Wollstonecraft's Thoughts on Slavery and Corruption

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Although Mary Wollstonecraft appears to have thought about slavery nearly as much as she thought about rights and duties, the body of scholarship on her idea of slavery is slight. Despite the recent proliferation of books and articles on her work, the only extended discussions of this subject are to be found in essays by D. L. Macdonald, who argues that Wollstonecraft anticipates Hegel's master-slave dialectic, and Moira Ferguson, who attaches a great deal of importance to the effects of Afro-Caribbean slavery on Wollstonecraft's thoughts about British women's "slavery."[1] I argue, contrary to Ferguson, that the Afro-Caribbean backdrop and the politics surrounding it, potent as they may be, are incidental to Wollstonecraft's idea of British women's condition. To focus one's attention on the situation in the Caribbean as the chief motivation for Wollstonecraft's idea of slavery is to risk missing what is most important and disturbing about Wollstonecraft's thoughts on the matter, which derive from the language of virtue and corruption that prevails in Protestant political discourse: throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a slave is an individual who is morally corrupt and who is complicit in his or her own ongoing corruption. Wollstonecraft sees moral corruption—"slavery"—at work everywhere she turns: among British women, men of wealth, soldiers, servants, and the inhabitants and rulers of empire. This corruption extends from the display of artificial manners to the promotion of a culture of luxury, which inevitably results in abuses of power.

To describe those slaves who lack rights as uprooted, tortured, incarcerated, disenfranchised, unpaid, or uneducated is to recognize the conditions they may suffer, but it is not to identify fully what the slave is. A slave is oppressed *and* unenlightened, lacking in reason and virtue.[2] By contrast, we must assume that one who is oppressed yet enlightened is necessarily in the process of casting off shackles and is not a slave but a revolutionary. That it may be difficult to locate enough revolutionaries in society to effect change is a problem of

The Eighteenth Century, vol. 45 no. 1 2004

which Wollstonecraft is well aware: "Educated in slavish dependence, and enervated by luxury and sloth, where shall we find men who will stand forth to assert the rights of man;—or claim the privilege of moral beings, who should have but one road to excellence?"[3] Because Wollstonecraft finds the condition of British women especially troubling, she first addresses the need for a national system of public coeducation that will lead women out of "slavery" and into freedom and a condition of virtue. But she writes about the greater part of society suffering enslavement as well:

> The civilization of the bulk of the people of Europe is very partial; nay, it may be made a question, whether they have acquired any virtues in exchange for innocence, equivalent to the misery produced by the vices that have been plastered over unsightly ignorance, and the freedom which has been bartered for splendid slavery. (*W* 13)

Wollstonecraft does see pockets of reason and virtue existing in ancient and modern history among a handful of enlightened Europeans, and, despite the pacifism she brings to her opposition to military imperialism, she celebrates individual military leaders, such as the Roman general Fabricius and the American general George Washington, who, she believes, led defensive battles against civil and political slavery.

Scholars have noted that Wollstonecraft's frequent descriptions of marital relations and women's condition in terms of a system of slavery reflect her broader interest in an idea of slavery that is both literal and figurative. In the *Rights of Woman* and in the earlier *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), D. L. Macdonald suggests, Wollstonecraft is preoccupied with the injustices of the Afro-Caribbean institution as well as the literally slavish aspects of British women's social, economic, and legal condition; in the *Rights of Woman*, Macdonald points out, women are also represented to be *metaphorical* slaves to pernicious social forces.[4] Wollstonecraft herself occasionally alerts us to her semantic intentions. On the one hand, she sees women as suffering virtual slavery: "When, therefore, I call women slaves, I mean in a political and civil sense" (*W* 167).[5] On the other hand, she acknowledges the use of figurative language: "I argue from analogy," she explains, while remarking that a regrettable condition of vanity ("fondness for dress"), caused by ignorance, among servants and plantation slaves is apparent among British women as well (*W* 187).

SLAVERY IN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Despite the moral outrage they elicit from reform-minded readers, neither the metaphors nor the realities of slavery in themselves explain why slavery is objectionable from a philosophical or political standpoint. Considering Wollstonecraft's place within the tradition of liberal thought, many modern read-

ers will recognize the glaring problem of slavery of any kind to be its violation of what she calls "inherent rights" (*W* 175) or "the natural rights of mankind" (*W* 5). Without "natural rights" women have no "voice" (*W* 5) and are merely "slaves." However, by linking "natural rights" to education and political representation, and slavery to their absence, Wollstonecraft conceives of natural rights in a particular sense. "Natural rights" are not something that we possess in the state of nature, which undergo some fundamental redistribution when we enter civil society or into a compact for government. Instead, "natural rights" appear to be indistinct from the civil, educational, and political "rights of man" and "rights of woman," which means that she obscures, or renounces, the distinction between the state of nature and that of society. "Natural" men and women are those in a condition of reason, not those of a distant past (*W* 9, 12). The point is important because it underscores the tie between Wollstonecraft's idea of freedom and an adamant progressivism she develops through her association with Joseph Priestley and with the rational Dissenting circle of Newington Green, which, when Wollstonecraft arrived in this London suburb in 1784, included Richard Price, a mentor whom she would eventually defend in print, and a widowed Hannah (Mrs. James) Burgh, whose husband's *Political Disquisitions* (1774) profoundly influenced the British radicals and American revolutionaries of his own generation and carried a strong influence on Wollstonecraft's generation as well.

In her progressive zeal, Wollstonecraft believes that men who idealize a distant "state of nature" or the "golden age," as well as any age of European monarchy or aristocracy, are indulging an unhealthy tendency toward nostalgia and are thus misguided in looking to the past for a solution to the corruptions of the present. Edmund Burke, from whom, Wollstonecraft claims in the *Rights of Men,* we learn "to reverence the rust of antiquity,"[6] is only her most obvious target. Indeed, the first of the two vindications formed an early rebuttal to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* which was conceived as an attack on Price's sermon to the Revolution Society, published as *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country.* But Wollstonecraft also challenges Rousseau, despite their common political ground and despite the fact that she had become an avid and enthusiastic reader of him during her time at Newington Green. She does so not only on the woman question, which is her most famous point of contention with the author of *Emile,* but also on what, in the Scandinavian letters, she terms Rousseau's "golden age of stupidity"[7] and that which she takes to be his nostalgic vision of the state of nature: "Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all *was* right originally: a crowd of authors that all *is* now right: and I, that all will *be* right . . . " (*W* 15). In briefly rehearsing the history of European government, Wollstonecraft is silent on "ancient rights" and the argument for a *return* from the state of corruption and bondage to an ancient constitution, an argument that figured prominently in much of eighteenth-century opposition political thought.[8] Instead, "the society is formed in the wisest manner, whose

constitution is founded on the nature of man" (*W* 12), or reason, and such a constitution has not existed previously in history. She makes this point clear in her sketch of the history of European government, a history whose characteristic instability has given rise to "aristocracy," "feudal tenure," and "monarchical and priestly power" (*W* 18), all of which she regards as desperate attempts at stability in a dark and tumultuous world of corruption and internecine warfare.

In her resistance to nostalgia and interest in individual rights for men and women of reason, Wollstonecraft does not reject as an antidote to corruption the idea of virtue, which is so often associated with an idea of *return*, rather than *progress*, and with the discourse of republicanism. Virginia Sapiro, in her book on Wollstonecraft's political theory, has suggested that Wollstonecraft's "works from the 1790s are at least as infused with the language of republicanism as of legal rights."[9] She notes that Wollstonecraft's disapproval of monarchy "combined what is now understood as a Lockean liberal argument with a republican critique reminiscent of some aspects of the Country ideology prominent earlier in the century" (Sapiro 82–3). G. J. Barker-Benfield has traced Wollstonecraft's thought through Burgh and back to the republican discourse of the seventeenth-century Commonwealthmen,[10] whose early eighteenth-century descendants, in their opposition politics (against credit, the standing army, placemen, and the Robinocracy), held certain goals in common with the independent country gentry, as J. G. A. Pocock has documented.[11] In fact, for all Wollstonecraft's progressivism, she finds the task of not looking backwards a difficult one, and she occasionally slips into such wistful republican expressions of nostalgia as "the days of true heroism are over, when a citizen fought for his country" and regrets the loss of classical agrarian-military virtue: "our British heroes are oftener sent from the gaming table than from the plow" (*W* 143). But for every retrospective glance, there is also a refusal to indulge the romance of the ancients, for she finds it difficult to separate the virtuous Roman republic from the corrupt Roman empire: "[Rousseau] forgets that, in conquering the world, the Romans never dreamed of establishing their own liberty on a firm basis, or of extending the reign of virtue" (*W* 15).

