

Reading Ideological Silence in Late Eighteenth-Century English Fiction:
Pierre Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production* and
the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft

by

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Abstract

English novels by women of the late eighteenth century rarely if ever reflect the improvements for women's lives that contemporary radical ideas promised. Using Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) as a research lens, author and feminist thinker Mary Wollstonecraft's political ideas in her famously bold works of non-fiction are read against her novels *Mary, A Fiction* (1788) and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798). Macherey's critique is used to trace the gap between philosophical and fictional imaginations of the late eighteenth century where it becomes clear that ruling modes of ideology are determining the representation and fate of Wollstonecraft's heroines. Wollstonecraft's use of sensibility and the gothic shows us that there is not language to delineate a successful feminist heroine. The findings of this study question imagined authorial freedom in the process of literary production and challenge readers to produce new knowledge through literary criticism.

Keywords

Mary Wollstonecraft; Pierre Macherey; *A Theory of Literary Production*; Eighteenth-Century Fiction; Ideology; Feminism; Gothic; Sensibility; Women Writers; *Mary, A Fiction*; *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*

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Chapter 1: Considering a Project of Absence

“The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure”; literary theorist and critic Pierre Macherey explains that knowledge of a book “must include a consideration of this absence” (85). Macherey’s use of ideology, a key to understanding the development of the following thesis, has a Marxian inflection that refers to the conditions of production as having primary significance. He goes on to elaborate that the ideological context within which literature is produced limits what can be said within the form of its products, that is, limits the language that can be utilized in the production of fiction. Here literary criticism becomes a concept which must be re-evaluated to include a shifting of the critical gaze to include a consideration of spaces in literature where ideology illuminates spaces of silence in the text. These spaces of silence will illuminate the workings of everyday ideology on the production of literature. It is the claim of this thesis that this production is determined and means that literature can reproduce only the ideas which support its production. As nothing can be produced except by and within ideology, ruling ideology shapes the ingredients which form all production including language, literary themes, plot trajectories, and character paths. In this way, authors are unable to present ideas in their novels which do not support ruling modes of ideology. These spaces are often contradictory and will illuminate for us the workings of ideology on the production of literature, where what the literature cannot say becomes visible. It is the view of this thesis that there is an important connection to be made between understanding the fictional work of Mary Wollstonecraft and the workings of ideology on literature that creates a determined form of expression, one where the novel form becomes limited by ruling systems of ideology. It is my claim that, although Wollstonecraft expressed great passion for the prospect of women being regarded as rational

reasoning creatures, literature always exists and is determined within ideology which, in the late eighteenth century, did not include the language needed for fiction to articulate happy, strong and reasonable female heroine characters.

“Silence reveals speech – unless it is speech that reveals the silence” (Macherey 96). This is a major premise of concepts explored in Pierre Macherey’s *A Theory of Literary Production* (published first in French, in 1966, and translated to English and published in 1978). This philosophical work of literary theory offers its reader a compelling, if challenging, explanation for the workings of ideology in the production of literature. Macherey explores deeply the role of the critic in reading (and misreading) literature and applies his theoretical approach to a number of works by authors including Jules Verne, Vladimir Lenin, Jorge Luis Borges, and Leo Tolstoy. I was attracted to his work on what he calls textual silence where the critical gaze through thematic figurations allows the critic to read spaces of silence in the text that signal a clash between the struggle against ruling ideology and the necessity of laws governing ruling ideology based on the laws of production. Here, a critical reader will be able to read what is not being written or what occurs marginally within the text.

Critical reception of Macherey’s work generally praises his innovative theoretical style and challenging way of reading literature as “a caricature of customary ideology” (Macherey 68). Literary theorist Terry Eagleton explains that Macherey’s “intention is to inaugurate a radical ‘epistemological break’ with what has come before, to construct an entirely distinct problematic; and since he is therefore, in my view, one of the most challenging, genuinely innovatory of contemporary Marxist critics” (Eagleton 135). Surprisingly, admiring reviews have led to only a small number of projects that apply Macherey’s methodology to literature. This project will

attempt to do just that in the belief that his theory has been overlooked due to the challenges it presents to critics to consider their subjects in a non-traditional way.

Most of Macherey's theory application in *A Theory of Literary Production* considers authors producing literature during the nineteenth century. In the preface to the 2006 Routledge Classics edition of *A Theory of Literary Production*, translator Geoffrey Wall wonders if Macherey's theory applies "to other genres and to works from a different historical period" (xiv). It is my belief that Macherey's theory, although speaking to these nineteenth-century works, is applicable to any work of literature. Ideology, according to Macherey, is at work during all points in history, including our own, and will have significant influence on any author producing literature in any period. In the afterword included in the 2006 Routledge edition Macherey states that "we can say that all literature is, in itself, though in various degrees, revolutionary, in so far as it reveals and actively contributes to certain fracture lines which run deep into historical reality and into the forms in which that reality is lived, imagined and represented" (363). In Macherey's understanding, there is no practice of existence or production outside of ideology; there will be no historical literature that would not be a fit sample for investigation.

I have chosen to apply his theory to two novels produced during the late eighteenth century by author and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. This time period was marked by intense ideological disruption and radical revolutionary thought and will serve as an appropriate stage for exploring modes of literary production. It is my belief that the critical exploration of these two works of fiction, by a woman with such strong beliefs and convictions, will illuminate new insights into how ruling ideology shapes fictional literature in the late eighteenth century.

