Family, Education and "Sensibility" as Represented in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

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ABSTRAKT

Bakalárska práca sa zaoberá rozborom diela *Obhajoba práv ženy* od Mary Wollstonecraft. Pre správne porozumenie problematiky, ktorou sa Wollstonecraft zaoberá, sa prvá časť práce venuje historickému pozadiu diela. Táto časť teda spresňuje rôzne aspekty života žien v 17. a najmä 18. storočí. Analytická časť sa následne sústredí na autorkin názor na tieto aspekty. Hlavným cieľom je určiť v čom tkvie dôvod jej nesúhlasu s kultúrou citlivosti, postavením žien v rodinných a manželským vzťahoch a vtedajšími vzdelávacími spôsobmi.

Kľúčové slová: Mary Wollstonecraft, Obhajoba práv ženy, 18. storočie, práva žien, citlivosť, vzdelanie, rodina

ABSTRACT

The bachelor thesis deals with the analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In order to fully comprehend the issues approached by Wollstonecraft, the first part is devoted to the historical background of her literary work. Hence, it specifies various aspects of women's lives in the 17th and particularly in the 18th century. The analytical part of the thesis, then, focuses on author's perception of those aspects. The overall objective is to identify the reason for Wollstonecraft's disapproval with the culture of sensibility, the status of women in familial and marital relationships, and then-existing forms of education.

Keywords: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 18th century, women's rights, sensibility, education, family

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the thesis is to analyse Wollstonecraft's view on the culture of sensibility, family, and education in relation to women as represented in her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. To comprehend what is now considered as the founding text of feminist philosophy and thought, it is first essential to map its historical background. Even though Vindication was written in 1792, the previous century is also discussed since it contributed to shape the atmosphere of the period experienced by Wollstonecraft. Thus, the theoretical background is opened with the description of the conduct book literature that assigned the private domestic sphere to be a female domain. Then, the text depicts the 17th-century family life with focus on obedience that a woman owed to men in her life. Another chapter is devoted to the attitude towards female education and subjects learned by girls. To provide a better picture of the daily lives of women in 17th century, the scope of female household work and some other professions entered by women are demonstrated.

Laying the foundation of Vindication, the 18th century is approached in a greater detail. The evolution of the culture of sensibility based on the gentle female nervous system is illustrated. In addition, the insight into enduring prescriptive literature is also provided because it reflected the trend of sensibility and dealt with ideal polite behaviour of women. Then, the marital relationships are discussed. Another important topic in relation to Vindication is female education. Thus, the parental struggles between home and public schools and curriculum are covered.

The analytical part of the thesis is devoted to Wollstonecraft objections towards then-existing status of women, her reasoning and proposed solutions. At the outset of analysis, the personal life of Wollstonecraft is detailed for a better understanding of her attitudes. Each of the main themes – culture of sensibility, family and marriage, and educational system – are then individually considered in regard to analysed work.

I. THEORY

1 WOMEN IN THE 17TH CENTURY

1.1 Emergence of conduct books aimed at women

A period of great political and social turmoil and omnipresent revolutions in the middle of the 17th century brought a climate of change to European society. Ever since the Great Comet of 1618, with its mysterious fiery red tail, was visible for seven long weeks, science seemed to favour disastrous theories that suggested a crisis in the form of the dissolution of society. Yet, newly observed spiritual sky phenomena were not the only prophetic signs, since new interpretations of Scripture and cyclical theories of history that came into fashion at the start of the century seemed to predict "the decline and fall of nations" as well.[1] As opposed to the 16th century and its monarchical society that "succeeded in absorbing its strains" of wars and revolts, the vulnerability of17th-century monarchies was evident. Even though revolutions could be triggered by external factors, they generally arose from defects of social structure. One of the central sources of 17th-century issues resided in authoritarian struggles between Crowns and Estates.[2] In England, this intensified to the point of the execution of Charles I and the abolishment of the monarchy. Led by Oliver Cromwell, a republican government named the Commonwealth was established in 1649. The interregnum lasted until 1660.[3]Given these points, the 17th century was not able to "absorb its revolutions," and "the divine right of kings" could not resist the pressures any longer. As British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper concluded, "It [was] broken in the middle, irreparably broken, and at the end of it, after the revolutions, men [could] hardly recognise the beginning." Indeed, it was the beginning, and the Renaissance climate that had been present since the 15th century was being replaced by the intellectually, morally, and politically contrasting climate of the Enlightenment.[4]

Not only was the early Stuart period, which began with the reign of King James I of England in 1603, marked by a constitutional struggle, it also faced a population boom, rapid inflation, epidemic diseases, and excessive geographic and social mobility.[5] Consequently, as social and cultural historian Susan Dwyer Amussen put it, the number of "vagrants and beggars, alehouses and their customers, bastards and their parents" increased, and local as well as national governors feared that the order in society might gradually fade away. Since the English social order rested on two concurrent hierarchies of class and gender, preserving both of these was of great interest to sovereignty. Thus, household manuals and sermons founded on the era's patriarchal political approach represented an ideal means of social control.[6] In his notable conduct book on the art of managing a household, *Of Domestical Duties* (1622), Puritan preacher William Gouge stated that "a family is a little Church, and a little Commonwealth" and that a man "is the highest in the family, and hath both authority over all, and the charge of all is committed to his charge: he is as a King in his own house." [sic][7] Thus, creating such an analogy by comparing the family, the basic unit of society, and the state secured the hierarchical relations not only of those among the husband, his wife, children, and servants but also the ones between the king and the people. Being obedient and respectable to the more dominant was "a moral duty." Moreover, the patriarchal political theory also asserted that "political authority originally belonged to fathers," analogously to kings, and was thus natural.[8]

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[1] H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the 17th Century," *Past & Present*, no. 16 (1959): 31.

[2] Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the 17th Century," 33-4.

[3] John Morrill, "The Stuarts," in *The Oxford History of Britain*, ed. Kenneth O. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 372-3.

[4] Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the 17th Century," 33-4.

[5] Susan Dwyer Amussen, "Gender and the Social Order in Early Modern England," (conference paper, Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, North Hampton, MA, June 1984), 3.

Undoubtedly, such domestic handbooks worked in favour of roles based on gender. While a man's duties, even though he was the head of the family, had been placed mainly in the world outside the home, a woman was seen as a helpmate whose focus of attention ought to be the household and not any public function in the Church or state.[9] Moreover, a man's duty was to exact obedience, and a woman's duty was to owe it.[10] For all wives who did not feel subordinate in any way to their husbands, Gouge elaborated on the concept of equality, affirming that the reason for the misconception is that a woman was only a little less than a man, hence she could be easily mistaken and not to see male precedence. Moreover, a man was "as the head" while the woman was "as the heart," likewise fundamental in many aspects and "far more excellent than any other member [organ] under the head."[11] Comparable constructs drew a precise borderline, which could not be trespassed by a good wife. In the case of a knowledgeable, religious man married to an unreasonable, foolish woman, he, as a husband, had all the rights to govern her in every way, whereas she could not act based on her own common sense. Nevertheless, a good wife needed to comply even if a husband was an enemy of Christ because he was still summoned by Christ to the office he was in.[12]In short, “Man is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.”[13]

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[6] Amussen, "Gender and the Social Order in Early Modern England," 4.

[7] William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties*, ed. By Greg Fox (Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2006), 11, 183. [1622]

[8] Amussen, "Gender and the Social Order in Early Modern England,"5-8.

[9] Erica Longfellow, "Public, Private, and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 327.

[10] Linda A. Pollock, "Little Commonwealths I: The Household and Family Relationships," in *A Social History of England, 1500–1750*, ed. Keith Wrightson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 67.

[11] Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties*, 191.

However, being an obedient wife did not necessarily indicate an accord with the widespread convention of wifely obedience or absence of scepticism about prescriptions that a woman was bound to follow. In fact, women still found creative ways of dealing with unpleasant tasks: they reacted warmly to requests, but failed to accomplish them or pretended misunderstanding. A wife could withhold information that inhibited her husband from giving a direct command because of unfamiliarity with a matter, or she could manipulate him through love and emotions to get out of an assignment. Furthermore, women could reinterpret or blend the messages of household manuals and use them to vindicate their conduct. A wife could also highlight the prescriptive norms and use them to criticize a spouse’s behaviour. For example, the mistress of King George II, patron of the arts, intellectual and Countess of Suffolk Henrietta Howard was convinced that despite her adultery, she “had fulfilled her marital obligations in ‘word and deed’, whereas her husband was conspicuously derelict in his duty.” Thus, the idea of deference and subordination, presented as natural, neglected to consider whether women identified with it as well. Admittedly, wives acknowledged conjugal obedience, yet not in terms of fulfilling all of a husband’s demands.[14]

1.2 Marriage

The predominant belief was that love was the foundation of marriage, whether it was born before or after a wedding. Even though marital unions arranged by parents were still common in aristocratic circles, for whom status and economic considerations were fundamental, generally this was rather a rare practice. Women who made their own choice were, however, still expected to discuss it with their parents or at least request their blessing. Broadly, carrying out a marriage was influenced by the “multilateral consent” of partners, parents, kin, and friends. Judging by the younger age of brides in areas where economic decline was the most detrimental, and contracted employment options for women, one of the reasons behind a decision to marry were financial concerns.[15]

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[12] William Haller and Malleville Haller, "The Puritan Art of Love," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1942): 250-1.

[13] Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties*, 251.

[14] Pollock, "Little Commonwealths I: The Household and Family Relationships," 67-8.

The ritual of joining a couple in matrimony was less ceremonial than we think of nowadays. Even though public church marriages were becoming more fashionable, perhaps because this was the only way that inheritance of property was secured, all the law required for a legally valid marriage was a public declaration in which a bride and a groom stated in present tense that they acknowledge themselves married.[16] Paradoxically, despite the prevailing Puritan belief, which placed immense importance on women to preserve their “purity” and to practise sexual abstinence until marriage, every fourth Englishwoman was already pregnant during her wedding.[17] As the Puritan *Book of Common Prayer* maintains, one of the major objectives of marriage – along with being a remedy against sin, helping in the avoidance of fornication, being a mutual help and comfort to the partners – was the procreation of children.[18] However, until a couple had children, a man could not act as the head of the family, therefore the only way for him to ascertain his wife-to-be’s crucial “ability to procreate,” was testing it before entering into a wedded state. Moreover, 17th-century society understood infertility as an abnormality or even as God’s punishment, which was a source of great tension for women. By christening a newborn, parents let a community publicly know that matrimony had achieved its purpose.[19]

1.2.1 Children

Raising children was rather difficult for the poor, since the annual expense of providing for a family, a pair and three children, was 13 pounds and 14 shillings, while the average income of a labouring family was 15 pounds per annum. When illness or other unexpected costs emerged, there was a very limited financial safety net available, and often none at all..[20] A woman from such an environment, compared to one from the upper class, entered wedlock later in life, gave birth with longer intervals in between almost until menopause, and her children were at greater risk of dying.[21]In the 1650s, writer Alice Thornton, sick after several pregnancies, wrote about the “exquisite torment” that she experienced during her fifth labour, which resulted in a stillborn child. As known from correspondence, only three of Thornton’s children remained alive for more than a few weeks out of the nine full-term pregnancies she underwent. Despite the quite high age of matrimony, on average, a woman delivered six or seven full-term babies in her lifetime.[22] Yet, one in four children died before the age of ten.[23]

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[15] Ibid, 64-5.

[16] Anne Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760: A Social History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 42.

[17] P. E. H. Hair, "Bridal pregnancy in Earlier Rural England Further Examined," *Population Studies* 24, no. 1 (1970): 61.

[18] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 41.

[19] Alice Brabcová, "Marriage in Seventeenth-Century England: The Woman’s Story," in *Theory and Practice in English Studies, Volume 2: Proceedings from the Seventh Conference of English, American and Canadian Studies*, ed. Pavel Drábek and Jan Chovanec (Brno: Masaryk University, 2003), 23.

[20] Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 115.

While being brought up, siblings faced the reality of gender-based treatment.[24] Raising a boy meant a higher financial investment – the virtues expected from a man could be acquired and tested only by experiencing the world and freedom. However, the process often ended up with a large debt, failed studies or career, or having an unwelcomed love affair. On the contrary, a young girl needed to develop an understanding of her obedient role towards authorities while acquiring a perception of how important a woman was for a smoothly running household. Not only did a family have to be kept clean and fed, but a woman was also expected to be prepared to help financially, whether helping out with her husband’s business or having a paid job. Parents, particularly those from the upper class, restricted the freedom and limited the cultivation of their maturing daughters’ intellects. This obstructed the development of some of their faculties, such as problem-solving and the capacity for action. Surprisingly, an adult woman who was not allowed to exercise any authority while growing up was expected to be able to “rise to life’s challenges” in her adulthood.[25] Parent-child relationships among the gentry can be observed in the well-documented family of Richard Barrett-Lennard. Since his wife died after giving birth to their fourth child in 1659, Barrett-Lennard became a widower after only six years of marriage, and took care of his two sons and two daughters by himself. Both sons received a proper education in philosophy and languages, learned to play three musical instruments, took dancing, fencing and tennis lessons, and were sent off on the Grand Tour, the traditional journey through Europe undertaken by aristocratic young men, in 1670-71 for a period of nineteen months. As historian of early modern England Linda Pollock commented, “[n]o expense was spared to ensure the two young men were properly groomed on their travel.”