Isaac Kramnick's argument on the Anglo-American discourse of virtue and corruption in the second half of the eighteenth century may help us refine our assessment of Wollstonecraft's idea of slavery: this discourse follows a separate track, Kramnick argues, from that which derives from the Country opposition ideology that emerged against Court politics and the corruptions of Walpole. He departs from historians of the civic humanist school by arguing that "by the middle of the eighteenth century [a] Protestant, political discourse of corruption was just as apt to be part of opposition ideology as the republican, civic humanist vision of corruption."[12] This discourse "has powerful political resonance which renders it profoundly antagonistic to the discourse of civic humanism and much more compatible with the ideals of liberalism"

(Kramnick 59). What characterizes virtue in the Protestant vision, according to Kramnick, is middle-class industry, productivity, self-reliance, and self-interest, while corruption is identified closely with the idleness and extravagance of the upper classes. This emerging political discourse revises "[t]he language of corruption in the discourse of civic humanism [which] emphasizes the decline from a polity of leisured men moved by civic duty seeking the public good in public, political action" (Kramnick 59). Kramnick is continuing the sometimes heated debate that he, Pocock, and other scholars of Anglo-American political thought have been carrying on for years. At stake are fundamental questions surrounding the lineage of political thought in the eighteenth century and whether it is appropriate to talk about class identity or bourgeois ideology before the nineteenth century. For the purposes of the argument on thought and language in the *Rights of Woman,* we may note that, considering Wollstonecraft's lapses into the language of republicanism and agrarian-military virtue and her interest in civic duty, it is difficult to view the discourses of civic humanism and liberalism as profoundly antagonistic. The fact that she attacks the corruption of the standing army repeatedly is the best evidence of this, for opposition to the standing army is the most enduring feature of the argument for civic virtue.[13]

Still, when Wollstonecraft speaks of slavery, she usually means an idea of moral corruption that accords with the values of Protestant political discourse as described by Kramnick. She focuses frequently on individual failures of moral character, although she sees those failures as impeding the public good as well. When she attacks the standing army, she pays particular attention to such failures. Not only does she insist, in sweeping republican phrases, that "a standing army . . . is incompatible with freedom" (*W* 17), but she claims that soldiers are effeminate, idle, and vain: "the insignificant fluttering of soldiers may be termed active idleness" (*W* 17), and "officers are . . . particularly attentive to their persons, fond of dancing, crowded rooms, adventures, and ridicule" (*W* 24).[14]

She also places her hopes for a deliverance from slavery on what she calls the middle class of society, whom she deems less corrupted than persons of rank and more able than "women who [gain] a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never [had] any advantages of education" (*M* 62), as well as the oppressed "peasantry" and "mechanic[s]," or manual laborers (*M* 47). In the *Rights of Woman,* she claims that "I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to be in the most natural state" (*W* 9). In the *Rights of Men,* she avers that "It would be an arduous task to trace all the vice and misery that arise in society from the middle class of people apeing the manners of the great. All are aiming to procure respect on account of their property" (*M* 54). What she can possibly mean *politically* by "middle class" in the two vindications depends upon the nature of late eighteenth-century polity, which subject lies beyond the scope of this essay.[15] It is clear, however, that

she distinguishes the "middle class" in terms of morality, manners, and daily activities and that she believes that these attributes have political consequences.

For women, freedom from slavery means embracing middle-class values and aspirations and holding in high regard "plans of usefulness" (*W* 123, 143). It is true, as Barker-Benfield points out (109–10), that Wollstonecraft appears to praise a republican ideal of motherhood, which might seem to contradict the idea of middle-class self-interest. Wollstonecraft is disturbed by the idea that too many women, so that they may enjoy a life of corrupt leisure, farm out their children to the wet nurse or, far worse, commit unspeakable crimes such as abortion, infanticide, or abandonment:

> Women becoming, consequently, weaker, in mind and body, than they ought to be, were one of the grand ends of their being taken into the account, that of bearing and nursing children, have not sufficient strength to discharge the first duty of a mother; and sacrificing to lasciviousness the parental affection, that ennobles instinct, either destroy the embryo in the womb, or cast it off when born. (*W* 139)

Scholars have argued that the emphasis on motherhood serves both the national and imperial projects at a pre-Malthusian time when population decline was feared, and when more British subjects were needed to staff the empire.[16] But Wollstonecraft can hardly be regarded as an unwitting republican proponent of British national baby-boom propaganda. To the contrary, she regards breastfeeding as a commendable form of birth control, the idea being that lactation inhibits conception: " . . . nature has so wisely ordered things, that did women suckle their children, they would preserve their own health, and there would be such an interval between the birth of each child, that we should seldom see a houseful of babes" (*W* 190–1). Wollstonecraft also extols professional aspirations for women that complicate the prevailing discourse of republican motherhood, and she believes that wives and mothers should remain independent of their husbands. Her exemplary husband and wife are "equally necessary and independent of each other, because each fulfilled the respective duties of their station" (*W* 143). Should women choose to enter public life, they might "study politics, and settle their benevolence on the broadest basis" (*W* 148). Women who currently "waste life away the prey of discontent . . . might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop" (*W* 149).

CARIBBEAN SLAVERY

If Wollstonecraft employs the term "slavery" primarily as a means of expressing a Protestant idea of corruption, she does not ignore the contemporary political debates over the situation in the Caribbean or, I would add, the effects

of imperialism generally. Ferguson contends that, between the 1790 publication of the *Rights of Men* and the 1792 publication of the *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft shifts dramatically from a primary focus on natural rights to one on slavery,[17] although it should be noted that most of the few direct references to Caribbean slavery appear in the *Rights of Men*. Wollstonecraft's numerous references to slavery in the *Rights of Woman*, Ferguson suggests, particularly reflect her growing interest in identifying European women's subjugation in terms of the debate over colonial slavery, even though, Ferguson notes, many of the references to slavery in this text evoke earlier women writers' complaints against women's social, legal, and economic powerlessness. To be sure, Wollstonecraft's idea of slavery—particularly the "slavery" of women—gains a sense of urgency from the Afro-Caribbean situation, to which she directly refers in the *Rights of Woman* more than once. For example, one passionate statement likens women's "blind propriety," by which she means "false refinements" (*W* 21), to inhuman labors and punishment meted out on the plantation:

> Why subject [woman] to propriety—blind propriety, if she be capable of acting from a nobler spring, if she be an heir of immortality? Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man? Is not this indirectly to deny woman reason? (*W* 144–5; quoted in Ferguson, "Wollstonecraft," 93)

The message is that blind propriety, like sugar produced by Caribbean slaves, is a luxury whose cost is far too dear.

