, Adeline believes that marriage is unnecessary; she determines that she intends to pursue an unmarried liaison with a gentleman named Glenmurray. It was an idea that Adeline was first taught by her mother and yet her mother’s response is full of outrage at Adeline’s request. Mrs. Mowbray says, “Little did I think that you were so romantic as to see no difference between amusing one’s imagination with new theories and new systems, and acting upon them in defiance of common custom, and the received usages of society” (335). Mrs. Mowbray sees thought and action as two separate entities; she can teach and support radical ideas that challenge the structure of society, but she dares not to live within those ideals because she fears being an outcast. Wollstonecraft struggled in the same manner as Mrs. Mowbray. According to Mary Poovey, in Wollstonecraft’s final work, *Maria*, she

identified one aspect of what she held to be the tyranny of eighteenth-century bourgeois institutions, yet because her own values—indeed, her own self-definition—were inextricably tied up with the values of these institutions, she was unable to pursue her revolutionary insights to their logical conclusion. (112)

Mary Wollstonecraft, although fully aware of her society and the wrongs committed

against women, had to be censor herself when it came to expressing her views that contrasted with what everyone else accepted as normal. Mrs. Mowbray's struggle is very similar because she is aware of the pains that society can inflict, while her daughter's naïveté leads her to stubbornly hold onto her beliefs in a society that is not ready for such a radical change. While society in Opie's time was ready and accepting of female writers, it was closed to women who entered the public sphere. In fact, "the patriarchal structures of British society . . . restrict[ed] women's access to education and ability to act in the public sphere as an infernal attempt to corrode social, political and cultural authority, representing itself as a virtuous, patriotic defence against such 'corruption'" (McInnes 481). Adeline's education expands her mind and makes her aware of the inconsistencies of society, and she acts with youthful haste. Still, it is society's reaction that becomes the focal point of Opie's condemning commentary.

Opie's Depiction of Adeline's Marriage: A Horror Story

Adeline's adverse views on marriage due to her education mimic the idealistic expectations of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Candide*, in which Candide is taught that "this world is the best of all possible worlds." She treks into a society that is unprepared for any deviation made by an otherwise "virtuous" woman and fully anticipates acceptance only to be met with unwanted advances and judgmental shunnings. Glenmurray, the admired writer who first sparks Adeline's adopted aversion to marriage, even tries to convince Adeline "that the opinions which she had expressed [against marriage] were

better confined, in the present dark state of the public mind, to a select and discriminating circle” (319). He is fully aware of the possible ramifications of living as an unwed woman in his society due to his ability to reach logical conclusions. Adeline wants too much too soon and does not recognize that acceptance in society relies on following traditional moral codes of behavior. Adeline’s education fails her because while she reads about Glenmurray’s oppositional views toward marriage, she is unable to deduce that theory and practice are two completely different things. Wollstonecraft asserts, “Till women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks” (*Vindication* 111). Although Adeline’s courageous, steadfast journey is certainly admirable, her ignorance with how the world will react to her demonstrates her inability to foresee the consequences of her actions. Lacking a rational, Wollstonecraftian education, she assumes that she will be able to live her life how she chooses without the glaring eye of society. If Adeline had been educated more in-depth and had opportunities, per se, in a “Socratic seminar” as Wollstonecraft suggests, she would have been able to gain the perspective of others.

Adeline’s aversion to marriage is a constant topic throughout the novel; this aversion is significant as it relates to the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. As noted above, Adeline and her mother read publications written by Mr. Frederick Glenmurray that “attacked the institution of marriage. . . . [And] he drew so delightful a picture of the superior purity, as well as happiness, of an union cemented by no ties but those of love and honour” (294). Many readers recognize Mr. Glenmurray’s

adverse views on marriage as mirroring those of William Godwin. William Godwin did not believe in the constraint of marriage and the limitations of committing oneself for a lifetime to another person. He described marriage as something people rushed into and “in almost every instance [people] find themselves deceived. They are reduced to make the best of an irretrievable mistake. They are led to conceive it is their wisest policy, to shut their eyes upon realities” (Chapter VIII Appendix). Certainly, Opie created the character of Glenmurray based on her knowledge and acquaintance with William Godwin. Godwin’s doctrine, turned into the words of Glenmurray, creates the main premise for Adeline’s refusal to marry. It even seems as though Opie is criticizing Adeline’s choice on a number of occasions throughout the novel. She describes Adeline’s initial ideas about not marrying as “opinions dangerous to her well-being as a member of any civilized society, and laying, perhaps, the foundation to herself and her mother of future misery and disgrace” (294). As the story progresses, Adeline and Glenmurray fall in love and live together without being married. They have a strong friendship and a loving relationship; in fact, the only negative issues they face in their relationship come from outside opinions of people who look condescendingly at Adeline. If Opie wanted to criticize Adeline’s promiscuous relationship with Glenmurray, she would have shown the relationship to be weak or shown drawbacks to Adeline’s choice. The only drawback to their relationship is that they can exist together in bliss within their own microcosmic apartment, but any time they come into contact with the outside world, Adeline experiences mistreatment. Still, Opie ultimately emphasizes that between a man and a

woman, a friendship can exist, specifically without the confines of marriage. She shows allegiance with Wollstonecraft's ideas on friendship between men and women.

Wollstonecraft states, "The most holy band of society is friendship. It has been well said, by a shrewd satirist, 'that rare as true love is, true friendship is still rarer'" (99). Again, if Opie wanted to misalign from Wollstonecraft's (and Godwin's) ideas and show that living together out of wedlock produces negative results, Opie would not have shown the relationship between Adeline and Glenmurray to be ideal, especially as a strong friendship. Yes, Adeline suffers due to her intellectual integrity and her inability to anticipate the rejection of society and the unwanted advances of assuming men. But the actual relationship behind closed doors between Adeline and Glenmurray is ideal and desirable. They become each other's best friend. Furthermore, other relationships featured in the novel like the courting relationship between Adeline's mother and her new fiancé, Sir Patrick, are portrayed as laughable. Adeline's mother falls in love with Sir Patrick without knowing him well, and Sir Patrick is shown to be a libertine who has more interest in Adeline than in her mother. Other relationships become the foil to Adeline and Glenmurray's relationship. It is not too long, however, before Glenmurray's health declines and he asks Adeline to make a surprising wish of his come true.

On his deathbed, Glenmurray tells Adeline that he wishes for her to marry his friend Mr. Berendale. After the death of Glenmurray, and after the complaints of community members against her in relation to her teaching children, she decides to marry Mr. Berendale:

In consequence of this, and of the recollection of *his* [Glenmurray's] advice, and *his* decided opinion, that by becoming the wife of a respectable man, I could alone expect to recover my rank in society, and, consequently, my usefulness, I offer you my hand; and promise, in the course of a few months, to become yours in the sight of God and man.