“I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves” (Wollstonecraft *A Vindication* 90)¹; Wollstonecraft’s famous early feminist text, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in 1792, outlines a guide for women of the late eighteenth century in moving to become recognized as rational citizens and individuals. She writes boldly here in the hope of giving power to women over themselves. This power would surely allow a woman greater ability in choosing how she exists in marriage (or not), in the family and in society. Wollstonecraft’s passion is unmistakable in her most famous work of non-fiction which in part aims to inspire women to think of themselves in an alternative way, resulting in alternate lifestyles and pleasure in recognition of the ability women possess to think and act rationally and with reason.

Standing in contrast to this statement are the last lines of *Mary, A Fiction*, Wollstonecraft’s only completed work of fiction; “Her delicate state of health did not promise long life. In moments of solitary sadness, a gleam of joy would dart across her mind – She thought she was hastening to that world *where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage*” (148).² The novel’s heroine explores life, marriage, love and passion as a woman living in eighteenth-century England. After a narrative of much hardship, riddled with autobiographical

¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, edited by Eileen Hunt Botting, Yale UP, 2014. All subsequent quotations from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* will be taken from this edition, and cited as *VRW*.

² This quotation comes from the 2012 edition of Mary Wollstonecraft’s two novels, edited by Michelle Faubert, Broadview Press. All subsequent quotations from Wollstonecraft’s novels will be taken from this source unless otherwise stated.

reference points, Wollstonecraft's heroine Mary ends her story with the understanding that she will die young and unhappy, trapped in a marriage to a man who disgusts her.

The vast difference between the suggestions for a woman's life in eighteenth-century society in Wollstonecraft's non-fiction as opposed to her fiction are both puzzling and intriguing. This thesis will explore possibilities as to why there is such a great difference between Wollstonecraft's two genres of writing. I will ask why there seems to exist a certain absence, or silence, in Wollstonecraft's fictional heroines when it comes to envisioning happiness, equality and ability in their lives even as they are written as rational, reasoning characters. In answering these points, I will be utilizing Macherey's analytical approach in determining the ideological limits of literature, specifically fiction. From here I will lead the reader through a contextual summary of the bibliographical timeline of eighteenth-century author Mary Wollstonecraft and her world, in order to clearly understand the ideological context that authors of fiction are inevitably working within during this time-period. I will explore the life and accomplishments of Wollstonecraft as these life experiences and feminist philosophies will serve to illuminate better the unexpected spaces of silence within her novels. Finally, I will examine Wollstonecraft's two novels in detail (*Mary, A Fiction* and *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*) using Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production* as a critical reading guide. This exploration will highlight Mary Wollstonecraft's use of significant literary concepts, the depiction of discontentedness in radical, feminist and independent female characters in novels written by women, and their relationship to eighteenth-century ideology.

Methodological approach – Pierre Macherey and *A Theory of Literary Production*

The discussion that follows will serve as an exploration of Pierre Macherey and *A Theory of Literary Production*, defining ideology and providing an introduction to how I will begin to

connect this methodology to my study of Mary Wollstonecraft's two novels. First, I will provide a brief biography of Pierre Macherey and situate him within his theoretical discipline. This will create a clear understanding of his core theoretical approaches and how these compare to those of his contemporaries. Second, I will engage with his ideas by providing an analysis of *A Theory of Literary Production* and giving an account of my reading this theory as a compelling way to understand the ideologies behind the production of literature. This analysis will also draw upon the critical response to his work as a relevant addition to understanding the connections I will make between this theory and novels written by Wollstonecraft. Third, I will explore the methods of his theory that Macherey uses to analyse selected examples of nineteenth century fiction in *A Theory of Literary Production* and validate my approach of using this theory in association with late eighteenth-century fiction written by women, specifically the two novels written by Wollstonecraft. This will ensure that I have given a clear explanation of the intentions and relevance of my inquiry into this subject in relation to the work done by Pierre Macherey in *A Theory of Literary Production*.

Born in Belfort France in 1938, Pierre Macherey is known as a French Marxist literary critic. He attended the École normale supérieure from 1958 to 1963 where he met and worked closely with French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser (Buchanan 303). Althusser's theoretical practice involves "translating the Marxist concept of 'means of production' to the intellectual sphere" (Oxford Reference "Louis Althusser"). He does this by "elevating ideological issues above economics" and implicitly flattering "theoreticians by raising the seminar room, library, and cafe-bar to forums of much greater value than the factory floor and the cobble-strewn street" (Oxford Reference "Louis Althusser"). Arguably, the most important influence passed down by Louis Althusser would be the Marxian emphasis on the modes of

production as directly correlating with what Althusser would call “Ideological State Apparatuses” (Althusser 141).