Wollstonecraft's understanding of slavery undoubtedly reflects her sense of the instability of the Caribbean system as well. In order to explain why women, deprived of liberty and reason, misbehave whenever possible, Wollstonecraft contends that

> Slaves and mobs have always indulged themselves in the same excesses, when once they broke loose from authority.—The bent bow recoils with violence, when the hand is suddenly relaxed that forcibly held it; and sensibility, the play-thing of outward circumstances, must be subjected to authority, or moderated by reason. (*W* 83)

She may be thinking of "slaves" in a generic or classical sense, but the fear of Caribbean slave revolt was widespread among even those late eighteenth-century Europeans who not only criticized the institution of slavery, but questioned the legitimacy of its very existence.[18]

Rajani Sudan cautions that "even if she [Wollstonecraft] compares the plight of women as chattel to the plight of black slaves, these comparisons rep-

resent different forms of commodification: in the case of women, their cultural difference from black slaves is marked by the very fact of the analogy" (77). Wollstonecraft herself was alert to the difference in circumstances, at least to the extent that she sees conflict between Caribbean slaves and the planters' wives who presumably hold no civil or political rights either, but who are infamous for their cruelty. She writes, "Where is the dignity, the infallibility of sensibility, in the fair ladies, whom, if the voice of rumour is to be credited, the captive negroes curse in all the agony of bodily pain, for the unheard of tortures they invent?" (*M* 79). Wollstonecraft's indignant question suggests the righteousness that European abolitionists adopted toward European planters and Creoles[19]—an attitude that derives from social and political principles about cruelty in slavery but also from an antipathy toward the vulgarity of colonial wealth. Her point also forms part of a broad indictment of the hypocritical postures adopted by callous upper-class women as a whole; elsewhere she lambastes the European woman of fortune who affectedly cries for suffering animals, and "takes her dogs to bed, and nurses them with a parade of sensibility" yet abuses her coachman (*W* 172).

Wollstonecraft comments on both actual Caribbean slavery and slavery as a metaphor for the situation of citizens in France in her response in the *Rights of Men* to Burke[20]:

> You mourn for the empty pageant of a name [the French monarchy], when slavery flaps her wing, and the sick heart retires to die in lonely wilds, far from the abodes of men. . . . the lash resounds on the slave's naked sides; and the sick wretch, who can no longer earn the sour bread of unremitting labour, steals to a ditch to bid the world a long good night. . . . (*M* 95–6)

Wollstonecraft believes that the Burke of 1790 can never fully defend any noble principle. The problem, as she sees it, is that Burke holds an undue reverence for rank, property, and law, even when they are unjust. "You find it very difficult," she shrewdly observes, "to separate policy from justice" (*M* 86). (Although Burke opposed Caribbean slavery in principle, his practical suggestions for reform, contained in the "Sketch of a Negro Code" [1780; pub. 1792] hold no direct criticism of planters' or overseers' conduct.) Wollstonecraft indirectly implicates Burke in a recent episode in Parliament during which "interested politicians" argued that "an abolition of the infernal slave trade would not only be unsound policy, but a flagrant infringement of the laws . . . that induced the planters to purchase their estates" (*M* 86). She is nonplussed: "is it not consonant with justice, with the common principles of humanity, not to mention Christianity, to abolish this abominable mischief?" (*M* 86).

ORIENTALISM AND THE CORRUPTIONS OF EMPIRE

Despite the urgency of her abolitionist sentiments, the allusion in the *Rights of Woman* to suffering on the Caribbean plantation is only one among a series of references to several sites of imperial irresponsibility that exemplify Wollstonecraft's view of slavery as moral and political corruption. Other sites of corruption include the Turkish seraglio, China, ancient Sybaris, *ancien régime* France, the South Sea Islands, Circassia, Portugal, Italy, biblical Egypt, and Russia. In fact, several scholars have remarked in passing that Wollstonecraft's evaluation of patriarchal attitudes and institutions in the *Rights of Woman* draws upon early British Orientalist discourse.[21] To censure a society that encourages the physical, intellectual, and moral degradation of its women, Wollstonecraft repeatedly inveighs against the British preference for badly educated, superficial women—those who comply with society's expectation of "false refinement"—through references to exotic Eastern practices that Wollstonecraft identifies as a form of slavery.

These references are designed to elicit fear or outrage among readers that British women might somehow degenerate, or worse yet, may have already degenerated so far as to be indistinguishable from their Eastern counterparts. She often alludes to a vaguely Eastern notion of "slavery," as when she laments that a woman is to be "made a coquetish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire" (*W* 25). At times she is more concrete: "Surely," she remonstrates, "these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio!" (*W* 10). "[I]n the true style of Mahometanism," she roundly declares, British women "are treated as a kind of subordinate beings [*sic*], and not as a part of the human species, when improveable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation . . . " (*W* 8). "[W]hen he"—she reports of Milton in *Paradise Lost*—"tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls . . . " (*W* 19). Such Western beliefs about the status of women in Islam—that women languish in seraglios, are on a par with animals, and are thought not to have souls—had already become commonplace a century earlier when Mary Astell, like Wollstonecraft, employed them to evoke in readers a sense that to deny women education is to hamper their reason, while to deny women reason makes them incapable of appreciating their duties.

The images of Eastern women's "slavery" in the *Rights of Woman* appear to allude primarily to the harems of the Ottoman Empire, yet Wollstonecraft looks toward other imperial sites as well. For example: "To preserve personal beauty, woman's glory! the limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bands . . . " (*W* 41). The ostensibly sadomasochistic cultural fetish of foot-binding had, in fact, long been remarked by European observers with horror, fascination, or detached ethnographic curiosity. John Locke's *Some*

Thoughts Concerning Education (1693), an enlightened tract that Wollstonecraft cites approvingly in the *Rights of Woman* (*W* 155), demonstrates through a dispassionate comparison to foot-binding how important it is that children's clothing offer freedom of movement:

> I have seen so many Instances of Children receiving great harm from *straitlacing* . . . Narrow Breasts, short and stinking Breath, ill Lungs, and Crookedness, are the Natural and almost constant Effects of *hard Bodice*, and *Cloths that pinch*. . . . 'Tis generally known, that the women of *China* (imagining I know not what kind of Beauty in it) by bracing and binding them hard from their Infancy, have very little Feet. I saw lately a pair of *China* Shooes [*sic*], which I was told were for a grown Woman; they were so exceedingly disproportioned to the Feet of one of the same Age amongst us, that they would scarce have been big enough for one of our little Girls.[22]

Like the Ottoman references, the image of Chinese foot-binding had become conventional in England. Here, the idea is that a child's tight clothing, like Chinese foot-binding, stunts normal growth: "'tis observed," continues Locke, "that [Chinese] women are also very little, and short-lived . . . " (91).

The Orientalist bias in Wollstonecraft and among other late eighteenth-century feminist polemical writers has been identified by Donna Landry as a "projection of a hostile yet exotic culture of Eastern alterity . . . " (267). The Orientalist polemic, Landry argues, allows the writer to "consolidate her audience's sense of cultural identity. To be British is to be enlightened and free" (268). Joyce Zonana, in tracing antecedents to the Orientalism of *Jane Eyre*, considers that Wollstonecraft's feminism "ultimately reduces itself to what would have been in her time a relatively noncontroversial plea: that the West rid itself of its oriental ways, becoming as a consequence more Western—that is, more rational, enlightened, reasonable" (602). "[F]eminist orientalism," Zonana argues, "is a rhetorical strategy (and a form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands. . . . [T]he Western feminist's desire to change the status quo can be represented not as a radical attempt to restructure the West but as a conservative effort to make the West more like itself" (594). In the case of Wollstonecraft, this observation is correct to the extent that the improvement of rights that come with reason and the rooting out of corruption make the West more like itself. Wollstonecraft hopes that her audience will see her demands as unthreatening, as Zonana suggests, but her vision, she claims, is adamantly progressive rather than restorative or conservative.