(510)

The combination of community disapproval mixed with a sense of duty to her lost lover overcome her, and she finally yields her beliefs in order to improve her reputation from that of a mistress. Mr. Berendale, however, turns out to be adulterous, selfish, and embarrassed by his marriage to one formerly known as a mistress. In fact, Adeline's marriage to Berendale becomes the precise type of union Wollstonecraft cautions against in *Vindication*. In terms of marriage, she states,

I cannot avoid feeling the most lively compassion for those unfortunate females who are broken off from society, and by one error torn from all those affections and relationships that improve the heart and mind. . . .for many innocent girls become the dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and still more are, as it may emphatically be termed, ruined before they know the difference between virtue and vice:—and thus prepared by their education for infamy, they become infamous. (149)

Berendale ends up leaving Adeline and their child in order to marry another, and even denies that a marriage to Adeline ever took place. This new wife of Berendale's after

Adeline, like many women during that time, succumbed to the trickery of cruel men who would make a verbal promise of marriage only for the man to leave when he found someone else. The beguilement was all too common and placed many women in a position where they had no means to care for themselves or their offspring. Even when Adeline commits to marriage, it is not enough to halt evil or distress from approaching her. Adeline has other hardships that she is able to overcome in the novel, but her marriage to and subsequent abandonment by Berendale is the lowest point for Adeline in the novel. Opie depicts Adeline's submission to marriage in such a negative way to demonstrate that again, it is not the refusal to marry that is the ultimate conflict; the ultimate conflict resides in society's rules that are directly aligned with the oppression of females. If Opie is trying to show that Adeline should rightfully get married, she would not depict it in such a miserable way. Instead, Opie garners sympathy for her female protagonist by displaying the inhumanity and evil behavior of those around her with special attention to the wrongs committed by Adeline's husband.

Making an Impression on the Reader: All of Adeline's Good Qualities

Most protagonists are created to excite sympathy and interest among readers, and Opie delivers just this with Adeline. Still, where most protagonists have certain faults exposed or perhaps crumble under pressure, Adeline remains steadfast in her convictions and pure of heart. Opie exposes all of Adeline's innately good qualities many times over, presumably to ease the prejudices of the nineteenth-century reader and to establish

credibility for her character. Many readers would find it difficult not to sympathize, for example, with a woman who gives to those in need. Adeline provides for the poor and shows compassion beyond expectation: “[T]he comforts the poor required she purchased herself; and in sickness she visited, in sorrow she wept with them” (282). Adeline is a benevolent giver at an early age, and throughout the course of the novel, she has multiple opportunities which demonstrate her generous and kind disposition. The ultimate sacrifice is made later in the novel when Adeline goes to purchase a pineapple for her dying soulmate and instead, uses the last of her money to prevent a poor, sick father from going to jail. After telling her lover, Glenmurray, the reason for the pineapple’s absence and asking forgiveness, he proclaims, “Forgive you! I love and admire you more than ever! I know your heart, Adeline” (466). Her sacrifice for strangers prevents her from satisfying her lover’s dying wish. This upsets her greatly, yet it shows her ability to think rationally about what is most important. Readers appreciate such a show of humanity, and it inspires empathy and respect for Adeline. If Opie had the intention of using Adeline as a cautionary example, she would not have created such an admirable and likable protagonist. As readers, we want to see Adeline succeed and we sympathize with anything that upsets her or serves as an obstacle for her.

Adeline’s generous nature coincides nicely with a very favorable physical attractiveness. Opie writes,

Her beauty was the beauty of expression of countenance, not regularity of feature, though the uncommon fairness and delicacy of her complexion,

the lustre of her hazel eyes, her long dark eyelashes, and the profusion of soft light hair which curled over the ever-mantling colour of her cheek, gave her some pretensions to what is denominated beauty. (299)

Opie does not simply bestow physical beauty upon her heroine, but rather she creates a description of beauty based upon Adeline's disposition. Opie accentuates her good qualities in order to gain the best impression of her character. Female readers of the time could more easily identify with Adeline due to her admirable features. If she was just described as being beautiful, it would be less effective in gaining the reader's favor because again, women in Opie's society were judged mainly on their physical appearance. Because of this superficial judging, women then became envious of one another and insecure. This all relates to and supports the argument that Opie creates Adeline as a sympathetic character who readers adore. If the novel was just a cautionary tale warning women that they should not try to seek their independence, Opie would not have constructed Adeline as Opie does. Female readers connect with Adeline and admire her ability to uphold her personal beliefs, in spite of her naiveté.

Adeline experiences many injustices in the novel, which in effect then creates the largest amount of sympathy for her due to the cruelty of those she encounters. The first and most abhorrent injustice happens when Adeline becomes the victim of her future step-father's advances: "so much have your sweet person, and your frank and liberal way of thinking, charmed me, that I here freely offer myself to you, and we will begin the life of honour together as soon as you please" (Opie 325). Sir Patrick learns of Adeline's

refusal to marry and consequently, he assumes she desires to be a loose woman. Even though Adeline maintains a belief in marriage that contradicts most readers' beliefs of that time, Opie overshadows this with the gross insult Sir Patrick inflicts on her. Several other incidents with disrespectful and presumptive men further demonstrate that the problem clearly lies with the grotesqueness of the men and societal prejudice. That society also includes the opinions and behaviors of the gentlewomen.

A Call for Female Unity and Support

As Wollstonecraft shows the need for female unity, Opie paints a similar picture and draws on different groups of females to illustrate this need. A mother's love is irreplaceable and so significant that with its absence, Opie hints at the assumption that the daughter will certainly falter. After evading the unwanted advances of her stepfather, Sir Patrick, Adeline has no place to go and runs to the protection of Glenmurray, with whom she lives as his mistress. Even though her mother forbade her to be with Glenmurray, Adeline decides to flee because she wants to spare her mother the shame of knowing that her husband, Sir Patrick, desires her daughter. When Adeline is finally able to plead with her mother for forgiveness, her mother sternly replies, "But for her, I might still have indulged the charming delusion, even if it were delusion, that love of me, not of my wealth, induced the man I doted upon to commit a crime to gain possession of me" (406). The mother blames the daughter for her misery and refuses forgiveness. Opie clearly shows Adeline as the victim and so the incident not only builds sympathy in the reader

for a girl without her mother but it also solidifies the need for female unity. With no mother to help protect and guide her, Adeline is thrust into a world that preys on nonconformists. Adeline becomes the victim and the reader vehemently wants to see her situation improved.

As a mistress or kept woman, gaining the friendship of just one “lady” would prove an almost impossible task, as shown in *Adeline Mowbray*. Opie shows how the lack of female unity can further contribute to a young woman’s downfall, as in the case of Adeline. Dr. Norberry is a trusted friend and physician of Mrs. Mowbray and her daughter, much to the dismay of his wife and two daughters. Opie explains,

The praises of Mrs. Mowbray and Adeline were odious to the ears of Mrs. Norberry and his daughters. . . . especially the praises of the latter,—as the merit of Adeline was so uniform, that even the eye of envy could not at that period discover any thing in her vulnerable to censure. (298)

Because Adeline was both intelligent and domestic, his wife and daughters envied her the most and wished for her demise. Instead of supporting the idea of a strong female, they let personal jealousies illuminate their hateful thoughts. The Norberrys could have been a strong support system for Adeline, especially because Adeline becomes pregnant and faces the daunting realization that Glenmurray will die and she will be left without his help. Dr. Norberry suggests letting Adeline stay at their cottage to which Mrs. Norberry proclaims, “She shall never live within a ride of our house, I can assure you, Dr. Norberry” (401). Mrs. Norberry, despite being quite happily married, distrusts her

husband's intentions with helping an unwed and much younger female. Mrs. Norberry has an opportunity to aid a woman who will be desperately in need, but instead, her jealousy and distrust consume her. Her allegiance to Adeline as a female is nonexistent and Mrs. Norberry allows her jealousy to prevent helping Adeline.