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[21] Pollock, "Little Commonwealths I: The Household and Family Relationships," 75.
[22] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 78.
[23] Pollock, "Little Commonwealths I: The Household and Family Relationships," 61.
[24] Ibid, 74.
[25] Ibid, 72.

Barrett-Lennard's daughter, Anne, experienced dissimilar opportunities during her childhood. After her mother's death, Anne was sent to live with her grandmother, where she received an education in languages and music. In 1673, as an 18-year-old, she was brought back to the home estate in Essex to accompany and take care of her father. Even though her father tried to provide her with means of entertainment, such as music for guitar and lute, Anne felt melancholy and restrained there. Four years later, when she got a marriage proposal, her father Barrett-Lennard refused to make the necessary financial arrangements. Consequently, the tediousness of living at home continued for eleven more years until she married, having the father's consent but no contribution. Not only does Anne's story illustrate the unequal opportunities provided to upper-class sons and daughters, but it also shows that if there was no husband, a woman owed her obedience to her father.[26]

1.3 **Education**

Girls were not provided with equally intellectual education as their male counterparts.[27] However, the prevalent concern was not whether a woman possessed learning ability but whether she should waste her time on subjects that would not bring her any benefit later in life. Early modern society believed that the education of both sexes should be fitted to a future style of living, and that comprehensive studies should have been performed only when they brought advantages.[28] Parents did not think of their daughters as less bright. In fact, if the acquisition of Latin would be vital for a girl's eventual prosperity, then she could attend the lectures. Regarding his daughter Nancy, Dr Denton stated that "[his] highest ambition of all is to have her have so much Latin as to understand a Latin testament which is enough to understand a Drs bill and to write one."[sic] Nonetheless, the usual wish for a daughter was marriage, which required a different educative programme and training, including: needlework, dancing, singing, or more rarely French. The growing public opinion that women were corrupting the gift of speech with gossip helped to form an environment in which many believed that the knowledge of English alone was enough for female requirements.[29] In 1673, an advertisement for Mrs. Bathsua Makin's boarding school, which specialized in the education of young gentlewomen, declared that young ladies aged from eight to nine who could read well could acquire Latin and Greek up to two years and proceed with other subjects such as botany or astronomy. But "[t]hose that think one language enough for a woman, may forbear the languages, and learn onely experimental philosophy." [sic][30] Moreover, an analysis of some preserved gentry account books showed that tuition costs were more expensive for girls. While the schooling of nine-year-old Ralph Worsley cost his grandfather six pounds annually in 1656, the education of his granddaughter Sarah amounted to ten pounds per annum in the same year.[31]

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[26] Linda A. Pollock, "Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 1 (January 1998): 5-8.

[27] Linda A. Pollock, "'Teach Her to Live under Obedience': The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England," *Continuity and Change* 4, no. 2 (1989): 240.

[28] Pollock, "'Teach Her to Live under Obedience': The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England," 241.

[29] Ibid, 243.

Even though there is no evidence to prove that women felt inferior by virtue of their sex, in general, women believed that their social life and morality was threatened by excessive learning.[32] The early modern standpoint did not applaud women whose only accomplishment was education. Furthermore, it was believed that for a girl, an education comes hand in hand with an undesired characteristic – pride. Gentlemen did not look for intellect in women but rather for humility, the quality that guaranteed a chaste and submissive wife-to-be.[33] In the case that he would have any daughters, John Evelyn, in 1704, advised his son on their upbringing: "Daughter[s] should have breeding with due caution and be encouraged without too much liberty. Let them therefore be instructed in useful things and all modesty to become [a] good wife." [sic][34] Such man-controlled notions were able to construct a woman's perception of herself as endangered by knowledge. Indeed, the vast majority of books for women were centred on the theme of "obedience and modesty." Also, most of these books were unsurprisingly written mainly by men. Besides the abovementioned *Of Domestical Duties* (1622) by prescriptive writer William Gouge, there were plenty of other manuals even more focused on female behaviour and visage, such as *Advice to a daughter* (1688). Written by George Savile, the Marquis of Halifax, this publication gives recommendations to young ladies who were not fond of their husbands on how to make the best out of such a situation, yet emphasizes the obedient status of a wife in a conjugal relationship.[35] In addition, concerning educational institutions, reading was commonly taught by women who learned it from their mothers, or at a dame's school, whereas male teachers were customarily in charge of more advanced subjects. Paradoxically, women were excluded even from instructing music, dancing or painting lessons due to their lack of specialised education.[36] Implicit or strongly voiced suggestions coming from a woman's surroundings – family, peers, teachers, literature – created an atmosphere in which her role seemed to be pre-set by others with no possibility of manoeuvring it herself.[37]

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid, 239.

[32] Miriam Balmuth, "Female Education in 16th & 17th Century England," *Canadian Woman Studies* 9, no. 3 & 4 (1988): 19.

[33] Pollock, "'Teach Her to Live under Obedience': The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England," 244.

[34] Ibid, 242.

[35] Ibid, 245.

1.4 Women's occupations

The work sphere was divided unjustly – what men did was specific, fixed, and limited, while what women did was everything else. A woman's scope of employment, whose fulfilment was to a large extent taken for granted, included all the unremarkable routine activities needed to be done daily, seasonally or in an emergency. Women were characterized and looked upon by their civil status, not by their profession as men were. Professions in the Church or Law were closed to women and they rarely got to exercise their authority over anyone outside of the home. Moreover, many female occupations, such as being a housewife, were not officially declared as employments, thus could not be taken a day off from, nor awarded a salary.[38] Managing a household was a full-time job, which not only included taking care of children, preparing meals, doing laundry, and keeping the house neat and tidy, but the domestic industry was also comprised of: nursing, healing, fetching water and production activities such as: brewing, baking, making candles, making simple medicines from herbs, tending the poultry, pigs, sheep or cows, dairy work, growing vegetables and fruit, and spinning linen and wool. [39]However, the range of duties was determined and altered by region, season and the presence of servants. In urban areas, products such as beer, candles or bread were bought; in winter, a homemaker needed to prevent a fire from dying out; and if there were helpers, a woman needed to instruct them with tasks on a daily basis. Poverty also influenced the daily routine– fewer possessions meant less cleaning.[40] Even the management of agricultural work was the realm of a farmer's wife. If the farm was larger, she had servants whom she needed to organize. Such a wife also employed herself in the financial part of the business, and often visited a market to buy and sell goods.[41]Since agriculture employed a majority of the population, aside from farmers' wives who were engaged in the family business, women seeking further, paid, seasonal work to supplement their family's income or girls in between their childhood and marriage were also involved in this industry. Heavy manual labour, such as ploughing and mowing with the scythe, was reserved for men, whilst weeding, harvesting, gleaning, butter and cheese making or work with wool was mainly female domain. The daily wage for work shared by both sexes differed. For shearing grain, in 1621, The Lincolnshire Justices of the Peace set a woman's pay at two pence per diem, whereas three pence for a man.[42] Furthermore, after the agricultural production, the textile industry came second in importance from an economic perspective, employing approximately one million English people, with a proportion of eight women and children to one man.[43] Aside from a few processes like dyeing, the industry outsourced the labour with a "putting-out system," which enabled women to work in their own homes for wages.[44] The spinning of wool and flax was supplied by wives of farmers or other well-off people, wives of husbandmen, or by spinsters who were fully reliant on the job to earn their living. After the wives provided their families with wool, they sold the surplus.[45] Another side job for women either paid for or done as community service free of charge, was an occupation exclusive to women – midwifery. However, during the 17th century, men started to question women's traditional but improperly trained wisdom. Though there were some manuals, such as *The midwives book* (1671) by midwife herself Jane Sharp, women were excluded from schools of anatomy, and thus acquired their knowledge mainly through practical experience of being mothers themselves or by observation and attendance at childbirths.[46]

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[36] Alice Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1968), 295.

[37] Pollock, "'Teach Her to Live under Obedience': The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England," 246.

[38] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 109.

[39] Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, 5.

[40] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 109, 111.

[41] Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, 50.

Even though the urban population was still greatly outnumbered by rural areas, reaching 13.5 per cent by 1670, the proportion had increased, since in the 1520s only 5.5 per cent of inhabitants lived in towns. Such growth resulted from migration, the majority of which were women. They were coming to towns to employ themselves in trade, or to work as servants with the aim of saving up money for a dowry before getting married, but cities also attracted poverty-stricken women.[47] Urban females were primarily employed in clothing manufacturing, including spinning, knitting, or button and lace production – all of which were employments associated with the impoverished. Guild records reveal that women engaged in crafts, trades and even in businesses were on their own account, whereas apprenticeships and guild membership were limited only to a few. According to a study focusing on 1,945 apprenticeships in Bristol between 1600 and 1645, only 2.2 per cent of them were undergone by girls. They were predominantly instructed to become servants or work in the clothing industry, thus in low-income jobs.[48] Regarding women's handling of separate businesses, still it was less frequent than the wives involved in family trade. Because in such circumstances the wife was likewise considered a husband's partner, she had his complete confidence and could acquire the knowledge necessary for the successful management of a business. In the event that her spouse died, she was undisturbed and able to take custody of the family enterprise into her own hands.[49]A widow or single woman was by common law recognized as a *femme sole* and was authorized to run a company. However, a married woman, a *femme coverte,* was outlawed from property ownership and the closing of contracts, which made her own entrepreneurship unthinkable. Several towns, though, permitted a woman to own property, providing she gained her husband's agreement. Femme soles in London usually operated in shopkeeping, millinery, silk, or mantua and lace-making trades.[50] Another profession more commonly found in city parishes was wet nursing. Because wet nurses were hired by wealthier families to take care of their young children whose mother had passed away or abandoned them, it was rather well-paid.[51] In general, nearly all the paid work available to women was more or less just the extension of tasks she was supposed do anyway.[52]

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[42] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 117-118.
[43] Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, 98.
[44] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 123.
[45] Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, 111-112.
[46] Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (London: UCL Press, 1998; London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 79. Citations refer to the Taylor & Francis e-Library edition.
[47] Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*, 73.

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[48] Ibid, 76-77.
[49] Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, 153-154.
[50] Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*, 76.
[51] Ibid, 78.
[52] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 116.

2 WOMEN IN THE 18TH CENTURY

2.1 The "delicate" female nerves

Defining the interconnection between reason, belief, and feeling played a vital role in the English Enlightenment.[53] In *Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1690), John Locke, philosopher and physician, stated "I conceive that Ideas in the Understanding, are coeval with Sensation; which is such an Impression or Motion, made in some part of the body, as makes it be taken notice of in the Understanding."[54] This introduction of the concept of "sensibility" captured the attention of intellectuals of various professional backgrounds. At the beginning of the century, prominent physicians concluded that the nervous system affects the intensity of receptivity and sensibility to external impressions. The physician and medical writer, George Cheyne of Bath, linked women of higher and middle ranks with having "delicate nervous systems," which rendered them more refined and courteous and at the same time more prone to fragility and malady. By the middle of the 18th century, this medical theory became clearly outlined by gender, stressing the fundamental anatomical differences between the sexes, particularly of the female and male reproductive system, which would preordain their distinct destinies.[55] Moreover, the uterus, an organ veiled in mystery and perceived as ruling the female body, was claimed to be releasing "toxic fumes," which were thought to be the source of hysteria and abnormal sensibility. Such spontaneous flow of toxins made women unable to govern their bodies, thus this natural female inconsistency made them "incapable of any rationality."[56] The philosopher Edmund Burke elaborated on aesthetic perceptions and sensations in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757/9) and identified "the sublime" as a masculine sensory experience and "the beautiful" as a feminine perception, which, for him, was connected with imperfection and weakness.[57]

Furthermore, alongside the rise of the novel, fictionalized conduct book literature with the aim to create a woman "whose value resided in her femaleness" emerged. Literary works of the new genre, enhanced by the language of sensibility, centred around the naturally wise, sensitive, and moral heroine who, after having her virtue tested, recognizes the pleasure of the private sphere and understands the harm a “public spectacle” does to her value. Female readers were meant to associate and empathize with the emotions the protagonist overcomes, and subsequently imitate her behaviour.[58] Ambiguously instructive content was founded on a feminine virtue, reigned over by sentiment and feeling rather than reason.[59] And as for Pamela in Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), losing her virtue, of which she is immensely proud, “is worse than cutting her throat.” In like manner, a woman should cherish her virtue.[60]

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[53] Jane Rendall, "Women and the Enlightenment in Britain c.1690–1800," in *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. Hannah Barker and Chalus Elaine (London: Routledge, 2005), 12.