Defining ideology and its specific relationship to the workings of the state and individuals is of particular importance, not only to Macherey’s theory, but to the development of this project as well. This chapter will explore the aspects of ruling eighteenth-century ideology in Great Britain which inevitably influenced the production and content of novels, including those written by Wollstonecraft. Althusser’s discussion of ideology in his work concerning ideological state apparatuses is a good reference point for understanding ideology as both the source of learning for Macherey and understanding these concepts using a Marxian framework. In his article “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser explains that the definition of ideology changes when reframed by Marx to mean “a system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (Althusser 158). Ideology, for Althusser (and Marx), has no history and “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (162). Although imaginary, ideology becomes material in its connection to the real recognition of it in defining oneself and each other and so it is that “there is no practice except by and in an ideology” and that “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects” (170). These defining aspects of ideology ensure that the ideology of the ruling class is realized and realizes itself through the installation of ideological state apparatuses only achieved through “a very bitter and continuous class struggle: first against the former ruling classes and their positions in the old and new ISAs [Ideological State Apparatuses], then against the exploited class” (185). Understanding what the term ideology means for Marxian intellectuals such as Althusser and Macherey will give us a better understanding of concepts weaving through their working theories. For Macherey, defining the relationship between

ideology and the ruling class helps us to understand better how literature is produced and how it is inextricable from ideology as an aspect of ruling class state apparatuses. It is important to understand that for the interests of this thesis the term “ideology” represents ideas of the individual which are imaginary but become inextricable from the real when they represent the ideas of the ruling class. In this way ideology controls and is produced through the subject and when language in literature is used to produce a product such as a novel, there is no language for the subject but the language of ruling ideology. The recognition of silence created in a novel produced through ruling ideology, as in Wollstonecraft’s works of fiction, offers the critic a way to perceive any sign of struggle against this ruling ideology.

What is unique about Macherey is his work at extending this emphasis to the production of works of literature which will both allow for an illumination of ideological workings and, through a reading of absences and contradiction, a glimpse at truths that ideology masks. Macherey worked with Étienne Balibar, Michel Pêcheux and Jacques Rancière on a study of critical methodology and later on Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*, publishing *Reading Capital* in 1970 (Buchanan 303). Pierre Macherey’s work is heavily influenced by Althusserian theory and his most celebrated text, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* published in 1966, translated to *A Theory of Literary Production* in 1978 is no different.

Macherey’s theory is often considered to be post-structuralist in nature and as Terry Eagleton suggests,

Macherey's theory of literary production entails a concept of structure radically distinct from that of the structuralist ideology. The structuralist critical enterprise revolves on the decipherment of the text's enigma, the disengagement from it of a cryptic but coherent sense. The literary artefact is constructed as a message, and the critic's function is to isolate

the transmitted information. The work, accordingly, has no autonomous value in itself: it is an intermediary, the simulacrum of a concealed structure (Eagleton 140).

Macherey's theory differs from the structuralist theoretical view in that it does not consider the text as a clear coherent structure, and there is nothing to be deciphered or discovered in a way that explains the entirety of the work itself. Macherey's theory works with not what we can discover in the words of a text itself, but rather the contradiction and difference between the words and what stands beside them in the margins as "absence." Macherey believes that literary criticism creates a new space of understanding instead of unveiling a hidden meaning in what is already known. This is an important aspect of Macherey's work for this project as I intend to discover and say, as a critic, something new about two works of fiction written by Wollstonecraft. Macherey's Marxist framework constructs the literary work as produced, directly situated as a product of ruling class ideology. He works to define this production as creating a specific object of critique with a distinct reality. This characteristic of being an object of critique is what allows literature to be read and articulated in terms of its absences and spaces of contradiction and is what makes Macherey's approach unique. Through this theory we are able to mark spaces in literary products where ruling ideology becomes visible. In doing this we can better understand the limits of literature and the struggle against ruling ideology.

Macherey's *Theory of Literary Production* came to the wider attention of English scholars in Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* first published in 1980 where Belsey considers a collection of theoretical work, including that of Macherey. This consideration of Macherey's theory in Belsey's overview of English literary theory marked it as influential in the world of English critical theory. Beginning as a notable work of French theory it took a number of years for this work to be translated and recognized in English circles. In speaking of critics such as

Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, and Althusser, François Cusset claims in *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States* that texts by these authors “were gradually translated, commented upon, and placed on the reading lists of literature courses, first in French departments and then in English and comparative literature departments” (Cusset 77) and Macherey’s work follows suit.

Macherey’s *Theory of Literary Production* work figured into Belsey’s *Critical Practice* visibly in the first edition (1980) and again in the second edition (2002). *Critical Practice* stands as a collection of approaches to literary theory which consider connections between humans, literary texts, and readers, and how literature is shaped through language and cultural politics. Belsey guides her reader through the complexity found in contemporary theory and post-structuralism. She does this by explaining the theoretical approaches of literary theorists such as Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida and pairing their methods with familiar literary texts such as *Middlemarch* by George Eliot, the stories of Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë.

A sign of Macherey’s status amongst literary theorists, his inclusion in such a text twice in a span of over 20 years, shows his theory to be consistently relevant and useful to contemporary studies of literary theory.