Another instance of Adeline receiving female rejection occurs when she is refused the ability to converse with two of Glenmurray's female cousins due to her status as mistress. Adeline has to close herself away in her room while the visit takes place and she cries, "Alas!...when can we hope to see society enlightened and improved, when even those who see and strive to amend its faults in theory, in practice tamely submit to the trammels which it imposes?" (447). Adeline is frustrated with Glenmurray, who refuses to introduce her to his cousins despite his disbelief in the ridiculousness of it all. As the women leave, Adeline runs to the window to catch a glimpse of them: "they looked at her with the bold unfeeling stare of imagined superiority" (447). Opie further explains that it is Adeline who should have been kept away from these two women on account of one being an adulteress and the other a widow who likes the company of various men. Opie again depicts the poor nature of women who emit a sense of superiority over another woman in a more desperate situation. Instead of offering a look of understanding toward Adeline, the women exercise their elevated status to make her feel inferior. Furthermore, the irony and hypocrisy of the women treating Adeline as lowly is laughable when the women's lifestyles and caprices are fully divulged. Opie uses these women to satirize their hypocritical natures as well as the questionable actions of different women in

society. Adeline comes out of the situation with the reader's sympathy while the others are scorned.

In contrast, Opie demonstrates the strength of female unity when it is enacted. Through an act of ultimate benevolence, Savanna vows to become a lifelong servant of Adeline and loves her faithfully. When Savanna leaves for Jamaica in order to care for her dying husband, Adeline laments the loss of her company:

It had been so grateful to her feelings to meet every day the eyes of one being fixed with never-varying affection on hers, that, when she beheld those eyes no longer, she felt alone in the universe—nor had she a single female friend to whom she could turn for relief or consolation. (541)

Savanna serves as Adeline's only friend and it is Savanna's friendship that encourages Adeline and provides her with confidence in different situations. Savanna is also the lone person to verbally admonish Mr. Berendale, Adeline's husband, for his selfish and degrading behavior towards Adeline. Savanna remains with Adeline for the rest of her short life, including the moments leading up to her tragic death.

A Heroine's Death Amidst a Circle of Women

Adeline's death at the end of the novel concludes the story with a message of hope rather than extreme sadness with the loss of the heroine. Patricia A. Murphy confirms this: "Adeline does not die the death of a fallen woman but of a female warrior on a domestic battlefield, setting the terms for her daughter's future" (388). If Opie intended the novel as a warning to those women who might try to radically revolutionize

the path for women, she might have used the conclusion of Adeline's life as an opportunity to show that her extreme views led to an early death. Instead, she is surrounded by all those who care for her: Savanna, Adeline's daughter, Mrs. Mowbray, Mrs. Pemberton, and Dr. Norberry. It is a powerful sentiment to the unity of women (along with just one man). Opie writes, "At length she grasped Mrs. Mowbray's hand to her lips, and in imperfect accents exclaimed, 'I thank thee, gracious Heaven!' she laid her head on Savanna's bosom, and expired" (625). The only truly happy moments of her life depicted in the novel occur in her childhood and with her death, at the beginning and end of her story respectively. In both cases, it is the influence of the females in her life that contribute to and create this happiness. The unity of women is portrayed to show that even with the variation in temperaments and beliefs, women can create solid bonds of friendship. Janet Todd expresses her views on women and their need for peer support. She writes, "If their destiny is almost always sexual and heterosexual in the eighteenth-century novel, women's salvation is social, for they may 'fall' sexually, but must rise socially. Here the support and acceptance of other women is essential, since through their teaching of female lore, criminal or conventional, women aid and sustain each other" (Todd 4). These friendships are significant to the well-being of the female psyche and are shown to be ultimately desirable. The comfort and support that Adeline receives from her circle of women as she lies on her deathbed is significant and even though the protagonist dies, it leaves the reader with a sense of hope.

Chapter III

Helen Craik's Realization of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vision in *Stella of the North*

Mary Wollstonecraft and Amelia Alderson Opie both wrote of female protagonists who suffer greatly due to their powerlessness in society and their lack of an education that stresses logic. The third work of fiction in this thesis, *Stella of the North, or the Foundling of the Ship* (1802) by Helen Craik, includes a female protagonist, Stella, who has a self-assured, confident, delicate manner of conducting herself. Craik published the book ten years after Wollstonecraft's publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Craik's Stella embodies many of the traits that Wollstonecraft philosophically wanted for women. Stella is brought up and solely surrounded by women in a sheltered environment, and as a young adult she becomes a great example of what a woman can be. Unfortunately, when compared with *Maria* and *Adeline Mowbray*, there is little scholarship to be found on *Stella*. In fact, *Stella* is difficult to find in publication despite the novel's great example of a strong female protagonist. The reason for the inclusion of *Stella* in this thesis is twofold: Craik's characterization of Stella that clearly connects to Wollstonecraft and the virtually untapped and underappreciated storyline of the novel, which deserves critical resurrection because of its feminist material. Wollstonecraft lobbied for a more academic education for women so that they could have the ability use logic and reasoning effectively in their everyday lives. She wanted a good balance where women could be the intellectual equal of a man and yet still maintain

delicacies in speech and manner. The character of Stella provides this balance.

It Takes a Village of Women for the Education of Stella

Stella is raised and educated solely by women; men have virtually no contact with her or the possibility to have any kind of influence on her until she becomes a young adult. With the absence of men, she is able to flourish and develop into her true self. Craik creates an idealistic upbringing for Stella, one that Wollstonecraft would find satisfying because of the dominant presence of women. After all, Wollstonecraft has argued that men create obstacles that inhibit progress and that women need to be set free from society's (or men's) limitations. Stella's education becomes a focal point of her childhood as her adopted mother, Mrs. Bertram, wishes Stella to receive the best instruction possible because she hopes that Stella will become a governess one day. With limited funds, however, Mrs. Bertram is only able to afford a meager education for Stella. Luckily, Stella becomes friends with the two youngest Ross daughters, Emma and Maria, and it is their mother, Mrs. Ross, who asks Mrs. Bertram if Stella can join the girls in their education under the governess, Mrs. Sommers. Mrs. Ross "called upon Mrs. Bertram, and explained the motive of her visit by offering the little girl the same chance for improvement that her own daughters enjoyed under the eye of their excellent governess" (18-19). The entire extent of Stella's education is supervised and administered by women. Mrs. Ross was under no obligation to educate Stella, yet she felt compelled to ensure that Stella was given every educational opportunity possible. Wollstonecraft

states, “I wish especially to prove, that the weakness of mind and body, which men have endeavoured, impelled by various motives, to perpetuate, prevents their [women] discharging the peculiar duty of their sex” (*Vindication* 445). Men interfere in a woman’s ability to reach her full intellectual potential, and instead proliferate ideas of subordination and delicacy to female subjects. Craik models this sentiment as she chooses to educate Stella within the world of women. Through Stella, Craik imagines a fellowship of women interdependent with sisterhood, where women support each other and promote each other’s growth. Stella flourishes because she is raised and educated separately from the world of men, furthering Wollstonecraft’s argument that preconceived notions about women’s intellectual abilities influences men and/or society to lower their expectations of what women can accomplish academically. Stella reaches her full potential, as Wollstonecraft believed could happen when women are given more than a limited education. Janet Todd asserts, “The patriarchal education. . . . fits a woman to be a mistress or a wife and pits her against all other women with whom she must compete for these roles” (41). Stella’s accepting demeanor contrasts significantly with that of the envious and distrusting woman. Men have little or no influence in Stella’s education, so she is free from thoughts or ideals that would detract from her natural, intellectual growth as a human being.