[54] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding: In Four Books*, 3d ed. (London: Awnsham and John Churchil, and Samuel Manship, 1695), 49. [1690]

[55] Rendall, "Women and the Enlightenment in Britain c.1690–1800," 14-5.

[56] Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 198.

[57] Rendall, "Women and the Enlightenment in Britain c.1690–1800," 15.

Prescriptive literature, with the domestic woman at its focus, remained alive for another century, with publishing reaching an all-time high after 1740. Women were encouraged to think collectively instead of separately, not considering themselves endowed with individual talents, rights, or capacities.[61] Generally, the strategy of conduct books was to assist a woman in acknowledging her “natural predispositions,” both good and evil, so she could control herself accordingly.[62] Most importantly, the mind needed to be disciplined, since it served as the basis for the regulation of the body. For women, the greatest emphasis was placed on the adequate governance of their sentiments, feelings, and passions.[63] In *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), English writer of conduct manuals for women, Hester Chapone, pointed out that woman’s “private and domestic happiness” resides in her well-regulated temper and affection.[64] Anger was regarded especially harmful to the ideal of “polite femininity” because it overshadowed the appreciated female softness and submissiveness.[65] As remarked by Anglican divine Revd John Bennett in *Letters to a Young Lady* (1789), “a sour or an angry look is more destructive to female charms, than a high scorbutick flush, or the small pox.” [sic][66] Women were encouraged to suppress the display of negativity or excitement, yet welcomed to express immense sensibility. Thus, funnelling their feelings into a tolerable emotional language instead of showing unaltered genuine emotions.[67]

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[58] Elizabeth Johnston, ""Deadly Snares": Female Rivalry, Gender Ideology, and Eighteen-Century Women Writers," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 47, no. 2 (2014): 3-4.

[59] Rendall, "Women and the Enlightenment in Britain c.1690–1800," 16.

[60] Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 8.

[61] Barbara Darby, "The More Things Change...The Rules and Late Eighteenth-Century Conduct Books for Women," *Women's Studies* 29, no. 3 (June 2000): 337.

[62] Darby, "The More Things Change...The Rules and Late Eighteenth-Century Conduct Books for Women," 335-6.

[63] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 199.

[64] Rendall, "Women and the Enlightenment in Britain c.1690–1800," 24.

[65] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 199.

[66] John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady: On a Variety of Useful And Interesting Subjects: Calculated to Improve the Heart, to Form the Manners, And Enlighten the Understanding*, rev. ed. (Hartford: Printed by Hudson & Goodwin, 1798), 2:16. [1789]

Along with the most crucial aspect of bodily discipline – the mind – didactic writers also devoted their attention to women's food consumption.[68] As written by John Gregory, physician, medical writer and moralist, an excessive appetite "is a despicable selfish vice in men, but in your sex it is beyond expression indelicate and disgusting."[69] Chocolate, for instance, intensified female sensibility and posed a risk of losing control by arousing their passions.[70] The issue of *The Spectator* published at the end of April 1712 warned of the May "Anniversary Inclination," when the springtime "naturally unbend[s] the Mind and soften[s] it to Pleasure" and thus "la[id] down some Rules and Directions for their better avoiding [of] those Calentures." [sic] Women were to be "careful how they meddle with Romances, Chocolate, Novels, and the like Inflamers." [sic][71] Especially unsafe for ladies was drinking, since it dulled their senses and enabled improper or even obscene behaviour, which endangered chastity, an attribute much cherished in women.[72] "She who is first a prostitute to wine will soon be to lust also" alerted the widely circulated work *The Ladies Library* (1714) compiled by philosopher Bishop George Berkeley.[73] Furthermore, since the "love of dress is natural" to women and it forms "an important article in female life," such form of consumption was impossible to be overlooked by the prescriptive literature.[74] Gregory declared that "[a] fine woman shews her charms to most advantage, when she seems most to conceal them," given that "[t]he finest bosom in nature is not so fine as what imagination forms."[sic][75] A century later Jane Austen is able to delicately critique these stereotypes and gender roles in her novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

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[67] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 200.

[68] Ibid, 201.

[69] John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (Dublin: Thomas Ewing and Caleb Jenkin, 1774), 23. [1761]

[70] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 204.

[71] *The Spectator*, no. 365 (April 29, 1712): 291-3, in *The Spectator: Volume the Fifth* (London: J. and R. Tonson, 1747).

[72] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 203.

[73] Richard Steele, *The Ladies Library* [1714] (London: W. Strahan et al., 1772), 7:122, quoted in Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 203.

[74] Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, 32.

[75] Ibid, 33.

2.1.1 "Swift to hear, but slow to speak"

Considering that speech was a fundamental aspect of polite sociability, it was widely elaborated upon in a gender-differentiated way, characteristic of the period. In which languages should women converse? How should women formulate their thoughts? In fact, should they even vocalize them? First and foremost, women were expected to naturally produce and implement a multitude of trivia, which defined a truly polite conversation, into their speech. For instance, tautology, lisping, and loudness were to be avoided by a proper gentlewoman. Thus, ladies were deemed as "naturally perfect conversationalists," but at the same time, they were provided with detailed instructions and advice on how to use their tongue correctly.[76] As described by Revd Bennett, an ideal woman "has really native feeling, which vibrates to the most distant touch of what is proper;[…] her voice is gentle; her pronunciation delicate; her passions are never suffered to be boisterous; she never talks politics; [and] she never foams with anger."[77] Engaging in conversation, which often took place somewhere public, in front of strangers, was in and of itself considered audacious of a woman, since not only did she expose herself to the public, but, by talking, she also sought attention. Garrulity was considered to be inappropriate, and a specifically feminine blemish.[78] In *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), James Fordyce, Scottish Presbyterian minister and poet, wrote that "nothing can be more stunning" as when "the impertinence of a female tongue let[s] loose into boundless loquacity." And continued "[p]rotect us [men], ye powers of gentleness and decorum, protect us from the disgust of such a scene – Ah! my dear hearers, if ye knew how terrible it appears to a male ear of the least delicacy, I think you would take care never to practise it." [sic][79] Noisy laughter and speech were reckoned to be overly masculine for women, and those who practised it were regarded as "speaking brutes" or "barking dogs."[80]

In a like manner, contributing to a debate was delineated by a gender-based dichotomy – while a man entered the discussion to grant it with seriousness and dignity, the female role was to lighten the conversation and provide its male part with cheerfulness and ease.[81] On behalf of womankind, Gregory remarked that "[t]he art of pleasing in conversation consists in making the company pleased with themselves.” Moreover, a woman ought to be careful when displaying her wisdom, since it could be “thought [she] assume[s] a superiority over the rest of the company” – “If you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding.”[82] Thus, ladies were urged to suppress their knowledge and rationality. In 1799, English writer and philanthropist Hannah More summarized in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) that women “often avoid to make use of what abilities they have; and affect to talk below their natural and acquired powers of mind.”[83]

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[76] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 205-7.
[77] Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 2:24-5.
[78] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 207-8.
[79] James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 3rd American ed. from the 12th London ed. (Philadelphia: M. Carey; New York: I. Riley, 1809), 1:100. [1766]
[80] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 208.
[81] Ibid, 207.

Pleasing company was sometimes done best by keeping silent.[84] As noted by Gregory, “People of sense and discernment will never mistake such silence for dullness. One may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable.”[85] The position of women in conversational situations could be practically summed up by Bennet’s words – “Remember, my dear girl, that nature has given you two ears, and only one tongue; and that scripture has said, ‘be swift to hear, but slow to speak.’”[86]

2.2 **Marriage**

The role of family and marriage during the period of imperial expansion and war was crucial for sustaining the social order and promoting the well-being of the nation.[87] Indeed, family represented the basic unit of production, social interaction, reproduction, and prosperity. Since marriage was perceived to be a cause of financial self-sufficiency, hence closely connected to trends in the economy, the decreased age of joining in matrimony was viewed positively.[88] In comparing the first half of the 17th century and the second half of the 18th, we see that the mean age of marriage for men dropped from 28 to 26.4 years and from 26 to 24.9 years for women.[89] However, women who migrated in order to accumulate enough resources to establish their own households, had a tendency to marry older than the ones who spent most of their lives in one locality.[90] The lower age of marriage denoted a higher number of children that a couple had, and thus resulted in the significant population growth during the 18th century.[91]

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[82] Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters*, 19.

[83] Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1799), 2:22.

[84] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 206.

[85] Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters*, 17.

[86] Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 2:15.

[87] Tanya Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," in *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. Hannah Barker and Chalus Elaine (London: Routledge, 2005) 57.

[88] Robert Allan Houston, "British Society in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of British Studies* 25, no. 4 (1986): 440, 456.

[89] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 32.

Social status constrained the woman's choice of a husband, although it affected higher-class women, whose parents were concerned about the transfer of property, more than the poor ones. Poor women were freer in selecting their husbands-to-be, since poverty-stricken parents were able to provide only a small dowry, which did not allow them to manipulate their daughter's decision to such a great extent. Even though the noble marriages became more egalitarian throughout the period, for many, wedlock endured uncontrollable.[92] The writer of conduct books, Lady Sarah Pennington, for example, noted in *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters* (1761) that she and her husband never "met in a Room alone, …'till after the most solemn mutual Engagement, that of the matrimonial Ceremony" [sic] in the mid-century.[93] In 1718, Mary Delany, who was forced to marry a forty-years-older man, wrote that "when I was led to the altar, I wished from my soul I had been led, as Iphigenia was, to be sacrificed" and later commented "Why must women be driven to the necessity of marrying? A state that should always be a matter of choice!"[94] According to Mary Wollstonecraft, marriages that are arranged by families but also women who "marry for a support" are not marriages yet a transaction in which women's persons are "legally prostituted."[95] Despite that, strategic reasons but also emotions and recommendations from family and friends were all the factors influencing the final verdict of whom to marry.[96]

Clandestine marriages, widely held in the 17th century, remained attractive due to several advantages. First and foremost, it was a means of avoiding publicity, including that of relatives and friends, being done outside the home parish with no banns announcing the upcoming marriage, and officiated by an unfamiliar clergyman.[97] For instance, gentlewoman Margaret Lindsay did not obtain the consent of her father, ignored his objections, and in 1751, eloped with portrait painter beneath her social class Allan Ramsay. Despite the fact that their marriage was joyful, she remained withdrawn from her family until her father's death. Secondly, in order to have a wedding ceremony, a couple needed to purchase a wedding license or pay parish fees and invest in food and beverages for their guests at the celebration, making it unaffordable for the poor, thus many opted for a non-traditional wedding instead. However, such a form of union was not to elite men's liking, who were concerned about the transfer of assets. Plus they feared that their offspring would run away and get married without their approval.[98] Consequently, Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act passed in 1753, which suppressed clandestine and other informal marriages not conducted in the church, and prevented them from being entered into the parish register.[99] From then on, everyone under the age of 21 needed parental consent in order to get legally wed, and the ceremony could be performed only in an Anglican church after the licence had been bought or banns published. Even though the regulation did not apply to Jews, Quakers, and royalty, Catholics were affected by the Marriage Act. After 1753, the informal matrimonies kept on being practised among the poor, despite their illegality.[100]

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[90] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 61.

[91] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 32.

[92] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 62.

[93] Lady Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters: In a Letter to Miss Pennington* (London: Printed by S. Chandler, 1761), 4.

[94] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 57.

[95] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Everyman, 1992), 64, 160. [1792]

[96] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 62.

[97] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 44.

Marriage was no longer solely patriarchal, but it became also companionate. However, a woman was not rendered equal, but her intellectual, spiritual, and mainly moral virtues contributing to the run of a household were recognized.[101]In effect, women were expected to control and discipline their "natural essence" by themselves.[102] As described by John Burton, clergyman and academic, in *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* (1793), "[a] social and domestic happiness so much depends on the tempers and dispositions of the female Sex" and further elaborated, that "A good temper is not always constitutional: And though some have more favourable propensities than others, yet every disposition is susceptible of improvement. A bad temper may be reformed by seasonable discipline: And a good one may be corrupted by neglect."[103] A woman had an essential role to play in the domestic sphere, therefore, not only was she reliant on her husband, but to some extent he was reliant on her as well, forming a sort of "co-dependency." The foundation of a blissful union rested on mutually agreed upon responsibilities – a wife being in charge of the household and a husband providing for his family.[104] However, a wife was still supposed to be obedient, honourable and loving towards her husband. An article published in *The London Magazine, or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* (1765) claims that a wife should “enjoy the amiable female privileges of ruling by obeying, of commanding by submitting, and of being perfectly happy from consulting another’s happiness.”[105] Therefore, a married woman’s requisite to put up with the unequally distributed power lasted.[106]

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[98] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 60.
[99] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 43.
[100] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 61.
[101] Ibid, 63.
[102] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 196.
[103] John Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, 4th ed. (Dublin: John Milliken, 1796), 293. [1793]
[104] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 63.