Wollstonecraft's image of the indolence and sexual fetishism associated with the "slavery" of the East is clearly not identical to that of the African slave working endlessly under the hot Caribbean sun. However, her belief that British women's rights are violated through a sexualized, luxurious form of

slavery may be reinforced by the fact that the culture of abolitionist propaganda that surrounded her also capitalized upon the sexuality of suffering slave women, especially light-skinned ones. Wollstonecraft may not have been conscious enough of this fact to have criticized abolitionists for capitalizing upon the erotics of suffering, but the atmosphere of sexually enslaved women must have seemed pervasive. For instance, William Blake's famous abolitionist engraving of a naked mixed-race slave woman tied to a tree to be whipped is intended to evoke tears of sentiment, yet it also carries an erotic charge: the woman's genitals are modestly—and enticingly—left unrevealed by a white tattered cloth.[23] As Joseph Roach describes the climate surrounding the eroticized slave auction in nineteenth-century New Orleans, "[a]bolitionist tracts appropriated such spectacles to heighten the pathos of the flesh market, while not coincidentally trading on its erotic titillation."[24]

In fact, before she wrote the *Rights of Woman* in a burst of activity during the last six weeks of 1791, Wollstonecraft would likely have seen the watercolors by John Gabriel Stedman that provided the model for Blake's abolitionist engravings included in Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), the manuscript of which had been delivered to the publisher Joseph Johnson in February 1791.[25] In January 1792, the *Rights of Woman* was published by Johnson, who was one of her mentors and to whose *Analytical Review* she contributed many articles, including, in May 1789, a review of Olaudah Equiano's autobiographical account of his slavery and travels. (She praises the harrowing account of slavery, but criticizes the description of post-emancipation life.[26]) Although the earliest of the Stedman engravings executed by Blake are dated December 1792, Stedman's numerous watercolors of slave life and the early engravings by other artists that Johnson commissioned for the volume may have been shown in 1791 around the radical intellectuals' salon at Johnson's home above his London bookshop in St. Paul's Churchyard. Both Stedman and Wollstonecraft frequented Johnson's circle at this time. Blake also illustrated and engraved the plates for Wollstonecraft's 1791 *Original Stories from Real Life*. The point at hand in tracing this possible influence in Johnson's circle, and the erotic undercurrent of an antislavery discourse that is otherwise sentimental, is to indicate that different sites of imperial slavery are perceived by contemporary observers in England as having cultural affinities that make corruption seem all the more pervasive.

LUXURY, DESPOTISM, AND THE SLAVE'S COMPLICITY

Apart from the peculiar eros of suffering that appears in both imperial contexts, the metaphors of Eastern and Afro-Caribbean slavery share a common feature, luxury, the practices of which are explicitly sexual or work through erotic displacement. The seraglio and foot-binding are themselves luxury practices, available only to men of wealth, while plantation slavery produces

luxury food, the "sugar produced by vital blood." Luxury signifies a whole range of vices for Wollstonecraft, as it does for most eighteenth-century moral philosophers—gluttony, indolence, vanity, and a general condition of decadence at odds with Protestant notions of virtue.[27] "Luxury," she announces emphatically, "has introduced a refinement in eating, that destroys the constitution; and, a degree of gluttony which is . . . beastly" (*W* 137). That she is thinking of sugar, in particular, in 1792, the year in which she published the *Rights of Woman*, is fitting, for this year marked the culmination of the first national campaign against the consumption of West Indian sugar. Elsewhere, she considers other luxury products as well. Wollstonecraft's review of Equiano's narrative, for example, offers from Equiano's more than five hundred pages of prose a short sample that culminates by remarking the similarity between Afro-Caribbean and Ottoman tobacco pipes, which suggests that her attention was drawn to this cultural comparison of luxury practices.

Paramount among the dangers of luxury is not the sheer gluttony of it, nor even—as Wollstonecraft argues throughout the *Rights of Woman*—that it breeds effeminacy in the individual, a disposition for women and men alike to avoid at all costs.[28] Rather, the great danger is that luxury creates a disposition toward tyranny or despotism—a familiar argument in eighteenth-century political thought—and that despotism, in turn, generates luxury:

> despots are compelled, to make covert corruption hold fast the power which was formerly snatched by open force. And this baneful lurking gangrene is most quickly spread by luxury and superstition, the sure dregs of ambition. The indolent puppet of a court first becomes a luxurious monster, or fastidious sensualist, and then makes the contagion which his unnatural state spread, the instrument of tyranny. (*W* 18)

Another passage puts it more succinctly: "the sensualist, indeed, has been the most dangerous of tyrants . . . " (*W* 24). The disposition toward luxury is treacherous because it represents the domestic, political, and imperial consequences of an individual's moral and physical corruption. Of primary concern is that nations have become collectively corrupted through the interplay of luxury and despotism and are therefore vulnerable to effeminacy (the antithesis of virtue in the Latinate sense), conquest, and enslavement. A similar argument may be found in Burgh's chapter in the *Political Disquisitions* on the perils of luxury, which he believes enervates formerly strong peoples: "there are other effects naturally to be expected from the prevalence of luxury in a country . . . of its tendency to break the martial spirit of a people."[29] He asks us to consider, for example, that "the great, but effeminate empire of *China*" was, despite its millions of inhabitants, conquered by the "warlike *Tartars*" (vol. 3: 67–8). The eighteenth century's haunting classical model of a manly people falling into effeminacy and slavery was Rome, although the problem of

Athens, where culture appeared to be wedded to effeminacy and decadence, also gave pause to writers of the period. That Wollstonecraft links luxury and superstition indicates that she has in mind the model of degeneration provided by the declining Ottoman Empire and its European equivalent, *ancien régime* France, whose demise Burke so bombastically (her opinion) laments. British Protestants understood the luxury and despotism of both the Ottoman and French empires to be inseparable from the benightedness and corruption that accompany Islam and Catholicism.[30]

Because the contagion of luxury predisposes corrupt individuals to infect the body politic, it is no surprise that the consequences of a woman's reveling in physical weakness are not only social but political. Wollstonecraft is led back to the model of the Oriental despot and to the ominous strength of his high-ranking officer, the "bashaw," who is, like the British woman, a despotic slave—that oxymoronic being to whom Wollstonecraft returns repeatedly.[31] She writes, "Women, deluded by these sentiments, sometimes boast of their weakness, cunningly obtaining power by playing on the *weakness* of men; and they may well glory in their illicit sway, for, like Turkish bashaws, they have more real power than their masters . . . " (*W* 40, italics in original). Wollstonecraft's habitual references to the luxury and despotism of the arbitrary ruler underscore her dismay that social and political power are never initially granted through compact by those governed, but are "snatched by open force" (*W* 18) and surreptitiously maintained. The effect of this alternately heavy-handed and underhanded operation of power is the creation of the class of despotic slaves who craftily usurp power.

It is troubling enough that those who are already in power have gained power deviously and maintain it through corrupt means. But the most pernicious effect of luxury is not, finally, that gluttony and sloth perpetuate already well-established tyrannical habits among men of rank, although she sees that as a fundamental problem, too. Rather, the tyrannical men who consume the products of luxury create the conditions for women to turn tyrannical and decadent as well. Wollstonecraft employs this volatile sense of despotic "slavery"—which Macdonald sees as anticipating Hegel's master-slave dialectic[32]—so frequently throughout the argument on politics and women that it begins to function as an abbreviated system of reference, which works to heighten the reader's sense of moral indignation and political fear. It makes sense that Wollstonecraft repeatedly turns to Eastern imagery in so doing, for Orientalist discourse typically destabilizes the boundary between despot and slave and results in moral and political confusion.

At the center of Wollstonecraft's argument on women and society is the notion that the despotic slave participates in his or her own enslavement. The issue troubles Wollstonecraft profoundly and, in fact, appears to precipitate Wollstonecraft's chief philosophical crisis in the *Rights of Woman*. Complicity is at the center of her sustained attack on luxury and despotism, and it unique-

ly shapes her understanding of the importance of women's rights. The idea that "freedom . . . has been bartered for splendid slavery" throughout Europe offers an instance of this complicity, although the passive construction here helps to divert agency from the slave. Wollstonecraft's response is not primarily to blame the victim for becoming enslaved, for it is clear that she believes that those who, in their native innocence, allow themselves to be enslaved have not yet reached a state of enlightened reason and are, therefore, incapable of making an informed choice. Even in a passage that assigns agency to women who "have, to maintain their power, resigned the natural rights, which the exercise of reason might have procured them" (*W* 55), Wollstonecraft sees not only a failure of character but a failure of reason. The outcome is the same whether women are bereft of reason entirely, or whether they possess reason in a dormant, ineffectual, uneducated state.