A theory of literary production

Macherey begins his exploration of literary production with a series of subtitled chapters under the heading “Some Elementary Concepts.” It is in these chapters that he describes the method and theoretical conceptualization behind his ideas on literary production and criticism. From a positive knowledge standpoint (as derived from logic and reason) Macherey explains that

by considering literature as a scientific object we acknowledge that it is progressively discovered. Here Macherey tells his readers that an empiricist of this nature would believe that the act of knowing “is rather the elaboration of a new discourse, the articulation of a silence” (Macherey 6); “an addition to the reality from which it begins” (6). In this space where the critic “employs a new language, brings out a *difference* within the work by demonstrating that it’s *other than* what it is” (8) there is a gap between literature and criticism where one cannot often speak directly to the other. This elaborates on Macherey’s removal from structuralist ideology that would suggest the critic as a reader of something already there; the critic who commits the normative fallacy of critiquing based on a normative model. Here, Macherey distinctly claims that a critic’s discovery is something new entirely through the act of seeking the conditions which make the emergence of knowledge (after the event) possible (literature as a scientific object). Here, the critic must not consider the literary product as a composition to be read for its answers but rather they must look to “formulate an initial question which gives meaning to those answers” (10). This question and the meaning derived from its answers produce a new product entirely through the act of criticism. This idea is key to understanding many of the concepts explored in his work as well as one of the ultimate goals of literary criticism itself.

The goal of the critic is to create something new by reading aspects of conflict which illuminate questions and answers supported by the development of the narrative. Macherey states that this gives criticism a certain power over the work whereby denouncing certain aspects of the original text, a new object is produced, and is able to be born only through the act of criticism (17). In “Front and Back” Macherey explains that in discovering something new, the work is therefore like a “pure introduction” (22) to something more. This “something more” that can be found in literature through the work of the critic is what I hope to engage with in investigating

the two novels of Mary Wollstonecraft. Literary scholars and critics alike have studied her work and found her to exist as a part of a trend among women novelists during the late eighteenth century who advocate early feminist ideals yet seem unable to reconcile these beliefs with the female heroines in their novels. It is my hypothesis that this breakage between feminist ideals and the literary product which is produced by women (even when writing through a feminist lens), directly correlates to a determination of language imposed upon the literary form through the state of prevailing ideologies at work upon authorship during this particular period of time. Validating the need to identify this concept, which extends the limitation of criticism, is something that Macherey does well here, offering encouragement towards identifying the difficult category of absence. The possibilities gained when using this theory, validate its existence.

He describes and defines both the “empiricist” and “normative” fallacies (18) in approaching literature. The empiricist fallacy occurs when the work is treated “as factually given, spontaneously isolated for inspection. The work thus exists only to be received, described, and assimilated through the procedures of criticism” (15). Here the critic will select the object of criticism based on a personal preference which often leads directly into the second fallacy. It is the normative fallacy which determines that a “work should be other than it is” (18) and that “its only reality is its relationship to the model which was the very condition of its elaboration” (18-19). In this way, for Macherey, a work is always preceded by an understanding of its model and the unfolding of narrative events in the text becomes an irrelevant fiction because “the work can only advance towards an identity already fixed in the model” (19). He gives the example of a narrative which only relevantly exists to reveal a secret through its full-term development such as the detective narrative where it is often tempting for the reader to read the last page first and

make the previous narrative structure unnecessary (19-20). Macherey positions narratives as windows to a truth revealed through the act of criticism which he states acts by “confronting the work with its own truth” (20).

This process suggests that in two steps, a book will establish the mystery and then dispel it (38) which acts as the simultaneous development which moves the narrative (40). Similarly, he explains that this development shows us that the work’s reality is found in “the conflict which impels it” (40); that this delay of an ultimate truth is what makes the work possible (43). He positions the real as a realization which overtakes/changes all previous knowledge into something new entirely and for him reaching this real is impossible because it is the development up to this moment in a literary work which makes it necessary in the first place (41). In his understanding the realization at the ending of a book can never erase the development of the narrative which brings the reader to this realization and this is why the real is impossible to reach; the real remains distinct from the (literary) product. In the consideration of literary plot developments and endings and in connection with the focus of this thesis, it is important to note that there is a large body of scholarship outlining the unhappy endings written by women novelists during the late eighteenth century. To fully understand eighteenth-century novels written by women, it is imperative that the critic grasp the full content of a plot’s conflict in order to better understand its conclusion. Judging these novels of fiction based solely on their endings becomes (for Macherey) a purely aesthetic reading. A critique of this nature becomes hollow and lacks interconnectedness, as it is only an analysis of a model (the way of the normative critic) (39) and is “much less vivid” (39). Each work of literature must be read and understood as a whole, in order to be read properly as a complex web of determination only made possible by the state of the conditions of its production. According to this framework,

reading late eighteenth-century novels written by women based on their endings is a critique which misses a wider, deeper understanding; an understanding which illuminates a sense of the conditions of authorial determination.