Attempting to Alter the Sentimental Education of Women

Wollstonecraft often addresses the idea of women being sentimental, and Craik

creates many examples of this sentimentality, including one example with Mrs. Ross. When Wollstonecraft speaks of sentimentality, she defines it as “that feminine weakness of character, often produced by a confined education,” . . . [as] “a romantic twist of the mind, which has been very properly termed sentimental” (*Vindication* 445). In effect, she says that women know little of reality and focus their attention on or have “a romantic twist of the mind” with pleasing males. Their “confined education” relies heavily on novel reading with a lack of any advanced subjects. Craik uses the Ross family, who live near Stella and Mrs. Bertram, as an example of miseducation that relates to this topic of being sentimental. In order to educate their daughters, they hire a governess, Miss Sommers. Still, the father and mother disagree about what constitutes a proper education for young ladies. When Emma and Maria Ross turn fifteen, Mrs. Ross is

Obliged to acquiesce in depriving them of that advantage [Miss Sommers’ instruction] in obedience to her husband’s determination of placing them under what was styled more fashionable tuition: a determination, however, by no means congenial to her own opinion, and to which she consented with much reluctance. (25)

While the exact nature of Emma and Maria’s education under their father’s control is relatively unknown, it remains certain that Mrs. Ross is vehemently against taking her daughters away from Miss Sommers’s instruction. Mrs. Ross’s concern with the change in her daughters’ education is echoed in Wollstonecraft’s statements about women’s education where females are led to become “sentimental.” The father believes that the

girls need a more suitable education for their gender that trains them to perpetuate the status quo while the mother would like nothing more than to continue with their governess and a more rigorous education for her daughters. Craik uses the character of Mrs. Ross to show the powerlessness of the position of a wife when it comes to making decisions and to link to Wollstonecraft's idea that Mrs. Ross did not want a "sentimental" education for her daughters. Mrs. Ross protests her husband's decision for their daughters' education because she realizes that only under female instruction can they reach their full potential; under such an educational plan, she would also have control of supervision over what they are learning. Instead, she must submit to her husband's plan because her position as his wife renders her powerless to overrule his decisions. She wants more for the girls when it comes to their education and recognizes that they are capable, yet she is still in a powerless position as a woman.

The view of women as sentimental is also demonstrated by Craik's male characters, and it is a perception of women that Wollstonecraft wishes to eliminate. A few of Craik's male characters share one similar assumption of women that relates to women's delicate nature with falling in love because women are unable to decipher between a man being nice and a man being in love. These men have wealth and/or rank, and many provide their opinion to the innocent young Stella. As Captain Montague, a frequent visitor with Stella at the hermitage, explains his attachment to her, he is careful to not excite any false hope. He states,

‘I have frequently, my sweet girl, . . . been astonished at the undefinable

nature of my sentiments in your favor—but be not alarmed, the confession that follows is not of a description to call up your blushes; yet, perhaps, it requires some apology; and did I not believe you superior to most of your sex, I should certainly consider such as necessary preliminary before I venture to avow, that it is not love, in the common acceptance of the word, which binds me to you.’ (100)

He goes on to tell her that her resemblance to his mother is what initially excited his interest. While his language makes him appear gentle and earnest, he exposes a certain tendency common amongst the novel’s male characters when he denigrates women as a population in his address to Stella. The compliment of Stella being “superior to [her] sex” insinuates that the majority of women would assume a man’s interest only signifies love or sexual desire. Stella expresses no romantic interest in Captain Montague (indeed, such feelings are reserved for Major St. Vincent), yet he feels that because she’s “superior” to her sex he can be honest about his feelings for her whereas he would have to give considerably more preamble to the average girl. And while the suggestion of women making assumptions based on their romantic conjecture may not be too off-base, it does highlight the proliferation of a man’s belief in women being shallow. This assumed weakness or sentimentality in women is addressed by Wollstonecraft as well. She states, “Women subjected to ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life” (281). She recognizes

this characteristic in women as being problematic because it is hard to convince men of women's intellectual capacity if there are sentimental women who constantly demonstrate lack of intelligence. Because women were extremely limited with their education and a lot of their education revolved around subjects that were intellectually insignificant, they were not given the proper tools for logical reasoning. With reference to women's education, Wollstonecraft explains,

It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves. . . . When they marry they act as such children may be expected to act: they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures. (*Vindication* 77)

Men underestimated the ability of the female mind because women were not given opportunities beyond a more sentimental education, or an education that sets them up for entertaining or pleasing their husband. These same assumptions led to a diversified education for women in contrast to their male peers. Wollstonecraft writes, "Women are supposed to possess more sensibility. . . . And their strong attachments and instantaneous emotions of compassion are given as proofs; but the clinging affection of ignorance has seldom anything noble in it" (279). The supposition made by Captain Montague that most women are naive only furthers the need for a better female education and unity in the gender. Montague values the company of Stella and is comforted by her ability to

converse freely with him on an intellectual level. Craik suggests that a man will only be satisfied when the woman in his life is equally coherent and knowledgeable.

The Significance of Building Friendship with Both Genders

Stella's appreciation for literature, specifically poetry, creates a special connection with her love interest, and it signifies the ability and importance for men and women to have complimentary interests. Wollstonecraft wrote of men and women developing a friendship or companionship as a precursor to any intimate relationship. She argues, "Were boys and girls permitted to pursue the same studies together, those graceful decencies might early be inculcated which produce modesty without those sexual distinctions that taint the mind" (260). Women and men could connect on an intellectual level, void of any outside influence or being assigned certain traits based on one's gender. Amidst one of her strolls in the garden that connects the Ross's property to her hermitage, Stella comes across a book in a pavilion. Craik writes, "On the window-seat lay a book, which on examination proved to be [James] Hammond's *Love Elegies*. Stella casually opened it" (147). Stella sees the name of Major St. Vincent on a piece of paper in the book and due to the arrival of unexpected walkers, she hides the book and takes it with her. James Hammond's *Love Elegies* was published posthumously in 1742 and Hammond was believed to have died of a broken heart. His love elegies were rumored to have been written for his mistress, Kitty Dashwood (Fisher 303). Stella anxiously reads the elegies, which makes her love St. Vincent with even more ardor,

leading her to forgive the fact that he is a married man. In the Preface to *Love Elegies*, Hammond is described as being

sincere in his love as in his friendship, [and] he wrote to his mistresses, as he spoke to his Friends, nothing but the true genuine sentiments of his heart; he sat down to write what he thought, not to think what he should write; Twas nature and sentiment. . . . Not youthful and poetic fancy. (3)