Only those who have the freedom of choice have the proper environment for reason to prosper. The point is central to the Dissenting tradition of Enlightenment thought in which Wollstonecraft is steeped, although one of those seventeenth-century Commonwealthmen with whom she debates in the *Rights of Woman*, Milton, following Aristotle, assumes reason to be a prelapsarian condition: "when God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing."[33] And despite her efforts to distance herself from Rousseau, Wollstonecraft's point about the slave's complicity is anticipated and made much more firmly in *On the Social Contract* in the attack on Grotius' legitimation of slavery: "To say that a man gives himself gratuitously is to say something absurd and inconceivable. Such an act is illegitimate and null, if only for the fact that he who commits it does not have his wits about him."[34]

A SUPERIOR CAST OF TALENT

Wollstonecraft's outlook is progressive in the sense that it depends upon an idea that those who become enslaved in a dark and distant past are not at fault, because the conditions of enlightenment do not yet exist. Now that we are in an age of Enlightenment—which Wollstonecraft, like the Kant of 1784,[35] sees as a process rather than as an accomplished fact—the conditions are ripe for rights and virtue. Men and women born into the darkness of slavery and corruption can be emancipated through the exercise of reason. Such is the perfectibility of mankind affirmed by the rational Dissenters. However, Wollstonecraft feels that those in a benighted condition cannot be expected to help themselves without guidance. Reason will not magically blossom after a sudden release from corruption and enslavement. To make the point, Wollstonecraft again turns to the metaphor of Oriental confinement: "This brood of folly shews how mistaken they are who, if they allow women to leave their harams, do not cultivate their understandings, in order to plant virtues in their

hearts" (*W* 173). She regards the alleged vanity of Caribbean slaves, which may be lessened through the interposition of reason, in much the same way that she views that of corrupt European women, except that she resorts to noble savage discourse:

> A strong inclination for external ornaments ever appears in barbarous states. . . . So far is this first inclination carried, that even the hellish yoke of slavery cannot stifle the savage desire of admiration which the black heroes inherit from both their parents, for all the hardly earned savings of a slave are commonly expended in a little tawdry finery. (*W* 186–7)[36]

Several passages later she continues:

> An immoderate fondness for dress, for pleasure, and for sway, are the passions of savages; the passions that occupy those uncivilized beings who have not yet extended the dominion of the mind, or even learned to think with the energy necessary to concatenate that abstract train of thought which produces principles. (*W* 187)

We hear Wollstonecraft voicing similar condescension over the necessity of cultivation in the notes she left for the planned second volume of the *Rights of Woman;* only here she specifies who will be in charge: "It should be one of the employments of women of fortune, to visit hospitals, and superintend the conduct of inferiors."[37] The attitude cannot be called *noblesse oblige,* because she would only allow that reason, rather than rank, should dictate who helps whom.

Why Wollstonecraft discovers pockets of reason existing among, and being disseminated by, certain British intellectuals, rather than among English laborers or Africans in part results from the conviction that only certain Protestant ideals—thrift, temperance, industry—seem reasonable to her and that these ideals exist chiefly among a few educated Europeans. She does not mean that virtue and freedom are only possible among what she calls the middle classes, however, even though she repeatedly divides society into an intellectual elite and those "intended for domestic employments."[38] In the *Rights of Woman,* she praises "the good sense which I have met with, among the poor women who have had few advantages of education" (*W* 76). Wollstonecraft believes the poor to be too oppressed and too ill-educated to speak on their own behalf. Having rejected property as a qualification for occupying a superior station in society, Wollstonecraft invests hope in an idea of "talent": "One class presses on another; for all are aiming to procure respect on account of their property: and property, once gained, will procure the respect due only to talents and virtue" (*W* 140). Turning specifically to the case of women, she allows that although "women in the common walks of life" rightly have

duties to marriage and motherhood, "I cannot help lamenting that women of a superior cast have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence" (*W* 146–7). The belief in an elite class of mannered, polite, and sensible people is what motivates her to take issue with Rousseau's ostensible rejection of culture in favor of the dubious virtues of "the brutal Spartans. . . . Disgusted with artificial manners and virtues, [Rousseau] . . . threw away the wheat with the chaff" (*W* 15). Wollstonecraft distinguishes between genuine and artificial manners, sees that talent may be fostered through an advanced education in the liberal arts (*W* 168), and regards the gift of manners, culture, and reason as the qualifying traits of social superiority. In so doing, she anticipates what would soon come to pass in the age of Victoria, when being cultured begins to replace being propertied as the essential point of social distinction. (In her Enlightenment optimism, she does not, like some of her contemporaries, worry about the cycle of social doom exemplified by Athens, in which virtue leads to the arts and sciences, which leads to luxury, which leads to corruption.)

It is worth mentioning that Wollstonecraft follows this train of thought despite the fact that the idea that men and women of "talent" or "of a superior cast" would emerge in society as a kind of natural aristocracy is one that post-revolutionary American intellectuals, whom Wollstonecraft would have remembered with admiration, had already grown to mistrust.[39] The Americans, however, were planning for the future government of the republic, based on a recognition of an imperfect post-revolutionary present state of society. Wollstonecraft concerns herself with politics, but her vision of a cultural elite is more directly related to managing education, morality, and manners. Presumably, the revolution in education led by people of talent will effect the universal enlightenment Price expects in the sermon Wollstonecraft vindicated:

> Why are the nations of the world so patient under despotism? . . . Is it not because they are kept in darkness, and want knowledge? Enlighten them and you will elevate them. Shew them they are *men*, and they will act like *men*. . . . Ignorance is the parent of bigotry, intolerance, persecution and slavery.[40]

THE CORRUPTIONS OF EDUCATION AND PROPERTY

In Wollstonecraft's opinion, revolutionary France provides the model of enlightened policy that will lead the world from despotism and slavery to the freedom that comes with reason, rights, and compact. However, the French National Assembly's *Declaration of the Rights of Men and of Citizens* (1789) carries a "flaw" of omission, which is its failure to issue a positive statement of the rights of woman (*W* 5), despite its universalistic language. Wollstonecraft was not the only feminist who saw a problem here and wrote about it. During the

Constitution debates of 1791 the French novelist and playwright Olympe de Gouges issued a *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen*. The Marquis de Condorcet had issued his radically feminist proposition for women's enfranchisement a year earlier. This flaw of omission allowed the French diplomat and educational reformer Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord to argue for separate and unequal education for men and women under the new regime. The good news is that women should be educated; the bad news is the inferiority of that education. It is in response to this unfortunate "principle" in the otherwise visionary *Report on Public Education* (September 1791) that Wollstonecraft undertakes the *Rights of Woman*, which she dedicates to Talleyrand.

In the dedicatory epistle, she cautions Talleyrand to beware the shortsightedness of gender inequality, lest the new constitution ratify "tyranny": women "may be convenient slaves, but slavery will have its constant effect, degrading the master and the abject dependent" (*W* 5). The argument gains its rhetorical power through the allusion to Oriental degradation and confinement: "Do you not act a similar part, when you *force* all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark?" (*W* 5, italics in original). Her solution is a program of national public education for both sexes, which she presents in chapter 12, and women's political and legal rights, which she had planned to take up more fully in the subsequent volume that was never written (*W* 145). Wollstonecraft does, however, chronicle the harrowing realities of British women's civil and political "slavery" in her unfinished work of fiction, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria*.