Macherey's chapter "Improvisation, Structure and Necessity" states that literary work is not created in freedom and independence but in fact is sustained and grows out of being determined which interrupts this idea of the real (44). For Macherey, this idea of being determined suggests that a work is "not randomly put together" (45) and this begins to shape literary work as a rational, theoretical object (45). Macherey explains that, just as with a book, "there is no first, independent, innocent language" (50) and this suggests language's truth which is "the illusion that it produces its own peculiar norm" (50). He goes on to state that if an author's "decisions are determined" (54) then writing literary works becomes a "game of free choice according to the rules" of a previously established model (54). Francis Mulhern, in *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*, speaks to this determination in suggesting that "the mythic liberties of the literary – authorship, appreciation and so on – are the deceptive signs of its institutionalized conservative ideological function" (Mulhern 34). Macherey places the concept of the unconscious as not producing the works but rather creating effects within works (Macherey 55) and explains that because the work is dependent on its form it becomes "the mythical product of a process it can never mention" (55). Within this lens 'the work' exists only as an idea that is not accessible to the critic. In a way this idea (the work) that is created through unconscious effects is something that criticism often fails to capture in all of its parts and therefore in its actual entirety. Here, ruling ideology of the ruling class creates the determined form of a work and any place of ideological struggle within the work creates spaces of contradiction, read by Macherey as absence. Mulhern states in his chapter "On Literature as an

Ideological Form” in *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism* (2014), “as a norm, ‘literature’ sustains inequality and domination within linguistic practice itself, staging but also confirming the contradiction between ‘writing’ – ‘reading’ and merely ‘knowing how to read and write’” (34).

My readings of literature concur with his idea that the literary work is autonomous (“self-elaborating”) (59), interacting in a collaboration of various disciplines including “the theory of ideologies” and “the theory of unconscious formations.” The autonomy Macherey speaks of is the relationship between literature and the “theoretical and ideological uses of language” as literature is connected to the writer’s existence, individuals and to the history of literary production (61). For him, this interconnectedness positions literary works as a second reality with its own laws (61). Reading literature this way gives the critic of a literary product the ability to step outside of the words written on the page and into the interconnectedness which defines all literature. It suggests that there are new possibilities for understanding the production of literature and therefore any literary product that a critic chooses to explore. It therefore offers new possibilities for understanding what is revealed and concealed (regarding the ideological determination of form) in novels, including (for example), those written by eighteenth-century women, and specifically the two novels written by Mary Wollstonecraft I have chosen for this study.

In the chapter “Image and Concept,” Macherey begins to shape a larger conversation around ideology and literature stating that literary work is “a caricature of customary ideology” (68) meaning that it emphasizes the most revealing lines of the characters it traces. He furthers this point by explaining that at the completion of a literary work, ideologies (or gaps in them) become visible which makes literature a secondary work; existing only in itself and mimicking

the real through illusion (68-69). Reworded, this could be described as literary works presenting a parody of reality which becomes distorted in its presentation. He states that the language of illusion “is the vehicle and source of everyday ideology” (72) and explains that literature in its illusion must take a stand on everyday ideology and therefore step outside of its everchanging flow (found in reality) in order to represent it (73). By charging the critic to become the interpreter, he/she becomes able to recognize meaning and patterns of repetition (84) where forthcoming criticism will involve a questioning of what the work is a copy of. The critic will then be able to identify and display the work’s expressions of meaning which the critic will have to dismantle in order to reconstruct literary and ideological meaning from the work (85).

Central to Macherey’s work and this thesis is the idea that “silence reveals speech – unless it is speech that reveals silence” (that they are inextricable) (96). One of Macherey’s most important claims from this section would be: “it is this silence which tells us... of the precise conditions for the appearance of an utterance, and thus its limits, giving it a real significance” (97). The silence becomes “an unconsciousness which is nothing less than the play of history itself on the work’s margins” (Eagleton 139). He then asks if we can actually examine the absence of speech (97) and references Nietzsche’s concept of creation being all that man allows to appear (98) where “if the author does not always say what he states, he does not necessarily state what he says” (99).

He describes the literary work as hiding nothing, although not everything is easily/immediately accessible as we (the reader/critic) must unite/gather what it has to say (111). Instead of simplifying, he suggests that we must see the work in all of its complexity; as a combination of threads together and not each one separately (112). He states that the literary work is complex and systematic but not “simple and complete” because it is the existence of

other works which determines it (there is no first/independent book or work) (113). As Eagleton suggests, “Macherey moves almost wholly within the terrain of a work's "superstructures" [spaces of dominant cultural power within literature]. Eagleton rightly emphasizes that "Production" refers not to the material apparatus, technological infrastructures, and social relations of an artefact, but to its self-production as a chain of significations” (134). Identifying these significations and the spaces where ideology is put into contradiction with the work’s ideological project will allow the critic to clearly sketch out the workings of ruling modes of production through ruling ideology. Macherey concludes by defining the literary product as “decentred, displayed, determinate, [and] complex”, to be read as such in order to be theoretically criticized (113).

As this summary demonstrates, Macherey’s theory is complex but the instructions themselves are accessible. His theory of literary production uses concepts such as determination, historical context, ideology and critique, ones with which all literary critics will be familiar. However, the process of reading absence and silence in order to better understand the complexity of the former terms is the most challenging function of this work. The concept of absence, although clear in his description, becomes a more elusive concept to work with and the seemingly infinite interpretation that this allows for may seem daunting to speak about as a scientific process. However, it is this infinite possibility for interpretation which allows critique the opportunity to create something new out of the literary product, through the discovery of a central meaning behind the mask of the work (Macherey 86) and the consideration of literature as a scientific object, which, when studied, will elicit new knowledge. Macherey’s theory gives critics a wider range of working ground and moves away from the limits of reading what is on

the page as a representation of what a literary product is. It offers an alternative to spontaneous empiricism and reading through the normative fallacy of a pre-existing model.