Hammond's *Love Elegies* or "sentiments of his heart" are honest, unfiltered feelings that Hammond expresses for his love. Wollstonecraft writes of a direct correlation between education in women and love. She states that "were women more rationally educated, they could take a more comprehensive view of things, they would be contented to love but once in their lives; and after marriage calmly let passion subside into friendship" (444). We see that Stella possesses this "comprehensive view of things" because while Major St. Vincent is an unavailable man due to his married status, she cannot help but feel an inclination and devotion toward the only man whom she had ever loved. The sharing of Hammond's *Love Elegies* between the two of them, unbeknownst to the Major, shows a common bond of interest and friendship. Because she is possessed of an intellectual capacity, she is able to achieve a more real connection with the man she loves, rather than automatically be in a submissive role. As Wollstonecraft asserts,

When women are once sufficiently enlightened to discover their real interest. . . . They will. . . . Be very ready to resign all the prerogatives of love that are not mutual. . . . For the calm satisfaction of friendship, and

the tender confidence of habitual esteem. . . . [T]hey will not assume any insolent airs, or afterwards abjectly submit. (186)

By having Stella and Major St. Vincent enjoy the same reading selection, Craik demonstrates Wollstonecraft's idea that women and men can have similar interests and women can be at the same intellectual level as men if given the chance. The man can and should appreciate this "real" connection with the opposite sex and the woman will feel a more real connection with her male companion.

While the importance of having a real connection with the opposite sex is stressed in the novel, Craik also stresses the importance of having a good relationship with the same sex. She advances the idea that only when women can unite and come together can progress be expected. Trust and friendship amongst women is a subject that Craik emphasizes at many points throughout the story, and Wollstonecraft expresses a strong opinion on the subject. In fact, Wollstonecraft discusses friendship quite frequently in *Vindication* and ultimately concludes with a somewhat surprising revelation:

I allow that more friendship is to be found in the male than the female world, and that men have a higher sense of justice. The exclusive affections of women seem indeed to resemble Cato's most unjust love for his country. . . . Besides, how can women be just or generous, when they are the slaves of injustice? (288)

Perhaps her more pessimistic views toward the possibility of women having strong friendships is justified based on women being "the slaves of injustice." Yet, Craik creates

an ideal example of women being friends and supportive of one another. Craik envisions a world in which women work to promote each other's interests. As an infant Stella is abandoned and then found by James Wallace and his wife. While it is a sad beginning for Stella, her very humble and desperate beginning bodes well for her because it allows her to be raised within a community of women. Janet Todd writes of Stella's position: "In the commonest eighteenth-century plot of romance and sexual misadventure, the mother is removed so that her daughter may become an orphan, the most promising of heroines" (2). Her position as an orphan makes her an underdog in a sense and most readers would more easily empathize with her situation. Mrs. Wallace decides to employ the help of Mrs. Bertram, an independent widow who ultimately "declare[s] her resolution to take the sole charge of its future maintenance on herself" (15). Mrs. Bertram then explains that her newfound addition is the daughter of a deceased friend, so that Stella avoids the degradation of being an undeserved burden. Mrs. Wallace seeks out the help and guidance of Mrs. Bertram because Mrs. Wallace trusts her friend and confidant. In addition, Mrs. Bertram protects the infant girl from future scrutiny and dejection. This alliance of women becomes crucial in the face of a patriarchal system that could very well reject the female, orphaned child. Janet Todd describes this alliance as a sentimental friendship, which she defines as "a close, effusive tie, reveling in rapture and rhetoric. Unlike the sentimental romance which so often ruins, it aids and saves, providing close emotional support in a patriarchal world" (3). Through the fictional account of Stella's upbringing by Mrs. Bertram, Craik is able to emphasize the significance of creating these

strong female bonds. Craik clearly shows that only when women can unify and align with each other can positive outcomes be expected. Of course, these kinds of positive outcomes were all that Wollstonecraft could have hoped for and desired. Instead, she was accustomed to being witness to the more negative interactions amongst women, similar to Stella's experience with Margaret Ross.

Petty Jealousies: A Result of Miseducation

The oldest Ross daughter, Margaret, possesses a contrasting disposition to that of her mother and sisters. She is selfish and untrustworthy, and she looks down upon anyone of a lower status in life. Her hatred for and envy of Stella begins as Stella becomes a young woman, and Margaret is threatened by this competition with a low-born country girl. The narrator states, "When mental cultivation and personal attractions conspired to render her pre-eminently conspicuous, envy, ever a predominant trait in that lady's [Margaret's] character, marked our heroine as an object of peculiar hatred" (23). Mrs. Ross blames herself for her daughter's hateful character and blames "an improper mode of education. . . . At the period of whose birth she herself happened to be a very young woman, and too volatile to reflect much upon subsequent consequences" (25). The naïveté and laxness of Mrs. Ross at a younger stage contributed to her daughter adopting negative defects in her character. Wollstonecraft argues that a more rational education for women would mean "that idle jealousies would not be allowed to disturb the discharge of the sober duties of life or to engross the thoughts that ought to be otherwise employed"

(*Vindication* 444). This example with Margaret strongly aligns with Wollstonecraft because Craik chooses to demonstrate that a less formal or irresponsible education can lead women into becoming envious and spiteful creatures. Not only does Stella have the constant attention of Mrs. Bertram in her education, but she is also instructed by Miss Sommers. Stella is described as “rivalling her teacher in the governess line” and it is stated that in relation to music, “few could, however, excel her” (20). Stella is raised and educated very well and is presented as an ideal woman whereas Margaret’s education is deficient during her formative years and she is presented as horrible. Craik deliberately creates this foil relationship to show the difference a good education can make toward the formation of women’s temperaments. Education plays a direct role in a woman’s disposition.

Margaret’s hatred for Stella revolves solely around her jealousy of Stella’s beauty. Margaret’s limited perspective places all importance on physical beauty and material attainments, a failing which is addressed in Wollstonecraft’s text when she inquires, “Without taste, excepting of the lighter kind, for taste is the offspring of judgment, how can they discover that beauty and grace must arise from the play of the mind?” (443). Wollstonecraft contends that women must recognize and appreciate the idea of inner beauty and the power of the mind instead of focusing on shallow appearances. Beauty is a product of a lively intellect and where there is vapidness of mind, there can never be real beauty. Margaret’s malicious, tasteless lack of discernment makes her a villainous character because she fails to exercise pious thoughts and actions. Craik, in line with the

sentiments of Wollstonecraft, shows potential consequences of an irrational and sentimental female mind. The sentimental woman lacks the desire for female unity as she perceives her place to be determined by beauty and wealth. In a patriarchal society, she is molded into a shallow, spiteful creature who views her fellow females as competitors rather than as allies. Margaret is the quintessential sentimental female who serves as an undeniable contrast to Stella, whom Craik depicts as an ideal female prototype due to her nurtured intelligence and high sense of morality. Stella becomes the vision of precisely what Wollstonecraft was describing with women and what a difference there could be when women place value on their minds.