In describing the present system of improper education and parenting, Wollstonecraft alludes to Oriental confinement and corruption, and she deplores the abiding hazards of luxury, despotism, and slavery. Children should be dutiful to parents only when parents govern with reason, because—here she employs the verb that she elsewhere applies to Chinese footbinding—"A slavish bondage to parents cramps every faculty of the mind" (*W* 155). Thoughtless obedience leads children, like women, to become both slaves and despots, although, as Wollstonecraft carefully qualifies the point, "I do not . . . dream of insinuating that either boys or girls are always slaves, I only insist that when they are obliged to submit to authority blindly, their faculties are weakened, and their tempers rendered imperious or abject" (*W* 155). Moreover, children educated exclusively at home with tutors and not sent to school, "acquire too high an opinion of their own importance, from being allowed to tyrannize over servants" (*W* 158). And yet, boarding schools are equally sinister and lead to all those corrupt practices associated with the East.

Wollstonecraft maintains that elite boarding schools breed in both boys and girls despotism, luxury, effeminacy, indolence, and superstition. She sees girls suffering the effects of an appalling Western system of seclusion: "With what disgust have I heard sensible women, for girls are more restrained and cowed than boys, speak of the wearisome confinement, which they endured at

school" (*W* 164). Boys do not fare much better: "what boy ever recollected with pleasure the years he spent in close confinement, at an academy near London?" (*W* 159). Confinement breeds still more corruptions:

> I still, however, think schools, as they are now regulated, the hot-beds of vice and folly, and the knowledge of human nature, supposed to be attained there, merely cunning selfishness. At school boys become gluttons and slovens, and, instead of cultivating domestic affections, very early rush into the libertinism which destroys the constitution before it is formed. . . . (*W* 158)

"At boarding-schools of every description," she emphasizes, "the relaxation of the junior boys is mischief" (*W* 159). Schools "should be national establishments, for whilst schoolmasters are dependent on the caprice of parents, little exertion can be expected from them, more than is necessary to please ignorant people" (*W* 162). Teachers are a kind of slave, yet they are also tyrants, for Wollstonecraft beholds tyranny in every slave: "There is not, perhaps, in the kingdom, a more dogmatical, or luxurious set of men, than the pedantic tyrants who reside in colleges and preside at public schools" (*W* 161). The luxuriousness, indolence, and decadence of boarding schools is exacerbated, Wollstonecraft makes clear, by the corruptions of single-sex education.[41] Her response to Talleyrand's separate and unequal proposal is a plan for co-education: "Were boys and girls permitted to pursue the same studies together, those graceful decencies might early be inculcated which produce modesty without those sexual distinctions that taint the mind" (*W* 165). She recognizes that the bankrupt values of male chivalry and female daintiness fostered in single-sex education conspire against a free and virtuous society.

Wollstonecraft's educational advice draws upon the same set of discourses that link the opulence and confinement of Oriental palaces and grounds. Her tyrannical schoolmaster, for example, extends the unnatural confinement of children to the grounds surrounding the school by dictating where children may venture when they are out of doors:

> I went to visit a little boy at a school where young children were prepared for a larger one. . . . whilst I walked down a broad gravel walk, I could not help observing that the grass grew very luxuriantly on each side of me. I . . . found that the poor boys were not allowed to stir off the walk. . . . The tyrant of this domain used to sit by a window that overlooked the prison yard, and one nook turning from it, where the unfortunate babes could sport freely, he enclosed, and planted it with potatoes. (*W* 164n)

Wollstonecraft condemns the lack of physical exercise, but the idea of grass growing "very luxuriantly" and the "enclosed" yard calls forth another aspect of the Orientalist critique, which is the idea that Eastern despots cultivate opu-

lent, wasteful, and inaccessible pleasure grounds purely to indulge themselves. In the eighteenth century, the reformers' critique of pleasure grounds is closely related to the critique of estate enclosure, and the idea that stealing the commons from the goose creates a desperately poor underclass whose straits are all the more dire thanks to harsh Black Laws and other measures designed to protect property, as Wollstonecraft herself observes in the *Rights of Men* (*M* 42, 47). Given her comment about planting potatoes, it seems unlikely that Wollstonecraft would be much swayed by the argument that enclosure is beneficial because it leads to the agricultural innovations of men like Lord Townshend and Jethro Tull. It is this attitude that separates her from the Country aesthetics of someone like Alexander Pope, who, in the *Epistle to Burlington*, criticizes luxury but has no complaint against the great estates of great men, so long as they are tasteful and pragmatic. But when Pope was writing in the early part of the century, enclosure was not yet the overwhelming social and economic problem that it would become by the time that Oliver Goldsmith condemned it in *The Deserted Village* (1770).

For Wollstonecraft, planting potatoes in the "enclosed" school yard is a good rule misapplied. The planting displaces those who should occupy the land—in this case, the school children. In the *Rights of Men* she wonders, "Why cannot large estates be divided into small farms? these dwellings would indeed grace our land" (*M* 94). As a rule, Oriental-style luxurious enclosure is bad, and planting is good, but not when it only benefits men of wealth. Enclosure for planting by the tenant or yeoman farmer would be welcome: "Why are huge forests still allowed to stretch out with idle pomp and all the indolence of Eastern grandeur? Why does the brown waste meet the traveller's view, when men want work? But commons cannot be enclosed without *acts of parliament* to increase the property of the rich!" (*M* 94, italics in original). In short, "the ground would not lie fallow" in England were it not for the "[l]uxury and effeminacy" of the nobility (*M* 55). She complains likewise of the "awful contrast" between the "stately palace" and "pestiferous hovel" of effeminate Portugal, "a despotic country" (*M* 93–4), and she likens her enemy Burke's imagination to a "Chinese erection"—by which she means a rich man's Oriental-style pagoda—that has no place in the rustic simplicity of the English countryside (*M* 37).

Wollstonecraft believes that building garish *chateaux* and forbidding walls is linked to British commercial and imperial expansion and that expansion corrupts the nation. It makes sense, then, that Wollstonecraft not only despises the excesses of persons of rank and title ("what but habitual idleness can hereditary wealth and titles produce?" [*W* 140–1][42]) but those of the *nabob* class as well. The anti-imperial outlook is similar to that of Price, who argues that the only good war is a defensive war (Price 29) and that to love one's country does *not* mean "a desire of conquest, and a thirst for grandeur and glory, by extending territory, and enslaving surrounding countries . . . " (Price 5). In her

pacifist critique of the corruptions of colonization and empire, Wollstonecraft may appear, at first glance, to temper her argument for women's "imitation of manly virtues" (*W* 8) and to retreat from a progressive feminism:

> But fair and softly, gentle reader, male or female, do not alarm thyself, for though I have compared the character of a modern soldier with that of a civilized woman, I am not going to advise them to turn their distaff into a musket, though I sincerely wish to see the bayonet converted into a pruning-hook. (*W* 146)

Claudia Johnson has argued that this passage serves as a lukewarm "disclaimer of subversive intent" (40) and that it points to the way Wollstonecraft demilitarizes Commonwealth ideology (25). Yet it also points to Wollstonecraft's progressivist view on war and her discrimination between corrupt internecine and imperial wars and virtuous wars of national defense. The "pruning-hook" line originates in Isaiah (2:4), but it reappears in Priestley's utopian political writings,[43] as well as in Price's sermon, where it marks the culmination of his distinction between virtuous wars that lead toward global peace and progress (such as the American and French Revolutions) and corrupt wars for imperial expansion:

> the time is, I hope, coming, when a conviction will prevail, of the folly as well as the iniquity of wars; and when the nations of the earth, happy under just governments, and no longer in danger from the passions of Kings, will find out better ways of settling their disputes; and beat (as Isaiah prophecies) *their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.* (Price 29–30, italics in original)

THE AGRARIAN-ARCADIAN VISION

The virtuous middle ground between tutoring the young master or mistress at home and boarding school is the old country day school (*W* 159), which Wollstonecraft remembers as having fostered reason and the simple virtues of wholesome exercise and family harmony. Such a school and its arcadian surroundings instill in young minds a sense of civic virtue: "I appeal to many superiour men, who were educated in this manner, whether the recollection of some shady lane where they conned their lesson . . . has not endeared their country to them?" (*W* 159). This recollection is part of an agrarian-arcadian vision that Wollstonecraft sets forth as the remedy to the corruptions and slavery of British society.