2.2.1 Marriage not as hoped for

Even though the pursuit of marital harmony was prevailingly put on women’s shoulders, it was the men who often stood in the way of achieving such a state. The practice of wife beating in the middle and upper-class was in decline during this period, since such behaviour became publicly repudiated and marital violence was regarded as wrong and inappropriate. However, marital violence did not vanish, but only shifted “from the streets to behind closed doors.” Interestingly, those middle and elite-ranked women were now the target of another, more private, form of abuse – confinement. By the restriction of women’s personal space, confinement was used to demonstrate male dominance.[107] Moreover, those higher on the social scale were at a greater risk, since confinement was a husbands’ tool to extort their wives’ property and separate their estate from them.[108] Unlike physical violence, this method was not only left unquestioned but was even supported by the law. In his legal handbook, Sir William Blackstone wrote that a wife could be restrained “of her liberty, in case of any gross misbehaviour.” The only way for women to fight against abusive confinement was to address the magistrates where they needed to swear “articles of peace” and provide proof of being in physical danger. However, making it to the court could be a problem for a confined wife. Earl Ferrers’ ill-treated wife tried to escape and swear a peace against him in 1757, but he found out, led an armed chase on her carriage and, by threatening to shoot, made the drivers turn back to his house.[109] Similarly, in 1786, Mary Eleanor Bowes, Countess of Strathmore, attempted to divorce her husband who, in response, locked her up and required her to revoke the termination of the marriage.[110]

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[105] “Picture of Conjugal Felicity,” in *The London Magazine, or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* 34 (1765): 353.

[106] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 64.

[107] Elizabeth Foyster, "At the Limits of Liberty: Married Women and Confinement in Eighteenth-century England," *Continuity and Change* 17, no. 1 (2002): 40, 42.

[108] Foyster, "At the Limits of Liberty: Married Women and Confinement in Eighteenth-century England," 53.

[109] Ibid, 41, 43.

[110] Ibid, 44.

Besides domestic confinement, there was also an institutional one, private madhouses, which were often exploited by men to wrongfully incarcerate their sane wives in.[111] By the end of the 18th century, the number of private madhouses considerably increased, with a total of around 50 in England.[112] Moreover, showing signs of a nervous disorder was fashionable at that time, since such a tendency connoted the pre-eminence of class and refinement. The image of the feminine ideal also shaped the way women responded to marital violence. Reacting with anger was associated with lower-class women, thus the upper-rank ones often modelled their reactions on symptoms of mental illnesses, which could not be clearly told apart from insanity. Similarly, in pursuit of proving husbands guilty, women used "language of hysteria," or one resembling nervous instability instead of showing the court their bruises. As a result, they were looked upon as insane, and their stories were believed to be products of madness.[113]

For getting legally separated under canon law, one of the partners had to be accused of adultery, brutality, apostasy, or heresy, though only a few chose this path. Also, there was a possibility of divorce, the legal dissolution of marriage, yet it was reserved only for the ones belonging to the middle or upper-class, due to the lengthy and tremendously costly lawsuits of up to 700 pounds. As few as 325 divorces were granted between the years 1670 and 1857, out of which only four were initiated by women. Nevertheless, the vast majority of marriages was terminated as a result of death, informal mutual agreement, or a man simply abandoning his wife.[114] Urban women were three times more likely to be deserted by their husbands than wives in rural areas. While the average country rate was 5 per cent, in London's parish St Martin-in-the-Fields, the proportion of desertion fluctuated between 7 and 15 per cent. The main determinants for abandonment were poverty and work opportunities, primarily in military or navy services.[115] In 1794, Peggy Smith, accompanied by her illegitimate children, came before her parish in London for relief, since her husband apparently deserted them for another woman. Peggy stated that she had married John Smith in 1780, who, as she later learned, had been deceptive with her and "had a wife in every port across the world, one in Cork, Barbados, Plymouth, and Dartmouth."[116] Leaving a family so that one could start a new one basically posed as the equivalent of a divorce.[117]

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[111] Ibid, 50.
[112] Ibid, 45.
[113] Ibid, 55-6.
[114] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 66.
[115] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 53-4.

2.3 Education corresponding to the "destination"

Whatever the curriculum, whatever the form of education, the teaching of girls was founded on separate social classes, which pre-destined their future life. Most of the schools for lower-ranked girls, such as charity schools, dame's schools, or Sunday schools were not free of charge, thus even if the fee was small, financial constraints of the parents did not allow them to send their daughter to school. The curriculum was designed to train a plebeian girl appropriately for her life of work, and improve her morals and manners so she would be able to raise well-behaved children for the good of society as a whole.[118] Since such schooled girls received education often restricted to religion and needlework, and since most poor girls did not attend a school at all, the female literacy rate was very low. While 59 per cent of male weavers who married in Manchester in 1764 were able to sign their names, only 11 per cent of their brides could do so.[119] For the upper-middle-class and elite, home education was the most favoured form of learning for girls, since their future lay in the domestic sphere. According to a study of English middle-class ladies, 60 per cent of them were educated at home.[120]However, many parents adopted a combined method – a mother, father, tutor, or governess gave lessons at home and then schools were used to "finish off" a girl's education, particularly with regard to "polite skills."[121] The annual expenditure on a genteel boarding school could come be as high as £200, although cheaper version could cost merely £12–14 per annum. Day schools, however, were considerably better priced.[122]

2.3.1 Private vs public schooling

The great dilemma was not whether elite and better-off middle-class girls should be schooled, but whether to provide them with private or public education.[123] The

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[116] Evans, "Women, Marriage, and the Family," 67.

[117] Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, 54.

[118] Deborah Simonton, "Earning and Learning: Girlhood in Pre-industrial Europe," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 3 (2004): 370-1.

[119] Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 2005), 173.

[120] Deborah Simonton, "Women and Education," in *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. Hannah Barker and Chalus Elaine (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 41.

[121] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 115.

[122] Simonton, "Women and Education," 43.

[123] Michele Cohen, "A Mother's Dilemma: Where Best to Educate a Daughter, at Home or at a School?" *The Gaskell Journal* 28 (2014): 36.

Enlightenment approached its core focus – education – with the conviction that the environmental influences during childhood shaped a person for life. As discussed in section 6.1, even French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and advocate of women's rights Mary Wollstonecraft, whose theories about nature of reason markedly differed in many ways, found common ground in the concept of formative childhood. Since the upbringing of children and mothering grew simultaneously in importance, mothers were given the responsibility for morality of society through the early education of their offspring.[124] Therefore, the decision to educate daughters outside of a domestic environment appeared to many a sign of misguided mothering.[125] “Whatever elegant or high-sounding schools may be sought out for a girl, a mother seems the only governess intended by nature.”[126] Considering the prescriptive attitude of Revd Bennett towards the female ideal – “What woman is most really admired in the world? A domestic. What woman has all the suffrages of the sensible, and the good? The domestic.”– given that, girls were “destined to private and domestic life,” thus their learning should be tailored to this female destination.[127] While a mother’s educational guidance in the shelter of a home protected a daughter and preserved her sensibility and tenderness, almost every aspect of public education had the “tendency to corrupt the heart” and rendered a girl “undomesticated,” hence deprived of “all the valuable purposes of her existence.”[128] According to Revd Bennett, when those girls matured, they then “ha[d] houses without any order or arrangement; servants, without discipline; and children, without instruction,” which certainly did not resemble the concept of exemplary feminine destination.[129]

Another cause of parental concern was the “promiscuous mixing” of social classes in boarding schools.[130] English society was based on a delicately classified hierarchy with snobbery being the key divisive element.[131] Therefore, the fact that the middle class was getting wealthier and aspired to move up the social ladder endangered the nobility that was satisfied with the existing social structure.[132] For middle-ranked girls, learning at expensive schools was a means of social elevation – it allowed them to mingle with fellow, yet elite, pupils, enhanced their opportunities in the "marriage market," and could eventually boost their social prestige.[133] Nevertheless, the upper class perceived such mobility as a threat to social stability. According to More, "this very valuable part of society is declining in usefulness, as it rises in its unlucky pretensions to elegance."[134] When parents "bring up their daughters, in a manner, by no means corresponding with their station" and place them in schools with the ones of higher rank and fortune "under an idea of bettering their condition," the consequences could be "often fatal; because the ideas they have imbibed are not compatible with that humble rank, or perhaps employment, to which they are born."[135] Moreover, "all degrees are blended together in these schools, to the mutual disadvantage of all the parties concerned."[136] Thus, affluent parents worried that their daughters' exposure to inferior class in boarding schools would render them "déclassé."[137]

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[124] Simonton, "Women and Education," 34-5.
[125] Cohen, "A Mother’s Dilemma," 46.
[126] [John Bennett], *Strictures on Female Education: Chiefly as It Relates to the Culture of the Heart, in Four Essays*, (London: Printed for the author and sold by T. Cadell, J.J.G. and J. Robinsons, J. Murray, and Dodsley, 1787), 138.
[127] Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 2:108; Cohen, "A Mother’s Dilemma," 39.
[128] Simonton, "Women and Education,", 42; Bennett, *Strictures on Female Education*, 144.
[129] Bennett, *Strictures on Female Education*, 144.
[130] Cohen, "A Mother’s Dilemma," 42.
[131] Houston, "British Society in the Eighteenth Century," 461.
[132] Simonton, "Women and Education," 36.

Understandably, the expertise of educational authorities was also a cause of parental anxieties. A governess ran the institution and completely conditioned the quality of the school and its lessons. The possibility to establish a school was open, basically, to anyone.[138] In addition to gentle schoolmistresses, women of middle ranks also grabbed the chance – either they had no other option, or they did so out of a sense of vocation.[139] Frequently, it was those middle-class ladies who attended boarding schools in the pursuit of upward mobility, and later failed "to make their fortune by marriage." As More put it, they became "incompetent and illiterate governesses" and taught subjects, which "require a degree of leisure which belongs exclusively to affluence."[140] Although, many positions were rightfully occupied by proficient tutoresses, for instance, Hannah More taught in Bristol, Mary Wollstonecraft had a school in Newington Green, and her friend from childhood Jane Arden ran a school in Beverly.[141] Still, they could not "sufficiently resemble families, which are the foundation of society."[142]

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[133] Cohen, "A Mother's Dilemma," 42.

[134] More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 1:44.

[135] Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, 23-4.

[136] Clara Reeve, *Plans of Education; with Remarks on the Systems of Other Writers* (London: T. Hookham, and J. Carpenter, 1792), 111.

[137] Cohen, "A Mother's Dilemma," 42.

[138] Ibid, 37.

[139] Simonton, "Women and Education," 44.

[140] More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 1:45.

[141] Simonton, "Women and Education," 44.

[142] Alexander Jardine, *Letters from Barbary, France, Portugal, etc.*, 2 vols (London: 1788), 1:329-30. quoted in Michele Cohen, "A Mother's Dilemma: Where Best to Educate a Daughter, at Home or at a School?" *The Gaskell Journal* 28 (2014): 37.

2.3.2 Polite curriculum

> “The life of a young lady […] too much resembles that of an actress; the morning is all rehearsal, and the evening is all a performance.” (Hannah More, 1799) [143]

Women were to “cultivate such studies, as lie within the region of sentiment and taste” and rendered them and their knowledge feminine. While, taste and imagination were “the prominent excellencies of [female] minds” and were supposed to be imitated by the education; “politics, philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics” did not belong within the female realm and rendered a lady “unwomanly.” Thus, the optimal learning focused on “the elegant studies” that “do not require so much time, abstraction or comprehensiveness of mind; they bring no wrinkles, and they will give a polish to [the] manners.”[144] According to conduct book writer Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), accomplishments of young ladies were to include “well chosen and properly regulated” reading, particularly of poetry because it cultivates the imagination and “adds a thousand charms” to the sentiments which exalt and refine the soul; dancing and French language, since “both are useful as well as ornamental”; moreover, French books are often discussed so a girl “will not feel mortified in company”; writing and “common arithmetic”; music and drawing to fill up “agreeably [the] intervals of time”; history “to form and strengthen your judgement”; and the most essential; religion. Furthermore, English, French, and Italian “afford tolerable translations of all the most valuable productions of antiquity,” so there was no need for a woman to learn any other languages.[145]

The diversity of subjects offered to women was, as justified by the female “nature,” intellectually limited.[146] But, on the other hand, the range of suitable subjects about which a girl was supposed to know at least something was broad. However, it was impossible for a pupil to concentrate properly on so many pursuits at once.[147] For instance, philanthropist and traveller Jane Griffin, known as Lady Franklin, whose mother passed away when Jane was three and was therefore taught in a boarding school for young ladies at Chelsea, reported that her daily curriculum consisted of “Writing, Sums, Tables, ‘Work’ (needlework), Reading,

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[143] More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 1:64.