Education as an All-inclusive Offering

Wollstonecraft recognized the importance of education for women, and she also stressed the importance of education for all, including those who are less fortunate. Towards the end of Craik's novel, Stella becomes quite wealthy and decides to put some of her money to use. The first thing she decides to do is to build a school, "where the poorer class of children in the neighborhood might be taught reading, and every kind of useful needlework, gratis, by some woman of respectable character, if such could be found, properly qualified for the undertaking" (313). Being good-natured and generous, Stella's first concern is for those less fortunate than herself because her education has clearly enabled her to develop a social conscience. While there were certainly many female teachers during this era, it is still important that she requires a qualified female

teacher if “such could be found.” All teachers in the novel are women and with Stella being solely instructed by women and being the ideal woman presented in the novel, Craik is clearly making a statement about the merit of women as teachers. She recognizes the value of education and the need for female instruction in the guidance of children, no matter what economic background is attached. In addition, the clientele for the school would be all girls and so the girls would be only influenced by women teachers.

Wollstonecraft commented on an argument that was given against the education of the poor, which was a similar argument made against educating women. She writes, “I heard men argue against instructing the poor; for many are the forms that aristocracy assumes. ‘Teach them to read and write,’ say they, ‘and you take them out of the station assigned them by nature’” (139). She then goes on to say that “ignorance is a frail base for virtue” (139). Craik uses Stella’s plan of educating the poor to advocate for the education of girls in society as a whole. It is the insinuation that educating the poor is a good idea and there is nothing to fear. It is the same argument that Wollstonecraft makes for educating the poor and educating women. Craik uses the example of Stella to show that someone with money and of a sound mind recognizes the importance of education for all because, in essence, Stella is a rational thinker. Stella is able to also give the children the same educational opportunity that was given to her by Mrs. Ross. Education is promoted as a basic necessity for all people.

Stella’s Library: Building a Foundation for Lifetime Learning

The second thing that Stella decides to do with her money is add to her library collection. Craik writes, “Mrs. Bertram had a small, but select collection of the most esteemed authors; to the increase of these she turned her attention, and soon procured a very considerable addition by the assistance of her former admirer, Mr. Johnstone” who had a friend in London, “whose discriminating taste and judgment he could perfectly rely [on]. . . . And an appropriate apartment for the future reception of her valuable literary acquisitions was immediately determined to be erected” (314). She chooses to let men select “worthy” books for her library, a decision that I argue evinces her commitment to self-improvement, a commitment that trumps pride. While she is dependent upon the opinion of males to decipher what she should or should not read, she also recognizes the value of having educated males to help her in the undertaking of filling a library with the best works possible. After all, the opinion of a “Londoner” could quite possibly enhance her collection with more contemporary and diverse choices than that of someone in proximity to her who is relatively unaware of everything that is available. Still, having a man curate her library shows that Stella has ambition with her education and that she is not intimidated by any of the possible selections. Her curious nature as a human being, regardless of gender, propels her to read a wider variety of more complex texts. The building of her library becomes a triumphant act because it signifies her desire to progress her learning even further and it continues the idea education is lifelong.

Testing Conventional Thinking with Pre-Marital Relations

Stella and Adeline Mowbray are both strong female heroines, but both manage to

submit or dismiss a self-held belief towards the end of each novel. This connects well with Wollstonecraft's real-life and fictional writings of women where reality is ever present. Both Craik and Wollstonecraft recognize the vulnerability of women as human beings, regardless of intellectual strength. In *Stella of the North*, Stella returns after being gone for a number of years. She talks with Major St. Vincent, who becomes Lord Fitzhenry through an inheritance, and learns that Margaret Ross, his wife, is dead. Stella and Lord Fitzhenry can finally make plans to be married and live the lives they have been long awaiting. They go on a walk together to a grotto, and Craik gives a somewhat scandalous description of Stella's first sexual encounter:

as a repetition of the scene that followed might not be quite so interesting to those who have particular part assigned to them, as to the actual performers in the drama, we shall not fatigue our readers by dwelling on the minuter features of the subject, but merely observe, that nearly another hour elapsed before either the gentleman or the lady recollected the flight of time, or the increasing necessity for a separation.
(326)

Stella loses her virginity to Lord Fitzhenry before they get married. Her virtue, which gets tested through the course of many events in the novel, still, however, remains intact. Wollstonecraft asserts, "Virtue and pleasure are not, in fact, so nearly allied in this life as some eloquent writers have laboured to prove. . . . They, therefore, who complain of the delusions of passion, do not recollect that they are exclaiming against a strong proof of

the immortality of the soul” (*Vindication* 151-152). Stella still remains virtuous because it is her human passion that drives her to be with Lord Fitzhenry. Craik tests conventional thinking with this example of pre-marital sex, and in the end, her heroine is rewarded. Stella marries Fitzhenry. Craik’s alignment with Wollstonecraft is clear here with testing social conventions and suggesting a revolution in the structure of a relationship between a man and woman.

Conclusion

Women in the twenty-first century have developed into people who can openly read, write, work, think analytically, and, essentially, be viewed as intellectual equals in a number of private and public spheres. The transition from object of oppression to one of celebration and admiration has not come without its sacrifices and glitches. In fact, some would argue that the female gender, while making great strides, still has countless obstacles to overcome as it strives toward obtaining a perception of “woman” that is void of condescension. The limitations and obstacles that women face within a patriarchal society have been improved drastically, and yet women’s identity is still largely defined by misinformed theories of centuries ago. Education has played the most crucial role in transforming females into accepted contributors in society, and it continues to be a dominant force in shaping and changing long-held beliefs of women’s abilities, or lack thereof. Above education can be only one thing: unity among women.

Mary Wollstonecraft, Amelia Alderson Opie, and Helen Craik understood the disadvantaged position that women were placed in due to societal and/or domestic restraints. All three wrote works of fiction which highlight the necessity for a stronger, female mind. They all demonstrate the dramatic difference in fortune that a woman may be dealt in direct correlation to the level of proximal, female support.