The vision is agrarian in the sense that Wollstonecraft imagines putting one's hand to the plow as the mark of citizenship ("the parent who really puts his own hand to the plow, will always, in some degree, be disappointed, till

education becomes a grand national concern" [*W* 157]), and on this point she is entirely in line with the agrarian virtue of the civic humanist model described by Pocock. It is arcadian, if one may distinguish that vision from agrarianism, in the sense that she anticipates the Romantic generation's domestic idealization of the English countryside and its rustic inhabitants:

> [A]fter having been fatigued with the sight of insipid grandeur and the slavish ceremonies that with cumberous pomp supplied the place of domestic affections, I have turned to some other scene to relieve my eye by resting it on the refreshing green every where scattered by nature. I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and discharging the duties of her station with, perhaps, merely a servant maid to take off her hands the servile part of the household business. I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who returning weary home in the evening found smiling babes and a clean hearth. (*W* 142)

The vision—an interesting one for a progressive Londoner—recalls the deliberate provincialism of Goldsmith's lost Auburn in *The Deserted Village*. Like Goldsmith in 1770, Wollstonecraft mistrusts cosmopolitanism and colonialism, although she lumps all economic ills that produce social malaise under the heading of "hereditary property." That the virtuous farmer, who can be neither aristocracy nor gentry, lives somewhere in England does occur to her, although she is skeptical about how easily one may be found. In Wollstonecraft's view, such a man's virtue consists in his capacity for taking up arms, which accords with the agrarian-military ideal.[44]

Of course, the agrarian impulse combined with the concern over empire was already apparent among the early Country ideologues who mistrusted Walpole. We see the persistence of these interests in the mid-century writings not only of Goldsmith, but of Samuel Johnson and Tobias Smollett. Fearing that domestic agriculture and industry might falter as a result of British imperial expansion, Johnson opposed Britain's self-aggrandizing policies in his political journalism at the outset of the Seven Years War.[45] In fiction, Smollett is perhaps the best at demonstrating the destabilizing effect that empire and luxury have on domestic, agrarian, and civic virtue: in *Humphry Clinker* servants are surly, new money is an outrage, politicians are ridiculous, and the honorable country squire-*cum*-gentleman farmer is looking for a few good men. What distinguishes Wollstonecraft from these reform-minded authors of the previous generation—even from Johnson, who inspired her both intellectually and emotionally[46]—is not only the distinction in what kind of property is legitimate (hereditary wealth, for Wollstonecraft, is not) but the shift toward an emphasis on the language of rights, and the hard-to-sustain conviction that rights come with progress rather than with restoration.

This last conviction sets Wollstonecraft's thought apart, too, from the argu-

ment for a return to agrarian and arcadian virtue at the expense of rights that would prevail in the more cautious writings produced during the decade following the publication of the *Rights of Woman,* when many Britons looked with alarm on the Terror in France and, until Trafalgar, feared French invasion. Wollstonecraft's articulation of rights in relation to an understanding of slavery and corruption that draws on Protestant ideas of manners, morals, and political virtue, as well as on a nexus of discourses of feminism, Orientalism, and abolitionism, in fact, marks a unique chapter in the political thought of eighteenth-century England. That Wollstonecraft brings this thought to bear on such socially and politically charged concerns as luxury, despotism, education, enclosure, imperialism, and even motherhood points to the topicality and the scope of her work. Her extensive writings on the "slavery," as well as the rights, of women and men have their origins in the seventeenth-century Commonwealth tradition, gain complexity through the influence of Augustan Country ideology, and emerge in the era of Revolution as a progressive and humane political vision.

NOTES

This essay was completed with generous financial support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Trust and the Appalachian College Association.

1. D. L. Macdonald, "Master, Slave, and Mistress in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 11 (1992): 46–57; Moira Ferguson, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Problematic of Slavery," *Feminist Review* 42 (Autumn 1992): 82–102. Ferguson's essay is reprinted in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park, PA 1994), 125–149.

2. This attitude may be found among the ancient Greeks, although, unlike certain Greek writers, Wollstonecraft does not hold the condition of the slave to be natural. David Brion Davis provides a good summary of classical attitudes toward slavery in Chapter 3 of *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford, 1966). See especially 66–7.

3. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 2d ed., ed. Carol H. Poston (New York, 1988), 45. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *W.*

4. Macdonald suggests that several references to slavery "are clearly metaphorical: women are [in Wollstonecraft's words] the slaves of opinion, of sensibility, of ignorance, of prejudice" (49). In her comprehensive *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834* (New York, 1992), 22–3, Ferguson characterizes eighteenth-century women writers' comparisons between European women and Afro-Caribbean slaves as "extra-colonial expropriations of the language of slavery."

5. Anne K. Mellor quotes this line (also quoted in Ferguson, "Wollstonecraft," 92) and briefly addresses Wollstonecraft's comparisons between British women and Caribbean slaves in a essay on British women's abolition literature titled "'Am I Not a Woman, and a Sister?': Slavery, Romanticism, and Gender," in *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780–1834*, ed. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington, 1996), 317–38. Mellor also makes this point in her brief treatment of Wollstonecraft and Caribbean slavery (363–5) in "Sex, Violence, and Slavery: Blake and Wollstonecraft," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 58:3 & 4 (1995): 345–70.

6. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in *The Vindications: The Rights of Men, The Rights of Woman*, ed. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough, Ontario, 1997), 38. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *M.*

7. *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) in vol. 6 of *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (New York, 1989), 288.

8. The vision of Wollstonecraft's colleague Thomas Paine was, at this time, even more resolutely progressive. Linda Colley writes in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992) that "One of the reasons Thomas Paine had written his *Rights of Man* (1791) was to shatter the notion that liberty was uniquely first an English, then a British growth, rooted in the Saxon past. . . . There was no ancient and free constitution to reform, he had argued: the vital struggle must be to invent a brand new political order" (336).

9. Virginia Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago, 1992), *xx*.

10. "Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50, no. 4 (1989): 95–115.

11. *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985): the point is introduced on 225. See also Pocock's caveat that "there were no simple antitheses between land and trade, or even land and credit" (449) and his discussion of this web of relationships in Augustan England in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), 423–505.

12. "Corruption in Eighteenth-Century English and American Political Discourse," *Virtue, Corruption, and Self-Interest: Political Values in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Richard K. Matthews (Bethlehem, PA, 1994), 59. Kramnick's test case of the new discourse of virtue and corruption is James Burgh.

13. Pocock traces the centrality of arms and virtue to political identity and civic personality in *The Machiavellian Moment*. The standing army, which is inimical to the idea of an armed citizenry, is for many writers of the republican tradition an indication of a corrupt polity.

14. Barker-Benfield briefly notes Wollstonecraft's analogy between the effeminacy of women and that of idle soldiers in a standing army (112).

15. Kramnick argues for the beginnings of middle-class consciousness after 1760, when a middle class "asserted their interests as quite different from those of the ruling aristocracy and gentry at the same time that they sought eagerly to differentiate themselves from what they considered to be the less virtuous poor beneath them" (*Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* [Ithaca, 1990], 19). In doing so, he takes issue with historians ranging from E. P. Thompson to Harold Perkin, and including Pocock, J. C. D. Clark, and others (18–40). Pocock regards Kramnick's reading of class identification as un-nuanced at best, arguing that Kramnick both ignores the context of James Burgh's key usage of the term "bourgeois" in the 1770s and fails to consider the important factor of borough politics in the assessment of late eighteenth-century political identity (*Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 259–61).