[144] Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 1:90-1.

[145] Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (London: Scatchard & Letterman, 1810), 154-9. [1773]

[146] Vivien Jones, ed., *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (London and New York: Routledge 1990), 98.

[147] Cohen, "A Mother’s Dilemma," 45.

Globes, Lesson, Catechism, Dancing and 'French Master'."[148] Likewise, if a school offered a vast number of lessons and had only one or two teachers, they were most likely not qualified enough in all of them and consequently provided girls only with "mere glosses" of the subjects.[149] Thus, due to the surplus of rudimentary and shallow information, female education was perceived as superficial.[150]

Women's learning was not aimed solely at gaining polite knowledge, but rather at acquiring "external accomplishments" to polish her polite demeanour, and to make the female body ready for appraisal by elite society.[151] *The Polite Academy* (1762) stated that a "young Woman of Virtue and good Sense, will never think it beneath her Care and Study to cultivate the Graces of her outward Mien and Figure, which contribute so considerably towards making her Behaviour acceptable."[sic][152] Indeed, certain subjects – such as history, literature, modern languages, natural philosophy, and geography – were touched upon only so a woman would be conversant enough to engage in polite conversation.[153] Philanthropist and traveller Jane Griffin, who married an arctic explorer Sir John Franklin, deemed the curriculum to be "unimaginative," partly because her school textbooks contained vague and absurd theorems, such as "What is Metaphysics? A Science more sublime than Physics."[154] In her autobiography, English writer and literary patron Eliza Fletcher wrote about her stay at Manor Boarding School in York between the years 1781 and 1785 and described the institution as "a place in which nothing useful could be learned" and where everything was "artificial, flat, and uninteresting" with "four volumes of the Spectator constitut[ing] [the] whole library." Moreover, "The four years I spent at that school were not without their use," although it "did not convince me that the making a graceful curtsy was the chief of human existence," it "did convince me that, if the acquirements I valued myself upon were not to be more admired by the world than they were by my school companions, I had made a very mistaken estimate indeed of the value of my own knowledge and literary attainments."[155]

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[148] Penny Russell, "An Improper Education? Jane Griffin's Pursuit of Self-improvement and 'Truth', 1811-12," *History of Education* 33, no. 3 (2004): 251-2.

[149] Simonton, "Women and Education," 45.

[150] Cohen, "A Mother's Dilemma," 45.

[151] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 117.

[152] *The Polite Academy, Or School of Behaviour for Young Gentlemen and Ladies* [1758] (London: R. Baldwin and B. Collins, 1762), vi. quoted in Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 117.

[153] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 116.

[154] Russell, "An Improper Education? Jane Griffin's Pursuit of Self-improvement and 'Truth', 1811-12," 252.

[155] Eliza Dawson Fletcher, *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher: With Letters and Other Family Memorials*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1876), 20-2.

Undoubtedly, the reason behind female schooling was not to transmit practical knowledge, but to prepare a young lady to sparkle in the marriage market and let her become an adornment of her husband.[156] In *Essays Moral and Literary* (1779), educator and Anglican priest Vicesimus Knox commented that "[Men] entertain a notion that a lady of improved understanding will not submit to the less dignified cares of managing a household. She knows how to make verses, says the witling, but give me the woman who can make a pudding." [sic][157] According to Revd Bennett, "The qualities, which every man of real taste and sense wishes, particularly, to find in a woman, are innocence, simplicity, and domestick worth." [sic][158] Conduct book writer Lady Sarah Pennington concluded that it was important for a woman to receive adequate polite and religious learning so she could become "a proper Figure in the World and being well accepted in it […] as that only can secure to [her] the Approbation of the greatest and best of Beings, on whose Favour depends [her] everlasting Happiness."[159]

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[156] Simonton, "Women and Education," 45.

[157] Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary* (Dublin: R. Marchbank, 1783), 2:242.

[158] Bennett, *Strictures on Female Education*, 142.

[159] Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters*, 11-2.

II. ANALYSIS

3 PATH TO BECOMING “THE FIRST OF A NEW GENUS”

Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, was born in 1759 in London to Edward John Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Dixon as the oldest daughter of their seven children. About that time, in an attempt to climb the social ladder, her father abandoned the family’s prosperous silk manufacture and became a gentleman farmer. Though, this unfortunate decision eventually led the family to financial instability.[160] One would not call Mary’s childhood years blissful. Her father was a drunkard and despot while her mother “appears to [have] been the first and most submissive of his subjects.” She was also not the favourite of either of the parents and was governed with “considerable rigour” by her mother.[161] No wonder that anytime Mary heard about the sanctity of marriage and about the beneficial state of female obedience, thoughts about her mother’s helplessness in an unhealthy relationship crossed her mind, and she pictured the despair and sadness of her tender age.[162] “On many accounts I am averse to any matrimonial tie,” Mary wrote to her childhood friend Jane Arden at the age of 21. She was determined to “struggle with any obstacles rather than go into a state of dependence: – I speak feelingly. – I have felt the weight, and would have you by all means avoid it.”[163]

Coming from a rustic, middle-class background, Mary received only a minimal formal schooling, the principal part of which consisted of a day-school in Beverley, yet it could certainly not take any credit for her “subsequent eminence.”[164] Besides, Mrs. Wollstonecraft did not dedicate much time to the cultivation of her daughters’ minds. Unlike the girls from affluent or sophisticated families, like Jane Austen, who used her father’s library for reading *Belles Lettres* and history books, Mary’s conditions did not allow her to secretly sneak into a library and educate herself.[165] Despite all the adverse circumstances, Mary began to search for knowledge and it was granted to her by a few enlightened people who stepped into her life. First, in Beverley, it was the father of her close childhood friend,

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[160] Leonard H. Roberts. "Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘Rational Education’ Agenda and the Status of Women in Eighteenth Century England," (November 1, 1997), 2.

[161] William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 7.

[162] Anna Holmová, "Předmluva," in Mary Wollstonecraft, *Obrana Práv Žen*, trans. Anna Holmová (Praha, Král. Vinohrady: Jan Laichter, 1904), vii.

[163] Ralph M. Wardle, ed., *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 72. quoted in Barbara Taylor, Introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Everyman, 1992), x.

[164] Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,14-5.

[165] Cohen, "A Mother’s Dilemma," 45; Sandrine Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

Jane Arden, and a philosopher by occupation, who let Mary start to develop her intellect by lending her novels and books about natural philosophy and mentoring her.[166] Then, when the Wollstonecraft family moved to Hoxton near London, it was her neighbour and a clergyman Mr. Clare who tutored her as well as introduced her to a two-years-older "young woman of extraordinary accomplishments," Fanny Blood, with whom Mary formed a fervent friendship.[167] "The acquaintance of Fanny, like that of Mr. Clare, contributed to ripen the immature talents of Mary." It was this period of her life, when she began to experience an inextinguishable intellectual thirst and "her ambition to excel was awakened."[168]

Seeking independence from her parents, nineteen-year-old Mary left to become a companion to an elderly widow in Bath, where she eventually resided for a period of two years.[169] As to her subsequent occupation, it was not about "the mere removal of personal vexations" anymore, but Mary sought for something more arduous and useful.[170] In 1784, just after she had got to observe a lamentable marriage of another woman dear to her, her sister Eliza, and arranged for her to legally dissolve the alliance, Mary set up a day school for girls in Islington, providing an income not only for herself but also for her two sisters and Fanny Blood, who accompanied her as teachers. Several months later, the institution was moved to Newington Green, a village within a few miles from London and a place that changed markedly her course of life. Regardless of the school resulting in failure, Mary benefited from the stay in Newington Green by joining an intellectual radical circle called Rational Dissenters, republicans who favoured equality and opposed to the established Church of England. Hence, Wollstonecraft developed her education and radical thinking. She also befriended Richard Price, who introduced her to radical publisher Joseph Johnson, then considered as "some sort the father of English literature."[171] Just before Mary left to work as a governess for a noble Irish family, she entrusted a manuscript built upon her teaching experience to Johnson and it became her first published book titled *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787).[172] *Thoughts* was a little didactic tract on early female education that rather appealed to mainstream taste than offered the kind of radical ideas as were featured in *Vindication*.[173]

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[166] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 4.

[167] Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 16-9.

[168] Ibid, 20, 22.

[169] Ibid, 25-6.

[170] Ibid, 30.

[171] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 4-5; Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 45.

[172] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 6.

When Wollstonecraft returned, Johnson offered her the chance to contribute as a writer to a monthly progressive periodical *Analytical Review*, of which he was the editor.[174] "Mr. Johnson […] assures me that if I exert my talents in writing, I may support myself in a comfortable way. I am then going to be the first of a new genus," Mary wrote to her sister.[175] Her new journalist job consisted prevalently of reviewing books of various genres, thus she got access to plenty of publications and nourished her writing and reading skills.[176] She wrote hundreds of literary reviews of children books, travel accounts, natural histories, biographies, educational works, or even books about boxing, though, she focused particularly on a critique of sentimental novels. Despite being a female journalist, she managed to create a resonant voice as cultural and literary critic.[177] Thus, she was evolving into a more courageous writer, as also demonstrated by her well-received *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), which she wrote both as a response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and as a defence of Richard Price's opinions condemned by Burke.[178] Soon, Mary earned even greater applause for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), to some extent because 18th-century society perceived the book as an insistence on a widely acknowledged need to reform the female education system, instead of a political treatise on gender equality.[179] Yet, it was both, and as noted by Godwin, "the publication of this book forms an epocha in the subject to which it belongs"[sic] and "it seems not very improbable that it will be read as long as the English language endures."[180]

As regards the private life of Mary, her romances eventuated repeatedly to her disappointment. First, she had "a Platonic affection" for the painter Henry Fuseli, but her feelings were not reciprocated. In 1792, "determined to seek a new climate," Mary moved to Paris.[181] There, she fell in love and had a controversial affair with Gilbert Imlay, businessman and “native of the United States of North America,” with whom she bore an illegitimate daughter named Fanny.[182] However, their love affair did not last forever and Imlay soon became tired of her. When back in London, a devastated Mary attempted suicide twice. However, after all that emotional turmoil, she found her desired peace of mind in a newly-formed friendship with the moral philosopher William Godwin.[183] The amity melted into love, and in a mere six months, they got married. About a half a year later, in 1797, their daughter Mary was born, alas, after ten days of agony caused by birth complications, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin died at the age of 38.[184] In the words of William Godwin, “This light was lent to me for a very short period, and is now extinguished for ever!”[185]

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[173] Alan Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24.

[174] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 3.

[175] Ralph M. Wardle, ed., *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 164. quoted in Sandrine Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

[176] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 5.

[177] Mitzi Myers, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Literary Reviews," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82-3.

[178] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 9.

[179] Ibid, 11-2.

[180] Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 84.

[181] Ibid, 97-8.

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[182] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 6. Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 104.
[183] Holmová, "Předmluva," viii-ix.
[184] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 7.
[185] Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 199.

4 SENSIBILITY AT THE EXPENSE OF REASON

4.1 Gender-blind reason

Wollstonecraft locates the foundation of morality in reason, the cardinal mental faculty, and her core argument that women are rational to the same extent as men is alluded to throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The issue is addressed right from the outset, the first chapter opens with the author's conviction that "man's pre-eminence over the brute creation" consists in reason, and the accomplishment that "exalts one being over another" is virtue. However, unlike reason and virtue, passions were implanted in all creatures. Thus, what distinguishes a man is the ability to struggle with passions by which he "might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes." Moreover, she considers undeniable "that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow."[186] It is important to highlight that Wollstonecraft tells us that reason makes human beings superior to animals, yet virtue makes distinction only between human beings. Reason is an attribute of mankind, thus everybody has it by nature. Though, if reason is not exercised, it does not produce virtue. It is, then, up to individuals to cultivate their reason and shape their morals and become either virtuous or not.[187]Wollstonecraft's remark about reason emphasizes her fundamental point, i.e. she reaches for "simple principles" that "virtue can only flourish among equals."[188]

Wollstonecraft insists on her concept in which reason is not gendered, and has been bestowed upon every being, no matter what sex. Her conviction is derived largely from religious beliefs. The "Supreme Being" is neither male nor female and gave a soul to every man and every woman. Why, then, would only men be endowed with reason and why would God create half of the population unable of progressing towards understanding and virtue? Such a scenario would make God irrational.[189] Thus, inasmuch as "every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason," the thought that even "one being was created with vicious inclinations" would be a reason to convert to atheism. "Or if we worship a God, is not that God a devil?"[190]

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[186] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 13.