Maria, in *The Wrongs of Woman*, desperately seeks the trust and confidence of her prison guard, Jemima, the only other woman allowed to see her. After Jemima’s

initial hesitation with trusting Maria, Jemima quickly realizes their bond as women supersedes her duties of employment. She helps restore Maria's faith in humankind and aids in Maria's escape. There is a real sense of female unity as both characters strive to free themselves from their oppressive experiences. Both relay tales of falling victim to the selfish desires of the men in their lives and the women's inability and powerlessness to avoid condemnation. Wollstonecraft echoes these same sentiments in her works of nonfiction, specifically the inability of women to break free from the doomed cycle of being chased and then becoming "prisoner." She states,

And, why do they [women] not discover, when 'in the noon of beauty's power,' that they are treated like queens only to be deluded by hollow respect, till they are led to resign, or not assume, their natural prerogatives? Confined then in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. (98)

Women become the objects, or birds of prey, and while maintaining the illusion that they (women) have the control, it is really the men who watch the tireless episode unfold like that of a puppet show. While *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a clear outlet for Wollstonecraft to voice her beliefs and frustrations, it is truly through her work of fiction with *The Wrongs of Woman* that she is able to clearly demonstrate the endless song and dance that women must perform in order to function and survive within a male-dominated society. She can only say or do so much in her work of nonfiction as to not

offend those male readers, and thus, must strive to enlighten her female readership with a strong, yet more subtle approach in her fiction. Her female readers clearly see the oppressive, degrading position that a woman can easily fall into if she is too trusting in her male lover. Readers also get a strong example of female unity with the friendship of Maria and Jemima and a sense of female empowerment as a direct consequence of this friendship.

Adeline Mowbray, in *Adeline Mowbray; or, the Mother and the Daughter*, chooses to live a life according to her educational upbringing and to beliefs she is of firm resolve, despite society's objections. She refuses to marry, and notwithstanding the strong opinion of her mother (and prime teacher), assumes the role of mistress with her lover, Glenmurray. Regardless of her mother's role in instilling these revolutionary ideas in Adeline, Adeline's mother is appalled at her daughter's insistence to clinging to and openly practicing those ideas in a society that is clearly not ready for an independent female. Many critics perceive Opie's example of Adeline as being a cautionary tale for women to not stray away from the accepted rules of society. Furthermore, some see it as a direct assault on Wollstonecraft, a known acquaintance of Opie's who openly denounced the institution of marriage and then succumbed to marrying William Godwin. While *Adeline Mowbray* can indeed be both a cautionary tale and a critical lashing of Wollstonecraft, the message of the novel is stronger than either of these two possible motivations. In fact, the two possible motivations lose their luster when considering one key factor surrounding the character of Adeline: empathy.

Readers trace Adeline's experiences after deciding to live as mistress and learn to despise those around Adeline who relentlessly devalue her existence due to not following the accepted path and role of being a woman. Opie candidly shares each of the oppressive character's own faults in order to show his/her hypocritical lashing of Adeline. Opie is determined to have readers scorn these characters while simultaneously sympathize with the treatment Adeline receives. Only a few characters sympathize with Adeline, and these characters are very likable. They show the reader that those who sympathize with and understand Adeline are those who are of good character and high intellect. Those women who unite with Adeline rather than automatically scorn her are women characters who are the most agreeable. There is no stronger case that could be made for Opie using Adeline as a way to question the restraints placed on females in society, except for the additional pang, which shows Adeline's submission to marriage as being the beginning of her eventual downfall. She finally agrees to marry, only to be misled and abandoned by her husband. Once Adeline loses legal control over herself, Opie shows Adeline's powerlessness as a married female. Even though she eventually receives some vindication, Adeline soon submits to sickness and dies surrounded by people who love her, all females except for Dr. Norberry. *Adeline Mowbray* is a powerful example of the need for a better female education and more so, it is a plea for a revolution of the position of women in society. Adeline's tragic story does not serve to instill fear in female readers who want to exercise more independence; instead, it infuses anger and sadness over Adeline's inability to overcome obstacles as a female in a patriarchal society.

Stella, in *Stella of the North*, ends up marrying the man she falls in love with and has a much happier outcome than many other heroines. Helen Craik initially sets up the character of Stella as sympathetic when Stella is abandoned at birth and soon becomes the “burden” of Mrs. Bertram. To the reader’s delight, Mrs. Bertram raises Stella in a household of love, acceptance, and one that promotes the expansion of the intellectual mind. Stella is educated with the help of wealthy neighbors and consequently, becomes the quintessential female: beautiful, humble, intelligent, and insightful. Stella is able to escape the shortfalls of many of her fellow females due to her sound mind and ability to decipher nonsense, particularly when it comes to potential suitors. Had Wollstonecraft lived five years longer, she could have read about the female heroine she wished for, one who could make her own decisions and be respected as an intellectual equal to her male counterparts. Wollstonecraft predicts, “Let women share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty” (287). Stella is not without her “faults,” referring to her falling and staying in love with a married man and engaging in sexual relations before marriage, but those faults are easily reconciled with Craik’s creation of all of the obstacles which Stella must overcome in order to maintain her reputation. The adult Stella is a product of being raised, educated, and influenced by a microcosm of women. This unification of women becomes a key focal point in Craik’s political motivations with elevating the role of feminine influence in a woman’s life.

In the late 18th century and early 19th century, Wollstonecraft, Opie, and Craik

most likely could not have foreseen the ascension of women's role in society as it is today, two hundred years later. Their groundwork in fiction to inspire the minds of their readers to envision a world where women could be intellectual equals should never be ignored. Although their heroines present three very distinct, different stories, they are all unified by the idea of female empowerment. Education and female unity become active, necessary ingredients in order to counteract the bitter battles of a society that continually opposes the advancement of a male equivalent.

APPENDIX A

Appendix A - Wollstonecraft Biography

Born on April 27, 1759, Mary Wollstonecraft was the second of what would become seven children to Edward John Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Dixon. The family moved often and experienced periods of poverty due to her father's poor occupational decisions. She lived a childhood full of turbulent, violent exchanges with her abusive father as she attempted to shield her mother. She "stood watch 'whole nights at their chamber-door,' waiting to defend her mother from Edward Wollstonecraft's brutalities" (Ferguson and Todd 1). A fair connection can be made between playing her mother's protector from an early age and the important role she later plays in arguing for equality and the right for a woman to obtain a proper education.

In addition to serving as her mother's protector, there were other experiences that helped to lay the foundation for her philosophical beliefs. Mary's sister, Eliza, married, and, after having a daughter, suffered what might be described as a mental breakdown. For the sake of her sister's well-being—and possible survival—Mary devised a plan to rescue Eliza away from her husband and hide her away, a plan that proved to be successful. As her biographers Ferguson and Todd note, this act "underlines Wollstonecraft's confidence in her own convictions, her loyalty to loved ones...all of which later enabled her to flout convention privately and in her published writings" (Ferguson and Todd 4). Her strength and confidence in saving her sister displayed a commitment to ideals that she viewed as of the utmost importance. Another life experience and revelation came with Wollstonecraft's friendship with Fanny Blood,

which began when Mary was just 16 years old. It is explained that “Fanny remained her dearest friend and learning compatriot until Fanny's death in childbirth in 1785” (Johnson 2). Fanny's death solidified certain views for Wollstonecraft. She “told William Godwin that around this time she made a vow against marriage for herself; by this she would preserve her own health and well-being, and help abate the horrible memory of Fanny Blood's death” (Ferguson and Todd 5). Her adherence to this admonition of marriage—up until her marriage to Godwin shortly before her death—aligned with ideas she put forward in her later writings.