Ideological absence/silence and Mary Wollstonecraft

The key element of Macherey's theory is his concept of absence, also described as a text's silence. This concept brings together all of Macherey's ideas about what literature is and how it is to be read. Macherey is suggesting that in order to fully understand a literary text we must recognize both the lines of the text which make up its body and the spaces in between. We must first understand that it is not only made up of the text of the main body but also of the spaces in between the lines. He suggests that what is left out of a text, what is not written about, is just as (if not more) important as what is clearly written in the main literary structure of a work. Reading these absences will illuminate the conditions leading to the possibility of the work's creation. Critics can discover the circumstances of the ideological and historical state which made it possible for the author of the text to produce the determined form of presence read as literature. In describing Macherey's concept of absence, Terry Eagleton speaks to the importance of this element to Macherey's theory of literary production. He explains that absence "behaves in his work as a crucial nexus between Marxism and structuralism: it allows him to preserve a high degree of autonomy for the artefact while obliquely relating it to history. It is, in other words, an absolutely *necessary* category if a highly formalist conception of the literary text is to co-habit with historical materialism" (Eagleton 141). Insisting on the importance of the concept of absence presents some difficulty in the theorist's ability to speak confidently about such an uncertain element. It is as Eagleton suggests, that absence "is an elusive, ambiguous category too, genuinely productive but, in a sense, *ingenious*" (Eagleton 141). Even though this

complexity is not as available as we would like it to be does not mean that we, as critics and readers, should be deterred from reaching for it.

The other struggle facing would-be readers of absence is the possibility that presence (what is physically written) in a work is pushed aside in favor of the search for absence.³ Although this may be a legitimate concern, I believe that the risk of losing presence of the text is just as concerning as not reading the absences. Reading the present literary text seems somehow less important when the absences can illustrate so much about how the literary text came into being in the first place. Here then, reading only presence will produce a limited, hollow reading of what is physically on the page. It seems better to forego the hollow reading in favor of pursuing an understanding of the complex ideological, historical workings of literary production.

A Theory of Literary Production draws upon Althusser's later theory of ideology that proposes "a view of literature as a specific mode of ideological practice, whose material effects derive from its role in the reproduction of the 'national' (common and class-divided) language and in the bourgeois educational apparatuses whose basic practice this is" (Mulhern 34). The weight that this theory places on the influence of ideological practice in the production of

³ Eagleton cautions that, "Macherey at times presses the Althusserian concept of 'symptomal reading' (reading for both 'presences' and 'absences') to the point where presences are effectively abolished, feared, almost, as metaphysical traces and so absorbed back into absences. The work becomes an agitated allusion to what it is not; the concrete social processes by which historical modes of literary production, ideological apparatuses class relations, and so on produce the overdetermined conjuncture we know as a literary text are in danger of being dissolved to an interplay of negations" (141-142).

literature is exactly why I have chosen this particular theory in order to explore my subject matter. The last part of the eighteenth century in Europe, Great Britain, and America was a time of change and revolution. There was a push to dismantle some deeply rooted traditional foundations regarding not only the rights of the male individual in society but also the rights of woman in society. This push signalled a call for the possibility of changing ideologies. It is the goal of this project to explore this possibility by studying the literature being written by women in England during this time-period, using a theoretical approach which aims to read the ideological and historical trends which determine the production of literature. I have chosen to study the novels of Mary Wollstonecraft, based on the fact that Wollstonecraft is among the most influential and revolutionary, some would say feminist, thinkers of her time and arguably the woman who best expresses her ideas through non-fictional texts including *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Yet she also produced two fictional texts that are now recognized and read as a part of her body of work. Michelle Faubert explains that “*Mary* and *Maria* stand as Wollstonecraft’s efforts to put her complex ideas into practice and create the new state of womanhood about which she had only declaimed in her polemical prose” (Introduction 50). It is the contents and production of these novels that I wish to investigate using a Machereyan framework, searching out and reading the absence in her literary works.

As noted above, the second half of Macherey’s work outlines examples of the application of this theory to a number of fictional works from nineteenth and twentieth century male writers. I will now outline the steps Macherey identifies in order to read the ideological frameworks and absences as a process of his theory of literary production. This will better illuminate similar steps and frameworks I will utilize in considering the novels of Wollstonecraft.

In reading the marks of ideology and absence in works such as Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* (1875), Macherey begins by explaining the need for the critic to identify what he calls "the ideological project" (184). In attempting to identify this feature the critic must ask – what is this novel/work trying to do? – and what does the author of this work try to proclaim through the development of the literary product? In the work of Verne, Macherey identifies the ideological project as "the internal transformation of the social order by a process which is history itself, but which has now (and here arises the theme of modernity) come to predominate: the conquest of nature by industry" (184). Next, Macherey works to identify passages which exemplify major themes related to the ideological project. He asks – how is the product of literature unfolding into itself? And what makes up this process? After these questions are asked and answered the critic must define the subject of the work. An example of this is "man's domination of nature" (185), which is "the *subject* of all Verne's work" (185). The descriptions of the subject of a work will tell the critic about the ideological project and the intention of the work. Macherey proposes that the critic look for signs and symbols of thematic concepts within the literary work. Examples of such signs include the sea, the document in code, the volcano and haste found in Verne's work. Macherey suggests that the critic examine how the thematic concepts, visible in the written work and the actions of the subject, match up with the ideological project. But also, importantly *how they do not*. This analysis will be conducted on two levels of the literary product. The first and primary level is made up of a basic understanding of the subject and genre while the secondary level is where the critic must look to define "the state of society at a form of social consciousness" and the "state of literature or of writing – the form of the narrative, the typical characters; and even the situation of the writer, in so far as this

representation reflects the ideology of the profession” (194). Macherey identifies another level of description which he calls *figuration*. He explains that