[187] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 43.

[188] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 13; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Man, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: J. Johnson, 1790), 141.

[189] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 86.

[190] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 23.

The central impulse behind *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was the gender-biased educational reform proposed by Talleyrand, itself built upon the notions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. According to Rousseau, education should be in correspondence with a natural distinction between the sexes, for "a man seeks to serve, a woman seeks to please" and it should acknowledge diversity of virtues because "to preach […] baseless virtues you waste their [children's] youth."[191] Thus, it is Rousseau, liberal political and educational theorist who strongly influenced the Enlightenment and French Revolution, and his didactic fiction *Emile, or Education* (1762) in particular, that are repeatedly addressed by Wollstonecraft. Rousseau admits that the female and male "machine[s]" are "the same in [their] construction," and that a woman has the same faculties as a man, though, adds that "the difference is only in degree."[192] Even though he perceives the female mind as "pleasing but not brilliant, and thorough but not deep," he acknowledges that women are able to think, as well as cultivate their minds. However, "these weapons" were given to them by nature "only to make up for their lack of strength and to enable them to direct the strength of men."[193] However, Wollstonecraft argues that "if women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree" and hence, irrespective of gender, they should be governed in an identical manner and have the same objective.[194] Earlier in the work she has argued that

> the *knowledge* of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the *same* means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of *half* being – one of Rousseau's wild chimeras.[195]

4.2 Over-stretched sensibility

Wollstonecraft's necessity to defend the rationality of women arises from the fact that "everything conspires to render the cultivation of the understanding more difficult in the female than the male world."[196] One of the causes is that women are especially encouraged way too much to concentrate on their emotions and outward appearance, yet not nearly enough on their reason, thus their mental faculties. Indeed, English society of the 18th century was shaped by the culture of sensibility – the display of delicate and subtle emotions was an indication of refinement. As discussed in section 2.1, sensibility was believed to operate in the nervous system. Thus, due to their frail bodies, women were considered to have a natural tendency towards sensibility.[197] As an illustration, Wollstonecraft adapted the remark that economist and moral philosopher Adam Smith made in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), "[t]o be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which they [women] seek." Wollstonecraft claims that such "frivolous accomplishments" render women nothing but pleasing and come "at the expense of every solid virtue."[198] On the contrary, the "minor virtues" are exalted as if they were cardinal and practiced "with punctilious politeness."[199] Among the attainments in the disguise of cardinal virtues that are expected from women of polite society, "commonly called Ladies," belong "patience, docility, good-humour, and flexibility" but also "gentleness" and "spaniel-like affections." However, only a little benefit can be derived from these accomplishments, for they are "incompatible with any vigorous exertion of intellect."[200]

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[191] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 64; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Education*, trans. Barbara Foxley, M.A. (London & Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1921; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1921), 68, 339. [1762]

[192] Rousseau, *Emile, or Education*, 321.

[193] Ibid, 327, 358.

[194] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 28.

[195] Ibid, 42.

[196] Ibid, 58.

Because women are recommended to emphasize the virtues, which more closely resemble all the human "follies and vices" than "the useful fruit" produced by the exercise of reason, Wollstonecraft assumes that women would be better off "left in a state nearer to nature," instead of being constantly enfeebled by "false refinement." Even when "refined seventy times seven," sensibility is not where "intellect dwells." "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."[201]

In *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), sensibility was identified by the foremost English literary figure of the time, linguist and lexicographer Samuel Johnson as "1. Quickness of sensation. 2. Quickness of perception; delicacy."[202] Wollstonecraft replied that the definition evokes "no other idea than of the most exquisitely polished instinct."[203] The explanation for this remark is provided more precisely in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790):

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[197] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England*, 90-1.

[198] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 62, 64.

[199] Ibid, 25.

[200] Ibid, 36, 62.

[201] Ibid, 65, 68.

[202] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: 1755), quoted in Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard, "Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility: An Introductory Essay," in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 22.

> A kind of mysterious instinct is supposed to reside in the soul, that instantaneously discerns truth, without the tedious labour of ratiocination. This instinct, for I know not what other name to give it, has been termed common sense, and more frequently sensibility; and, by a kind of indefeasible right, it has been supposed, for rights of this kind are not easily proved, to reign paramount over the other faculties of the mind, and to be an authority from which there is no appeal.[204]

Wollstonecraft, however, does not dispute the very essence of sensibility. In her unfinished novel *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798), which was published posthumously by her husband William Godwin and which is considered to be the sequel to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she claims that "True sensibility, the sensibility which is the auxiliary of virtue, and the soul of genius, is in society so occupied with the feelings of others, as scarcely to regard its own sensations."[205] Thus, when one is not distracted by "false delicacy," sensibility is positive, because it allows one to be virtuously sympathetic towards the distress and blemishes of others. Moreover, such sensibility is not gendered and is in harmony with reason.[206]

Given that Wollstonecraft does not consider sensibility to be corrupt by nature, her objection against sensibility has its roots elsewhere, especially in its intensity. The criticism is aimed at the forced and stagey sensibility that is "increased at the expence of reason." [sic][207] Her attitude is clearly indicated throughout the book, since Wollstonecraft uses a wide range of adjectives to describe sensibility, such as "overstretched," "overweening," and "overstrained."[208] The problem with "false sentiments and overstretched feelings" is not only that they stifle "natural emotions of the heart" but by relaxing mental faculties they also prevent "intellect from attaining that sovereignty, which it ought to attain."[209] Hence, one could say the condition of women is quite lamentable:

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[203] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 68.
[204] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, 64-5.
[205] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 20; Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, vol. 2 of *Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. William Godwin (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 94.
[206] Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, 2:94; Dustin Friedman, "Beyond Heterosexuality: Mary Wollstonecraft's Aesthetic Masculinity," in *Called to Civil Existence: Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Enit Karafili Steiner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 221.
[207] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 69.
[208] Ibid, 66, 27, 70.
[209] Ibid, 4, 66.

> Ever restless and anxious, their over-exercised sensibility not only renders them uncomfortable themselves, but troublesome, to use a soft phrase, to others. All their thoughts turn on things calculated to excite emotion; and feeling, when they should reason, their conduct is unstable, and their opinions are wavering — not the wavering produced by deliberation or progressive views, but by contradictory emotions.[210]

4.3 Who enslaved women to their senses?

Wollstonecraft was fully conscious of the fact that the traits attributed to women are not natural but constructed.[211] As stated in *The Science of Sensibility* (2012) by Koen Vermeir, specialist in the history of science and philosophy along with philosophy professor Michael Deckard, "The identification of femininity and sensibility was a trap, which was constructed to keep women away from the realms of thought and reason and confined them to the emotions of the body." In *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft uncovered the true character of the culture of sensibility as "a tool of patriarchal oppression."[212] Right in the introduction of *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft points out that, unlike men, she will treat women "like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone." By laudatory remarks directed at women, men absurdly glorify the supposed "sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel" and call a weak mind elegant, "docility of manners" sweet, and sensibility exquisite.[213] Suchlike gallantry methodically degrades the "fair sex" and even though men deem it manly to pay these "trivial attentions" to women, all they really do is "insultingly support[] their own superiority" and "condescendingly […] soften our [female] slavish dependence."[214] Yet, as Wollstonecraft states, "[i]t is not condescension to bow down to an inferior."[215]

> Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing.[216]

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[210] Ibid, 65.

[211] Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, 5.

[212] Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard, "Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility: An Introductory Essay," in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 38.

[213] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 3.

[214] Ibid, 26, 61, 3.

[215] Ibid, 61.

[216] Ibid, 26-7.

Rousseau was also of the opinion that “woman is specially made for man’s delight” and considered it natural that her function was to accommodate male desires.[217] According to the afore quoted commentary by Wollstonecraft, a woman is either a slave to man or a “toy” that must amuse him whenever he wishes her to.[218] Moreover, men are “taking her body” while “her mind is left to rust,” thus a woman is kept in a state of blind obedience.[219] In fact, she is constantly encouraged by “[n]ovels, music, poetry, and gallantry” that thanks to the charming softness she “governs by obeying.”[220] Wollstonecraft concludes that “while physical love enervates man, as being his favourite recreation, he will endeavour to enslave woman.”[221]

Yet, Wollstonecraft seems to hint that women may be partly responsible for their condition as well. Genteel women, in particular, are made “slaves to their bodies” and are praised and credited for their “subjection.”[222] Accordingly, their “present power” is obtained by their sensibility.[223] In pursuit of acquiring power, they, however, lose “all dignity of mind,” because it is acquired “by practising or fostering vice.”[224] Hence, women are not enslaved only to their bodies, but also “to their senses.”[225] Though, in their blindness, women do not endeavour to break free of their state of abject dependence; instead, they rather seem to “burnish than to snap [their] chains.”[226] In *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), Rousseau stated that “enslaved peoples do nothing but boast of the peace and tranquillity they enjoy in their chains.”[227] The same applies to women, though, there is one fundamental difference – women are not aware of their chains.[228] “The passions of men have placed women on thrones,” thus, being adored and routinely complimented, women gladly adopted the role of queens. Like birds, they are “confined […] in cages” and spent their time parading with “mock majesty,” while being supplied with “food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin.” On this view, it is then no wonder, even to Wollstonecraft, that a woman indulges her gold cage rather than trying to get out of it. In defence of her sex, she asks whether "sufficient strength of mind" can be found amongst humankind that would "enable a being to resign these adventitious prerogatives."[229] Therefore, despite women basically being willing slaves, Wollstonecraft does not blame them for their degraded status and recognizes that women are deluded by men, who chained them up on pedestals. Yet she reminds all "short-lived queens," who constantly call for "homage as women" that "the men who pride themselves upon paying this arbitrary insolent respect to the sex, with the most scrupulous exactness, are most inclined to tyrannize over, and despise, the very weakness they cherish."[230] No man really believes that a woman is a queen, and as captured by renowned English poet Anna Letitia Barbauld in her *Song V* (1772) "woman, either slave or queen, Is quickly scorn'd when not ador'd." [sic][231]

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[217] Rousseau, Emile, or Education, 322; John Darling, and Maaike Van De Pijpekamp, "Rousseau on the Education, Domination and Violation of Women," British Journal of Educational Studies 42, no. 2 (1994): 118.
[218] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 36.
[219] Ibid, 82.
[220] Ibid, 21, 65.
[221] Ibid, 82.
[222] Ibid, 47.
[223] Ibid, 66.
[224] Ibid, 48-9.
[225] Ibid, 66.
[226] Ibid, 109.
[227] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 60. [1755]
[228] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 95.

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[229] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 60.

[230] Ibid, 59.

[231] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 96; Anna Letitia Barbauld, "Song V," in *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. William McCarthy, and Elizabeth Kraft (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 45. [1772]

5 FAMILY

5.1 Care of children: “the peculiar destination of woman”

Wollstonecraft takes the view that “the care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature.”[232] What makes the “rearing of children” so important is that it is “a foundation of sound health, both of body and mind in the rising generation.” By labelling this duty as “the peculiar destination of woman,” Wollstonecraft sounds very much like the prescriptive writers of her time.[233] Clergyman John Burton, for instance, stated almost identically that “[t]he Nursery is the peculiar department of the female sex.”[234] To clarify her assertion, it is worth mentioning that Wollstonecraft subscribed to “feminine essentialism,” which feminist philosopher Sandrine Bergès explains as the belief “that there is something fundamental in women’s nature that makes them different from men.” Though, Wollstonecraft had a firm conviction that both genders were equally rational and capable of attaining virtue by nature, thus the difference must lie elsewhere. What she regarded as contrasting was the physical nature of the sexes. Unlike men, women are physically equipped to bear children and “suckle” their babies, hence Wollstonecraft deduced that it was their natural duty to do so.[235] However, she still holds on to her dominant values, reason and virtue, claiming that women’s “first duty is to themselves as rational creatures and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother.”[236] Thus, Wollstonecraft allows that women “have different duties to fulfil” than men do, yet they are still “human duties, and the principles that should regulate the discharge of them […] must be the same.”[237]

Yet, what clearly differentiates Wollstonecraft from her prescriptive contemporaries is that she does not consider motherhood to be the only female alternative, for it would be an enforced option, not compatible with independence, which is “the basis of every virtue.”[238] For instance, as mentioned in chapter 2.3.1, Revd Bennett insisted that the proper sphere of woman is the realm of “domestic” life.[239] However, according to Wollstonecraft,

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[232] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 164.

[233] Ibid, 207.

[234] Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, 81.

[235] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 170; Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 78.

[236] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 157.

[237] Ibid, 55.

[238] Ibid, 7.

[239] Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 2:108.