16. Colley writes that "[a] cult of prolific maternity was immensely attractive to those who believed . . . that Britain's population was in decline, and to those who simply wanted more live births so that the nation might better compete in terms of cannon-fodder with France" (240). Felicity Nussbaum argues "that a particular kind of national imperative to control women's sexuality and fecundity emerged when the increasing demands of trade and colonization required a large, able-bodied citizenry, and that women's reproductive labor was harnessed to that task" (*Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* [Baltimore, 1995], 1). See also Rajani Sudan, "Motherhood and National Identity in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft," in *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780–1834*, ed. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington, 1996), 72–89.

17. According to Ferguson, Wollstonecraft's discourse develops "in response to" the Somerset case (1772), Phillis Wheatley's visit to England (1773), the publication of Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education* (1790), and the revolution in San Domingo (1791)

("Wollstonecraft," 82–3). There appears to be no explicit evidence, however, that Wollstonecraft is actually writing in response to these particular events, apart from the publication of Macaulay's *Letters*, which Wollstonecraft reviewed and which she refers to approvingly in the *Rights of Woman*.

18. In a gloss on this passage, Ferguson speculates that "since Wollstonecraft disdains passivity and servitude, she may be embedding an unconscious desire about female resistance that corresponds to her own. She could be hinting that women should emulate the San Domingan insurgents and fight back" ("Wollstonecraft," 95). However, there appears to be no material evidence in the *Rights of Woman* to indicate that Wollstonecraft's response to the revolution in San Domingo would be anything other than one of horror, despite her sense of the inevitability of revolt. She believes that "slaves and mobs," as well as most British women, do not possess the virtue of enlightened revolutionaries.

19. Wylie Sypher offers an extensive discussion of the eighteenth-century stereotype of the heartless and petty white Creole woman in "The West-Indian as a 'Character' in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Philology* 36, no. 3 (1939): 503–20.

20. Burke's *Reflections* had appeared a month earlier, in November 1790.

21. Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739–1796* (Cambridge, 1990); Joyce Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 3 (1993): 592–617; Nussbaum (1995); and Sudan (1996).

22. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), ed. John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford, 1989), 90–1, italics in original.

23. A reproduction of the engraving appears in *Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society*, ed. Richard Price and Sally Price (Baltimore, 1992), 146.

24. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, 1996), 216.

25. For a detailed discussion of the publication history of the text and engravings, see the Price and Price introduction to Stedman, xxxiv–xlv.

26. *Analytical Review*, Article VI, May 1789. Reprinted in *Works*, vol. 7, 100–1. She also favorably reviews *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, the English translation of Joseph Lavall's novel of the horrors of slavery. *Analytical Review*, Article XXXV, August 1790 (*Works*, vol. 7, 281–2).

27. For an in-depth study of the eighteenth-century debate on luxury and its roots in classical antiquity, see John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore, 1977).

28. In *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago, 1995), 23–46, Claudia Johnson describes Wollstonecraft's support for an ideal of "republican manhood" (29) to be embraced by both men and women and her rejection of men and women's effeminacy. Elissa Guralnick notes Wollstonecraft's hostility to luxury and effeminacy in "Radical Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*," *Studies in Burke and His Time*, 18, no. 3 (1977): 158, 162.

29. *Political Disquisitions*, 3 vols. (New York, 1971), vol. 3, 60.

30. China, "where a living man has been made a God" (*W* 37), is similarly superstitious and despotic. Biblical Egypt is cruel (*W* 117, 194); modern Russia, sadistic (*W* 194); Catholic Italy and Portugal, the latter which Wollstonecraft visited in 1785, are bloodthirsty, lustful, and effeminate (*W* 97, note 123, 138). Colley notes that "Asia, like Catholicism, was for many Britons synonymous with arbitrary power," a belief that caused concern especially following the Seven Years War, when, to some observers, Britain began to resemble earlier corrupt empires (102).

31. In his classic study of 1967, Bernard Bailyn notes that "Turkey as the ultimate refinement of despotism fascinated eighteenth-century American and Englishmen alike," in part because of the influence of Paul Rycaut's often reprinted 1668 *History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, which indiscriminately juxtaposes descriptions of Turkish polity and the secluded women's quarters. See *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), 63–4, note 8.

32. Macdonald argues that, in the *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft anticipates Hegel's master-slave dialectic by recognizing that powerless wives paradoxically become "mistresses"—that is, wield surreptitious power—over their husbands (50–7); in Wollstonecraft's view the dialectical inequality in social relations between husband and wife results in the moral degradation of both.

33. *Areopagitica, John Milton: Complete Poetry and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), 733.

34. Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Basic Political Writings*, trsl. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, 1987), 144.

35. "If we are asked, 'Do we now live in an *enlightened age?*' the answer is, 'No,' but we do live in an *age of enlightenment*." Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *Critique of Pure Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, trsl. Lewis White Beck (Chicago, 1949), 290, italics in original.

36. In a reading of this passage, Ferguson notes that "the blame that Wollstonecraft attaches to white women for their vanity is complicated by her assessment of the relationship between African women and dress. . . . Wollstonecraft equates self-conscious dressing with lack of intellectuality" ("Wollstonecraft," 90–1). Ferguson also points out that Wollstonecraft "cannot see that flirting and vanity could have a positive dimension, could sometimes be deployed by . . . women as strategies of resistance, as devious ways of assuming a measure of power" (90). The failure of vision identified by Ferguson may be attributed to the fact that Wollstonecraft adamantly opposes "devious" means of attaining power.

37. Reprinted in the Broadview edition of *The Vindications*, 409.

38. In her chapter on national education, Wollstonecraft is primarily interested in discussing methods of discipline and pedagogy (e. g., Socratic method is to be preferred to rote memorization), but she does mention a two-track curriculum. All students begin together studying "botany, mechanics, and astronomy. . . . [r]eading, writing, arithmetic, natural history . . . natural philosophy [experimental science] . . . religion, history, the history of man, and politics," but eventually, "young people of superior abilities, or fortune," would head towards "dead and living languages, the elements of science . . . [more] history and politics . . . polite literature," while those "intended for domestic employments, or mechanical trades" would study "plain-work, mantua-making, millinery . . . " (*W* 168).

39. See Gordon Wood's discussion of this point in his chapter on John Adams in *The Creation of the American Republic 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), 572–3.

40. Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (Oxford, 1992), 12–3, italics in original.

41. Claudia Johnson argues that Wollstonecraft deplores the male and female homosociality fostered by single-sex education (42–4).

42. "Hereditary property sophisticates the mind," writes Wollstonecraft, "and the unfortunate victims to it, if I may so express myself, swathed from their birth, seldom exert the locomotive faculty of body or mind" (*W* 141).

43. "The empire of reason will ever be the reign of peace. . . . the common parent of mankind will *cause wars to cease to the ends of the earth*, when *men shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks*. . . . " Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 3rd ed. (London, 1791), 150, italics in original. Priestley wrote his letters to Burke in response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which had appeared in November 1790. Wollstonecraft's response to Burke, the *Rights of Men*, appeared the following month, in December, 1790, and Priestley's *Letters* are signed and dated "Birmingham, Jan. 1, 1791." Like Wollstonecraft, Priestley was published by Joseph Johnson.

44. As Thomas Paine notes: "The aristocracy are not the farmers who work the land, and raise the produce, but are the mere consumers of the rent . . . " *Rights of Man* (New York, 1985), 227. Presumably, Wollstonecraft's farmer is a member of the yeomanry, although Wollstonecraft would most likely be able to reconcile the tenant farmer with an idea of citizenship as well.

45. Donald J. Greene, who identifies Johnson as a "little Englander," explains that Johnson opposed imperialism on humanitarian grounds as well. "Samuel Johnson and the Great War for Empire," *English Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John H. Middendorf (New York, 1971), 36–65.

46. James G. Basker cites numerous instances that demonstrate the nature and the extent of Johnson's influence on Wollstonecraft in "Radical Affinities: Mary Wollstonecraft and Samuel Johnson," *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, S. J. and James G. Basker (Oxford, 1996), 41–55.