“Verne has *everything necessary* for the writing of his books; but in fact he has nothing at all and must seek out other means: those true themes of his work – in their individuality, in the specificity of the writing of a page – which, unlike the ideological subject, cannot be immediately representative of a generality. For us these themes define another level of description, corresponding to the time of production, which can be called *figuration*” (Macherey 195).

These figurations are marked as alternative means of representation for the author which result in literary representations of ideologies corresponding to the time of the text’s production.

Once the critic has gathered a clear understanding of these levels they must identify where they correspond with and contradict one another in consideration of the work’s ideological project and its ideological representations. The following thesis will distinguish these spaces of contradiction in Wollstonecraft’s novels by identifying figurations such as sensibility and excessive gothic imagery and comparing them to the goals of the ideological project. The places where there are contradictions represent the spaces of absence and silence that Macherey identifies as the element necessary in order for the critic to create something new out of reading a literary product. Understanding Macherey’s figurations will better allow the critic to read ideological absence or as Macherey would call them, “true themes” (195) of an author’s work in their individuality.

Macherey’s *Theory of Literary Production* suggests a change in the way we read literary work and gives critics an innovative way to create new and infinite forms of discourse based on a complex system of understanding historical and ideological frameworks. It is true that “no text

can be 'independent': it subsists in its complex relations to other uses of language, and so to ideologies and social formations. But for Macherey these realities are inscribed within the letter of the text primarily by virtue of their *absence*" (Eagleton 138). Although the concept of absence is not easy to define and not tangible in the sense that it is not explicitly written, I would argue that Macherey's theory quiets these doubts by illuminating the possibility such a theoretical reading allows the critic. This is why I will be using this theory in trying to understand Wollstonecraft's novels. This theory allows for the inclusion and consideration of a long list of complex characteristics which all contribute to a reading of each of these literary texts in a way that will provide a fuller more comprehensive understanding of not only the late eighteenth-century novels written by Wollstonecraft but also shed light on possible factors contributing to the production of the late eighteenth-century novels written by women.

The next chapter will explore the life and works of Mary Wollstonecraft. This will help to situate her works within the eighteenth century and her life as a woman and a writer. From here we will be able to more easily read the ideologies at work around and through her and her work during this time period. Identifying the ideological project of each of her novels individually will allow us to consider, through figurations, where ideologies are placed into spaces of contradiction. This will show us the ways that ruling ideology was shaping and constraining eighteenth-century fiction.

Chapter 2: Mary Wollstonecraft's Life, Writing, and the Development of a Radical Female Novelist

This chapter will encompass Mary Wollstonecraft's biographical story and engage with eighteenth-century history in a way that will allow the reader to understand clearly the ideological space that Wollstonecraft was writing from during the production of her novels. In what follows I will sketch out a brief biography of author and feminist Wollstonecraft. Her two novels will be the major subject and focus later in this work in my attempt to explore and apply the literary theory of philosopher and theorist Pierre Macherey. But first I will review here the key events of her life and her connection to the political, feminist and literary history of the 1790s. I will then outline the content of Wollstonecraft's writings in order to understand the progression of her writing and thinking during her career. Most of the following biographical information has been drawn from the entry for "Mary Wollstonecraft" in the Cambridge *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* online database of women's writing unless otherwise cited.

A biographical and historical account

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in Primrose Street, Spitalfields, London on April 27, 1759. She was the second child and the first daughter to her parents who went on to have five more children, one of whom died in infancy. Her parents were Elizabeth Dickson, of Irish descent, and Edward John Wollstonecraft, of English descent. Edward Wollstonecraft was the dominant head of Wollstonecraft's rootless family. He tried his hand to guide the family into stability in the weaving trade but proved to be a poor tradesman and a violent husband and father. During her

childhood and adolescence Wollstonecraft moved with her family six times within the span of fourteen years. This lack of a settled and stable family life carried on for Wollstonecraft into her adult life as she continued to move from place to place frequently following the job opportunities that came available to her.