"the grand duty" of a woman is taking care of children – the duty that can be performed only after a woman becomes a mother. Thus, she did not regard maternity itself or marriage as a female duty. On the contrary, she criticizes that the only way "to rise in the world" for women is to "marry advantageously" and that besides motherhood, noble women do not have any "road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence."[240] Wollstonecraft wanted women to be in control of their own lives and girls who married merely to "better themselves" did certainly not have such control.[241] Furthermore, Bergès claims that "the marriage was not really the woman's success, but belonged to her father, who was able to both get rid of a daughter and consolidate his place in society by having his daughter make a good marriage."[242] However, the problem was that genteel girls were taught to obtain power by their "submissive charms" and "[h]ow women are to exist in that state where there is to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, we are not told."[243] Hence, Wollstonecraft is convinced that the proper exercise of understanding, which is the foundation of independence, "would enable a woman to support a single life with dignity."[244] To emphasize her point, she even states that "the woman who earns her own bread by fulfilling any duty" is much more respectable than "the most accomplished beauty."[245] Yet she acknowledges that the path of "accomplished beauty" is not always chosen by women alone:

> How many women thus waste life away the prey of discontent, who might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and stood erect, supported by their own industry, instead of hanging their heads surcharged with the dew of sensibility […][246]

Therefore, not only that Wollstonecraft does not believe that women are predestined solely for maternity but takes the argument even further and disputes the separation of sexes between the private and public sphere. She advocates for simultaneous presence of both spheres in female lives because "in order to render their private virtue a public benefit, they must have a civil existence in the State, married or single."[247]

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[240] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 64, 158.
[241] Ibid, 81.
[242] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 148;
[243] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 36.
[244] Ibid, 35.
[245] Ibid, 161.
[246] Ibid, 161.
[247] Ruth Abbey, "Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Hypatia* 14, no. 3 (1999): 87; Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 160.

5.2 Marriage as friendship

Wollstonecraft does not consider romantic love to be the foundation of a successful marriage. In her opinion, love is “an animal appetite” that “cannot long feed on itself without expiring” and it “soon sinks into lasciviousness when the exercise of a duty is sacrificed to its indulgence.”[248] Thus, love is “transitory” by its nature and there is nothing that would “render it constant.” For Wollstonecraft, there are two possible scenarios for love – it is either succeeded by “friendship or indifference.”[249] As a matter of course, a couple should endeavour to develop a friendship for it is “the most sublime of all affections, […] founded on principle, and cemented by time.”[250] In order to achieve “the calm tenderness of friendship,” they, however, cannot resist “the fever of love to subside.” Moreover, if “a master and mistress of a family” continue to love each other, yet without passion, they will liberate themselves from “childish caprices and fond jealousies” and will be able to devote their energies to the proper fulfilment of simple domestic duties which develop virtue and form “the moral character.”[251] Also, a rational attitude to marriage would create stronger ties – once partners become friends, they no longer value one another for their physical attractiveness, affluence, status, or femininity or masculinity, but for their virtues of character.[252]

Accordingly, Wollstonecraft believes that true and lasting marital happiness arises from “habitual esteem” and from “well regulated affections.”[253] She claims that “unadorned” affections are noble in their simplicity and they kindle “warmer passion” by “cementing the matrimonial tie.” [254] It is for this reason that young people who contemplate marriage should “look beyond the present moment, and try to render the whole of life respectable, by forming a plan to regulate a friendship which only death ought to dissolve.”[255] This particular idea that Wollstonecraft formulated in 1792’s *Vindication* seems exactly what went wrong in her affair with Gilbert Imlay a few years later. While she moralized her love into affection, Imlay appeared to be a sensualist either disinclined or unable to do the same.[256] In 1795, she addressed a letter to him stating:

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[248] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 78.
[249] Ibid, 32.
[250] Ibid, 79.
[251] Ibid, 32-3.
[252] Abbey, "Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft," 84.
[253] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 112, 153.
[254] Ibid, 211.
[255] Ibid, 79.

> Of me you have no cause to complain, but for having had too much regard for you – for having expected a degree of permanent happiness, when you only sought for a momentary gratification. […] You have thrown off a faithful friend, to pursue the caprices of the moment.[257]

Political theorist Eileen Hunt Botting summarizes that "Wollstonecraft set forth an extended moral justification of marriage as primarily a relationship between equal moral beings and secondarily a relationship that concerned natural functions such as sexual reproduction."[258] Yet, the morality of love that Wollstonecraft had in mind did not consist in the restraint of sexual passion but rather in the determination to convert it into the abiding friendship love.[259]

5.2.1 Co-parenting

Since the blissful marriage is established on friendship, Wollstonecraft suggests that it unites partners as one another's equals. "The two sexes," she claims, "mutually corrupt and improve each other," thus an equal partnership must be formed. Hence, for this to eventuate men are required to respect women as "companions rather than their mistresses" and "be content with rational fellowship, instead of slavish obedience."[260] Since partners complement each other, a marriage must be egalitarian, otherwise, it cannot be "held sacred."[261] In opposition to Rousseau who claims that the "mutual dependence" of partners "differs in degree" because "man is dependent on woman through his desires" but "woman is dependent on man through her desires and also through her needs," Wollstonecraft urged that there must be no asymmetry in interdependence.[262]

"[C]hildren will never be properly educated till friendship subsists between parents," and till both a mother and a father will successfully perform their duties.[263] According to

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[256] Susan Mendus, *Feminism and Emotion: Readings in Moral and Political Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 22.

[257] Mary Wollstonecraft, "Letter LXVII," in *Letters and Miscellaneous Pieces*, vol. 4 of *Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. William Godwin (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 3-4.

[258] Eileen Hunt Botting, *Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Women's Human Rights* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 106-7.

[259] Mendus, *Feminism and Emotion: Readings in Moral and Political Philosophy*, 19.

[260] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 180, 162.

[261] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 180; Paul E. Kerry, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Reason, Marriage, Family Life, and the Development of Virtue in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," *BYU Journal of Public Law* 30, no. 1 (2015): 30.

[262] Rousseau, *Emile, or Education*, 328.

[263] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 211.

Wollstonecraft, women will not become good wives and mothers until when they are made "rational creatures" and "free citizens" yet also until when "men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers."[264] If that is so, with "the chastened dignity," a reasonable mother "returns the caresses" that "she and her child receive from a father who has been fulfilling the serious duties of his station."[265] Thus, as interpreted by feminist philosopher Sandrine Bergès, "effective parenting had to be co-parenting." One may find the explanation of what precisely Wollstonecraft had in mind in her unfinished text *Letters* (1798) published posthumously by Godwin. She composed it as a legacy either for her first daughter Fanny before one of her suicide attempts, or when she was expecting her second daughter Mary. Besides lessons on words to learn or advice on hygiene, the text also illustrates Wollstonecraft's view on respect as the core of an ideal family.[266] When a mother has "such a pain in [her] head" that she can "scarcely hold it up," a child should not disturb her, but instead seek a father and ask him, "very softly," to play in the garden. Similarly, when a father is tired and is "resting himself" – Godwin suffered from narcolepsy – a child "must not wake papa" and should whisper and tiptoe; or when a father has "a pain in the stomach," a child comes with a mother to bring him "a cup of camomile tea."[267] What Wollstonecraft describes is a marital friendship in which partners promote each other's and also child's wellbeing. To summarize, a couple possesses "all that life could give," when partners are "equally necessary and independent of each other, because each fulfilled the respective duties of their station."

5.3 **Mothering incompatible with sensibility**

Not only that sensibility, "the manie of the day," is harmful to women, but once they become mothers, it harms their sons and daughters as well.[268] "In the regulation of a family, in the education of children," Wollstonecraft insists, "understanding, in an unsophisticated sense, is particularly required: strength both of body and mind."[269] However, a woman that has been made "the weathercock of its own sensations" from her infancy and ever since has been encouraged only to please and to satisfy the “genus of men,” naturally alters her “behaviour to gratify the taste by which [she] obtain[s] pleasure and power.” Consequently, her mind and body become weaker and she does not have the “sufficient strength to discharge the first duty of a mother.”[270] Clearly, a weak mother cannot be expected to take a reasonable care of her child. Moreover, Wollstonecraft is convinced that “the weakness of the mother will be visited on the children.”[271] Thus, to be a good mother, her nerves must have “a healthy tone,” she needs to have an independent mind and she must adopt “some austerity of behaviour” to give “an example of order.”[272] Most importantly, however, Wollstonecraft emphasizes that reason is “absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly,” and repeats that “sensibility is not reason.”[273]

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[264] Ibid, 195.

[265] Ibid, 154.

[266] Sandrine Bergès, "Mothers and Independent Citizens: Making Sense of Wollstonecraft's Supposed Essentialism," *Philosophical Papers* 42, no. 3 (2013): 283.

[267] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Lessons*, vol. 2 of *Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. William Godwin (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 194-6; Bergès, "Mothers and Independent Citizens: Making Sense of Wollstonecraft's Supposed Essentialism," 283.

[268] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, 5.

[269] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 68.

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[270] Ibid, 73, 150.
[271] Ibid, 193.
[272] Ibid, 31, 73.
[273] Ibid, 69.

6 EDUCATION

First and foremost, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a treatise on education in which Wollstonecraft calls for its reform. Since Talleyrand-Perigord's pamphlet, which likewise proposed educational reform, acted as a catalyst for writing *Vindication*, one would expect their approaches to differ radically.[274] Yet, Wollstonecraft agreed with him to a large extent. In his proposal, Talleyrand-Perigord promoted universal education that would remove class barriers and enable either rich or poor children to become virtuous. However, as egalitarian as it might seem, girls were excluded from Talleyrand-Perigord's reformed educational system. He followed Rousseau in perceiving female nature as essentially different and believed that the girls' education ought to follow this distinction. Clearly, Wollstonecraft's view on gender-based schooling diverged from Talleyrand-Perigord's. As discussed in section 4.1, one of her fundamental principles was that women are just as rational beings as men, and therefore must be provided with the same means of developing their reasoning skills. Thus, while Talleyrand-Perigord vindicated the rights of all classes to be educated, Wollstonecraft vindicated the rights of both sexes to cultivate their mind.[275]

6.1 Character formation in early childhood

Infancy and early childhood were widely acknowledged as crucial formative years that shaped a person for life.[276] In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), John Locke claims that the "almost insensible impressions on our tender infancies have very important and lasting consequences," and that children arrive "at very remote and distant places" according to "different tendencies" received.[277] Similarly, Rousseau believed that a child was innately good, and that education had the power to either preserve or corrupt that goodness.[278] In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft adopts the same stance by stating that "an early association of ideas" has "a determinate effect" on the moral character – "a turn is given to the mind that commonly remains throughout life."[279] Thus, early stages of life do not shape solely the consciously held ideals of adults, but also their unconscious prejudices, habits, manners, and character traits.[280]

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[274] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 22.
[275] Ibid, 25-6.
[276] Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," 24.
[277] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1809), 8. [1693]
[278] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 27.
[279] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 125.
[280] Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," 25.

Wollstonecraft, however, points out that “first impressions” have “more baneful effect on the female than the male character” because they are “[t]aught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison.”[281] From their childhood, everything that women “see or hear” provides them with impressions and associations “that give sexual character to the mind.” Later in their lives, women are “employed in unfolding instead of examining the first associations,” thus their characters are weakened. [282] Indeed, early education did form later stages of a person’s life, yet, regarding women, it rather deformed than formed their lives. Hence, not only did Wollstonecraft strive to equalize women’s access to education, but she also endeavoured to ameliorate educational conditions that kept women in a “state of perpetual childhood” by rendering them less rational than they would otherwise have become.[283]

6.2 Issues in education systems

6.2.1 Home-schooling

In the search of an ideal schooling system, Wollstonecraft analyses and evaluates two distinct kinds of education – public and private. At the beginning of the chapter *On National Education*, Wollstonecraft admits that she has “formerly delivered [her] opinion rather warmly in favour of private education.”[284] Clearly, she alludes to her conduct book *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) in which she leaned towards domestic education supervised by parents.[285] During the period between the publication of *Thoughts* and *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft, however, gained “further experience” working as a governess and becoming a mother, which “led [her] to view the subject in a different light.”[286] Wollstonecraft no longer believes that “a private education can work the wonders” that are attributed to it.[287] While it is true that children “brought up at home […] may pursue a plan of study in a more orderly manner” than they would in a boarding school, they might also “acquire too high an opinion of their own importance” because they do not spend time with other children.[288] Therefore, according to Wollstonecraft, the major problem with private education is that children are separated from their peers. Being "confined to the society" of adults only, children "acquire that kind of premature manhood which stops the growth of every vigorous power of mind or body." To properly develop their faculties, children must "be excited to think for themselves," though, the only way it can be accomplished is by "mixing a number of children together." Moreover, every affection should be formed in youth and not only "the respectful regard, which is felt for a parent" for it varies greatly from "the social affections that are to constitute the happiness" later in life.[289] Interaction with other kids reveals those "little secrets" to a child that "first open the heart to friendship and confidence." Thus, children are not gradually led to self-importance as when isolated from peers, but to "expansive benevolence."[290] Furthermore:

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[281] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 48, 125.
[282] Ibid, 125.
[283] Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education,” 25; Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 3.
[284] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 173.
[285] Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education,” 26.
[286] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 173.
[287] Ibid, 23.