Participating in premarital relations, having a daughter out-of-wedlock, and attempting suicide twice are notorious actions of one of the most—if not the most—celebrated and political female minds of the late 18th century. Mary Wollstonecraft certainly did not live a life devoid of rebellion and dramatics and it was the publication of these antics, in William Godwin's *Memoirs*, that led to her defamation and rejection by many in the 19th century. A well-intentioned celebration of her life and works was scrutinized due to various revelations about Wollstonecraft's life, including getting pregnant out-of-wedlock. Her society was not ready to accept any woman who deviated from the “plan” wherein a woman was expected to remain pure before marriage. Despite this notable setback to Wollstonecraft's reputation and credibility, “her philosophy of women's rights navigated an influential course through nineteenth century American political thought” (Botting and Carey 708).

APPENDIX B

Appendix B - Opie's Biography

Amelia Alderson was born on November 12, 1769, in Norwich, an only child to James Alderson, M.D. and Amelia, his wife. Amelia Alderson's mother was "possessed of firm purpose and high principle; a true-hearted woman, and somewhat of a disciplinarian" (Brightwell 6). It is then said that Amelia resembled these traits in her adult life. Her mother died when Amelia was just fifteen years old, which presumably contributed to the strong bond she shared with her father. It was said that "The tender attachment borne by Mrs. Opie to her father was perhaps her most prominent characteristic. They were companions and friends through life" (Brightwell 2). Her father was known as a kind, generous physician who oftentimes served as the poor's only resource for medical advice. Being only 15 when her mother died, Amelia entered into her father's society at an early age. She regularly conversed with learned men and women, and the bulk of her preserved letters were written to her lifelong friend, Mrs. John Taylor.

Before marrying John Opie, Amelia preferred home life and time with her father to traveling and the like. As Brightwell notes, "During the eight and twenty years of her life which preceded her marriage, with the exception of occasional visits to London and elsewhere, she remained in her native town and in her father's house" (35). In descriptions of Amelia, it is apparent that she was good-looking and in her own words, she was "guilty of 'girlish imprudence' of love at sixteen" (35). She started writing in her teen years, publishing *Adelaide* when she was just eighteen, and loved writing songs.

Amelia's strong attachment to her father is useful in detecting presumably similar beliefs she held in comparison to him. It was known that "Dr. Alderson was among those who hailed the dawn of the French revolution with pleasure" and maintained "his allegiance true to the original revolutionary cause" (Brightwell 39-40). Most of Amelia's contacts were politically-orientated and this continued into her later adulthood. Amelia was "enthusiastic, ardent, perhaps imprudent...but there was too much of pure womanly character in her, to suffer her ever to sympathize with the assertors of 'woman's rights,' (so called;) and she was not to be spoiled even though exposed to the influence of Horace Walpole's philosophizing serpents, the Paines, the Tookes, and the Wollstonecrafts" (41).

Amelia married John Opie on May 8, 1798, after a swarm of suitors failed to win her heart above that of Opie. Opie fell in love with the charming Amelia at first sight and he never loosened from his firm resolve to have her as his wife. He had already been unhappily married once before, which seemed of no consequence to Amelia. Nor was his absence of an original aristocratic background of much concern. She eventually married for love and looked forward to being a wife and mother. With her dream to become an author, she says, "he did not check my ambition to become an author; on the contrary he encouraged it, and our only quarrel on the subject was...that I did not write more and better" (70).

Amelia's connection with Mary Wollstonecraft begins through a relationship with William Godwin, before Amelia meets and marries Mr. Opie and before Godwin meets and marries Mary. In a letter to Mrs. Taylor, Amelia details the first of many meetings

with Godwin. She writes, “Rarely did we agree...In short, he convinced me that his theory has not yet gotten entire ascendancy over his practice” (Brightwell 42). Godwin’s flirtations are recorded by Amelia in a later letter to Mrs. Taylor: ““Will you give me nothing to keep for your sake, and console me during my absence...not even your slipper?’ You have no idea how gallant he has become; but indeed he is much more amiable than he ever was” (Brightwell 57). It is clear that they had a mutual liking, perhaps his more strongly than hers, but nevertheless, their relationship is not referred to again until a letter is written to Amelia some years later from his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft. After reading this letter, Amelia writes to Mrs. Taylor once again and states, “I shall have much to tell you in a tete a tete, of the Godwins...I love to make observations on extraordinary characters; but not to mention those observations if they be not favourable” (Brightwell 62). Though intrigued by the Godwins, Amelia seems to ridicule their mannerisms and some of their beliefs. It is interesting to note that many critics have looked at this as proof of a disconnection between Wollstonecraft’s ideas and *Adeline Mowbray*, yet Opie clearly shows an allegiance with some of them.

APPENDIX C

Appendix C - Craik's Biography

Despite living centuries ago, it is relatively easy to find biographical and background information on most published female writers of the 18th and 19th centuries. Helen Craik, however, requires a more dedicated search as information on her is scarce. Perhaps it is because she did not publish as frequently as others or that her novels were not as well read, with all three of her publications relating to the French Revolution. In any case, her additions to the female canon elicit a much deserved praise, especially when referring to that of *Stella of the North*.

Helen Craik was presumably born in 1750, a detail not completely confirmed, except for the known fact that she died in 1824 when she was 74 years old. Her parents, William Craik and Elizabeth Stewart, were farmers and far more is known about the temperament of William than that of Elizabeth. In one account, William, acting as Justice of the Peace, restrains a threatening criminal: "Mr. Craik, observing that the constables were terrified by the ruffian's threats, jumped from the seat of Justice, and snatching the rope from one of the constables, first wrenched the knife from the fellow, and then forcibly tied his hands behind him, without any resistance whatsoever" (*The Farmer's Magazine* 153). In another not-so-upstanding account, William was highly suspected of involvement in a murder of one of his employees, who was suspected of having a relationship with Helen. It was after this tragic event that Helen left Scotland for good and took up residence in Cumberland (Cracian and Lokke 219). An almost autobiographical, "fictional" connection can easily be seen between Helen and one of her

female protagonists, Adelaide, in her novel *Adelaide de Narbonne*. Adelaide faces a discriminatory father who kills her secret husband due to her husband's lower social status and leaves his inheritance to a male cousin due to Adelaide's brother dying and her father's inability to perceive his own daughter as being an acceptable, rightful heir due to her gender; Helen faces the same fate when her father wills his property to her cousin Douglas Hamilton (*The Farmer's Magazine* 1811).

Helen Craik died at the age of 74 as an unmarried female, evading the control of any male suitor and situating herself as the enviable "old maid." She published only three novels: *Julia de St. Pierre* (1796), *Adelaide de Narbonne* (1800), and *Stella of the North* (1802). All three novels promote female action and solidarity and center around the French Revolution. Cracian and Lokke write, "Most significantly, Craik shows how both republican and royalist political interests, practices, and ideologies are inimical to women, their interests, and their safety" (196). She aligned herself with principles which allowed for an independent female and voiced an opposition to the institution of marriage through her fiction--similar to that of Wollstonecraft--because it weakened the individuality and freedoms of her gender. Much of her life experiences and beliefs are portrayed in her fiction, not accepting *Stella of the North*. Through her female characters, she demonstrates the importance of a female education and clearly implores the need for female unity by depicting a female heroine who is relentlessly harassed by an envious, wicked female, and her male counterparts.

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