> [Children] will never acquire that frank ingenuousness of behaviour, which young people can only attain by being frequently in society where they dare to speak what they think; neither afraid of being reproved for their presumption, nor laughed at for their folly.[291]

6.2.2 Boarding schools

While there was a significant shift in Wollstonecraft's attitude towards home education, she certainly did not change her mind about boarding schools. Already in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, she states that only "few things are learnt thoroughly, but many follies [are] contracted" in those schools.[292] In like manner, she addresses boarding schools in *Vindication* by terming them "the hot-beds of vice and folly."[293] As explained by professor of politics Elizabeth Frazer, Wollstonecraft's concern was that "boarding schools put children of one sex together in a hothouse atmosphere that might be deliberately designed to generate bullying, obsessions with fashion, sentimentality and worse."[294] Indeed, Wollstonecraft claims that "girls are first spoiled" in boarding schools. Since "[a] number of girls sleep in the same room, and wash together," they acquire "nasty, or immodest habits." Many of those girls "have learned very nasty tricks, from ignorant servants, the mixing them thus indiscriminately together, is very improper."[295] Similarly, when "a number of [boys] pig together in the same bed-chamber," they learn "nasty indecent tricks" from each other.[296] Thus, boys become "gluttons and slovens" [sic] for they are "very early rushed into libertinism" at the expense of cultivating domestic affections – "the constitution" is destroyed "before it is formed."[297] Thus, even though Wollstonecraft is of the opinion that children need to socialize with their peers, boarding schools are not the most appropriate solution. All the social affections that should be developed there are instead "deadened by the selfish gratifications, which very early pollute the mind, and dry up the generous juices of the heart."[298]

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[288] Ibid, 173.

[289] Ibid, 172.

[290] Ibid, 172-3.

[291] Ibid, 173.

[292] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct in the more important Duties of Life* (London: J. Johnson, 1787), 58.

[293] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 173.

[294] Elizabeth Frazer, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay on Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 37, no. 5 (2011): 613.

Just like parents, as discussed in section 2.3.1, Wollstonecraft was also concerned about the proficiency of teachers. As a result of their guidance, the memory of a pupil "is loaded with unintelligible words, to make a show of, without the understanding's acquiring any distinct ideas." Thus, Wollstonecraft legitimately asks: "How much time is lost in teaching [children] to recite what they do not understand?"[299] Moreover, children spend "near a fourth part of the year […] in idleness" and during the rest of the year indulge only in "frivolous pursuits." Thus, they are neither taught "to speak fluently, nor behave gracefully."[300]

However, Wollstonecraft also shows some empathy with schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, which most probably arises from her previous experience and struggles of running a school. By the time she wrote *Thoughts*, her school in Newington Green had already become bankrupt.[301] Thus, her personal disappointing experience is apparently reflected in some sections of the book.[302] For instance, she states that "[a] teacher at a school is only a kind of upper servant, who has more work than the menial ones."[303] Moreover, she claims that even "a sensible governess cannot attend to the minds of the number she is obliged to have."[304] As further explained in *Vindication*, if a schoolmaster did not take more pupils "than he could manage himself," he could not make a living out of "the scanty pittance allowed for each child." Also, he could not "hire ushers sufficient to assist in the discharge of the mechanical part of the business."[305] Thus, Wollstonecraft considers the fact that "schoolmasters depend entirely on parents for a subsistence" as one of the problems with public education.

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[295] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 137.
[296] Ibid, 180.
[297] Ibid, 173.
[298] Ibid, 180.
[299] Ibid, 178.
[300] Ibid, 173, 178.
[301] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 6.
[302] Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," 26.
[303] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, 71.
[304] Ibid, 58-9.

6.3 Proposal for educational reform

As demonstrated above, Wollstonecraft does not agree either with one of the prevailing forms of schooling for they are both "extremes equally injurious to morality."[306] As professor of English Alan Richardson remarks, Wollstonecraft was "seeking a middle ground between the inadequate pedagogy and supervision of boarding-schools and the confinement of an adult-dominated 'private' education."[307] In a systematic manner, she first identified the problematic aspects of public and home education and then searched for an educational system that would avoid them. Hence, an effective system must cultivate "the domestic affections, that first open the heart to the various modifications of humanity," and enable children to "spend great part of their time, on terms of equality, with other children."[308] Importantly, both sexes need to be educated together – not only in private homes, but also in public schools.[309] Accordingly, virtues of both sexes are founded on reason, thus, boys and either girls must be educated and allowed to gain "strength both of body and mind."[310]

Wollstonecraft's revolutionary proposal for a national school system rests on mixed day schools "for particular ages" established and funded by the state. Between the ages of five to nine, elementary schools "ought to be absolutely free," compulsory, and "open to all classes."[311] Since Wollstonecraft was convinced that the roots of democracy are set the best in youth, both the rich and poor should wear identical uniforms to schools and be "all obliged to submit to the same discipline." Such treatment would prevent "any of the distinctions in vanity" and social relations of equality and mutual respect would be established.[312] Similarly, Wollstonecraft assumes that co-education would melt away patriarchal oppression.[313] Being brought up together and "educated after the same model" as children, men and women would have genuinely companionate relationships in adulthood.[314] Regarding the curriculum of these elementary schools, a substantial part is constituted by physical education because children should not be "confined to any sedentary employment for more than an hour at a time" at such a young age.[315] In order to be healthy, Wollstonecraft claims that children need to spend time in the fresh air and play, thus freely exercise. She criticizes that young girls are commonly "confined in close rooms till their muscles are relaxed," instead of allowed to play outside like their brothers.[316] Moreover, subjects like religion, history, and politics would be taught in the form of Socratic conversations. Other subjects that might fill up the day would be, for instance, botany, mechanics, astronomy, reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history, and some simple experiments in natural philosophy; though, "these pursuits should never encroach on gymnastic plays in the open air."[317]

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[305] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 179.
[306] Ibid, 180.
[307] Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," 34.
[308] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 173.
[309] Ibid, 180.
[310] Ibid, 68.
[311] Ibid, 183.
[312] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 165; Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 183.

At the age of nine, Wollstonecraft's day schools, however, would stop. Those who are destined for service, "domestic employments or mechanical trades," should pursue further education, yet appropriate to their destination. Those "of superior abilities, or fortune," yet still of both sexes, will move on to another school, where they will learn "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 exclude polite literature."[318] Thus, Wollstonecraft's educational system provides women with a "scheme to sharpen their faculties" and enables them to prepare for professions, just like men do in their youth.[319] "It is plain from the history of all nations, that women cannot be confined to merely domestic pursuits, for they will not fulfil family duties, unless their minds take a wider range."[320]

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[313] Tom Furniss, "Mary Wollstonecraft's French Revolution," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64.

[314] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 164; Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 180.

[315] Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 184.

[316] Ibid, 67.

[317] Ibid, 184.

[318] Ibid, 184.

[319] Ibid, 64.

[320] Ibid, 190.

CONCLUSION

Despite the enlightened atmosphere of the 18th century, the emancipation of women was still to come. Masculine prejudices affected the lives of women across various social strata. Though, the cult of sensibility was tightly connected with politeness and thus, paradoxically, the higher the social status of a woman was, the more she was oppressed. Following the period's phenomena of sensibility, the oppression, however, took a truly peculiar form. Women were instilled with the conviction that instead of the cultivation of their minds, they would become civilized by nurturing their senses. They were exalted by continual compliments and praise of their refinement, while they were parallelly degraded by being denied their rationality. Therefore, besides the enduring gender-based separation of the private and public sphere, the 18th century introduced also a new dichotomy – "man was made to reason, woman to feel."[321]

Wollstonecraft did not surrender to the bitter reality of social inequality constructed on reasoning capabilities. She developed a philosophical argument based on rational theology that every human being was endowed with the ability to reason by God. The divine moral law to develop reason, thus, resonates within each human being. Not only that Wollstonecraft vindicated education as a female and male right or even prescribed it as a duty towards God, but she also provided a solution to the deeper moral problem. Given that women were granted only inadequate polite education and as soon as in their infancy, their characters began to be systematically corrupted by sensibility, Wollstonecraft insisted that they could not grow into virtuous mothers who raise rational children and their relationships with men could not be companionate. Therefore, to properly put the divine moral law into practice and to enable women to exercise reason, Wollstonecraft proposed the innovative egalitarian reform of education. Not only would her "schools of morality" make all children equally rational, but they would also learn rich and poor, boys and girls to exist side by side and respect each other.[322] As she claimed: "The more equality there is established among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society."[323]

In the period of male domination when women were treated rather as ornaments than as human beings, Wollstonecraft sustained a philosophical argument for gender equality. She was truly a revolutionary who did not submit to the firmly established male constructed model of womanhood. Yet, she was not a radical only with a pen but fought back against the conventions in her private life as well. During her short life, she managed to take on several roles, even those that were traditionally male. Being unmarried, Wollstonecraft brought up her daughter Fanny single-handedly and acted as the head of her family while she also pursued a literary career and financially supported her sisters, father, and at times even two of her brothers. Moreover, she also established a school and assisted her sister to escape the sexually exploitative marriage.[324] Indeed, she was an independent and strong woman. What is the most astonishing is, however, that on top of all that, she was an educated woman whose voice was being listened to and her political and philosophical thoughts mattered. Thus, just as boldly she called for "a REVOLUTION in female manners" in *Vindication*, that courageously she demonstrated it in her own life.[325]

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[321] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 67.
[322] Ibid, 185.
[323] Ibid, 17.

Despite or maybe rather thanks to its controversiality, *Vindication* was an immediate bestseller. When it first appeared in 1792, every notice it received was favourable. Radical periodicals, such as Johnson's *Analytical Review*, *Literary Magazine*, and *Monthly Review*, all shared her philosophy with praise. Those more conservative devotees of the rights of man, as R. M. Janes claims, "did not greet the rights of woman with horror." Yet, most reviews approached *Vindication* as a sensible treatise on women's education and not as a call for equality between the sexes. However, the publication, or rather Wollstonecraft in particular, evoked negative responses as well. Specifically, writer and politician Horace Walpole and religious writer Hannah More opposed to *Vindication*, while neither of them even read it.[326] Still, in a letter to More, Walpole named Wollstonecraft a "hyena in petticoats" and a "philosophical serpent."[327] A year after Wollstonecraft died, however, her reputation collapsed for generations. The cause was Godwin's publication of her biography *Memoirs* in which he very honestly revealed details about her life, including her illegitimate child, the desertion of her lover Imlay, the two suicide attempts and the sexual relations which she had with Godwin before marriage. Consequently, *Memoirs* was reviewed by far more periodicals than *Vindication* previously.[328]

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[324] Bergès, *The Routledge Guidebook to Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 5;

[325] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 211.

[326] R. M. Janes, "On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no. 2 (1978): 293-4.

[327] Wardle, *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 159; quoted in Barbara Taylor, Introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, xii.

[328] Janes, "On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," 297.

At the turn of the 20th century, there was an international shift in the interpretation of Wollstonecraft's legacy and she was deemed as "a secular voice of reason" and advocate of human rights. The major trend in the reception of Wollstonecraft during that period was captured by Czech translator Anna Holmová in the introduction to 1904's Prague publication of *Vindication*, which she translated as well. Holmová remarked that Wollstonecraft's call for a change and a renewal in *Vindication* "connects her with the striving and longing woman of today, who disagrees with the old ways and who demands freedom to try and to look for new ways."[329] Later, in 1929, Virginia Woolf celebrated Wollstonecraft in her *Second Common Reader*: "One form of immortality is hers undoubtedly: she is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living."[330] During the last quarter of 20th century, Wollstonecraft was, however, strongly disputed by the second wave western feminists as being too conservative and not going far enough in her advocation for education and emancipation. Moreover, the criticism was aimed at the lack of composition in her texts and the undisciplined writing style which caused her works to be dominated by emotions. According to professor of English Cora Kaplan, back then, Wollstonecraft was treated rather as "the wayward child of an over-exacting feminism rather than its revered and chosen ancestor." Nevertheless, today it is acknowledged that Wollstonecraft's arguments were far ahead of her time, and she is justly titled the foremother of modern feminism.[331]

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[329] Botting, *Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Women's Human Rights*, 224; Holmová, "Předmluva," xvi.

[330] Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader* [1932] (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003), 163. quoted in Eileen Hunt Botting, *Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Women's Human Rights* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 226.

[331] Cora Kaplan, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 246, 248.

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