Wollstonecraft's education as a child was not a priority for her family, a common situation for female offspring during the eighteenth century. She first attended a village school in Yorkshire where she learned a very basic knowledge of reading and writing. This means that much of Wollstonecraft's considerable knowledge was self-attained. This self-education and the events of Wollstonecraft's early life are visible in letters that she wrote to her female friends in youth. Jane Arden was one of Wollstonecraft's first close female relationships that, although sometimes strained, shaped her personality in a great number of ways throughout her life. An influential by-product of this relationship was the guidance and schooling provided to Wollstonecraft by Jane's father John Arden. In *Mary Wollstonecraft, A Revolutionary Life*, Janet Todd explains that "Mr. Arden encouraged her and taught her with Jane: she was proud to compete for praise" (Todd, *Revolutionary* 15). Along with such tutoring Wollstonecraft also "attended a local day-school for girls, one of the many flourishing in the eighteenth century" (12). This school would have most likely taught some "French, needlework, music, dancing, writing, possibly some botany and accounts" (12) but most schooling offered to girls during this time was simply to teach accomplishments that would equip them for the marriage market, and prepare them for the lives they were expected to lead. For example, while Latin would have been taught as a staple for most boys preparing for university it "might be offered to a girl in school or at home from ambitious parents. But there was such cultural fear of the learned bluestocking as a byword for unmarriageability that few persevered" (12). This parental guidance directing what

their children learn offers a good example of a strong ruling ideology around gender roles during this time period. Just like there were subjects that female children did not learn because of limits impressed upon them by ruling ideologies, Macherey would argue that there are subjects that writers could not express using a form (the novel) that is produced under the same ideological limits.

Also of note, in the area of life-moulding friendships, would be Wollstonecraft's friendship with Fanny Blood, whom she met in the year 1775 at the age of sixteen. It can be said that Wollstonecraft loved Fanny in a very fervent manner, even considering living a life with her (Todd, *Revolutionary* 23). Fanny remained a very important and respected figure in Wollstonecraft's life and someone whom she loved and communicated with until Fanny's death of tuberculosis in November of 1785.

From 1778 to 1781 Wollstonecraft worked as a companion to a Mrs. Dawson in Bath where she experienced her first taste of earning an income for herself. During her employment with Mrs. Dawson, Wollstonecraft enjoyed what would be her first recorded flirtation – with a university don Joshua Waterhouse. Regrettably we know little about the friendship as the letters she had written to him were found upon his death and destroyed. In autumn of 1781 this romance was interrupted as Wollstonecraft returned home to care for her mother during what would be her final illness. Shortly after her mother's death, Wollstonecraft began living in Fulham with Fanny Blood's family as she feared for Fanny's health related to the aforementioned tuberculosis. She worked there as a companion and later by sewing until she was summoned to Bermondsey in 1783 to come to the aid of her sister Elizabeth who was suffering from a nervous breakdown after the birth of her first child. Wollstonecraft continued to watch over her sister

until she convinced Elizabeth to flee her abusive husband and leave her child behind, escaping with Wollstonecraft to Hackney in 1784.

In the same year, Wollstonecraft, with the help of Fanny Blood and her two younger sisters, opened a school in Newington Green in London. The school in Newington Green was the first taste of some form of independent success for Wollstonecraft but it was not to last. It was not long before Fanny left to be married and soon sent word of her pregnancy (Todd, *Revolutionary* 65-66). Wollstonecraft's deep feelings on the importance of education to the development of the individual (especially women) would become a key subject of interest in her later political writings, including her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in 1792.

The Newington school is also important to Wollstonecraft's biographical timeline because Newington Green was a "center for intellectual dissent" (Orlando) and a meeting place between Wollstonecraft and many influential individuals. Some of these individuals included the radical minister Richard Price, the poet Samuel Rogers, and her future friend and publisher Joseph Johnson. Her growing knowledge of radical ideals paired with her personal experiences with patriarchy and abuse from her father, and her family's clear preference for her brother Ned. They are both major builders of an interest and passion that would be a centre-stone of her adult life.

Wollstonecraft's intellectual experiences at Newington Green supports the history of London as a major space for discussing these culturally stimulating waves of ideas and for its ability to house individuals of every kind. Being known for both poverty and high society, London offered an opportunity for almost anything to be born from its busy streets. On the one hand, "London was iniquity itself, the poisoned spring of fashion, the nursery of vice, crime, riot,

and all the other enormities unmasked in Samuel Johnson's satirical poem *London* but it is also true that “many contemporaries were invigorated by the London experience: the metropolis was varied, energizing, an antidote against melancholy” (Porter “London”). In London, “a culture of worldly sociability grew up, increasingly secular in form and content, contributing to the commercialization of leisure and the modernization of opinion in the public sphere” (Porter “London”). These aspects supported the massive expansion of print culture through the century but they also coordinate the existence of sentiments being affirmed by the fight for American independence and the revolution in France.

In 1785 Wollstonecraft went to Lisbon, Portugal to help Fanny Blood, who was now married and pregnant. Unfortunately, Fanny and her baby died not long after Wollstonecraft’s arrival from Fanny’s long struggle with tuberculosis. Fanny was one of Wollstonecraft’s closest friends with whom she arguably had the deepest connection to this point in her lifetime, and this loss had a profound impact on her. After Fanny’s death, Wollstonecraft returned to the school that she had left in the hands of her sisters. The school was losing pupils and accumulating debt by this time, and it had dissolved without the care of Wollstonecraft and Fanny Blood.

Following the closure of her school, Wollstonecraft wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*⁴(1787), a collection of short essays and guides on topics such as manners, love, morality and the treatment of servants, directed at mothers and the young generation of women

⁴ Mary Poovey explains that “even though late eighteenth-century moralists described femininity as innate, they also insisted that feminine virtues needed constant cultivation. Instructions about proper conduct appeared in the numerous periodicals addressed specifically to women, in more general essay-periodicals like the *Spectator*, and in ladies’ conduct books” (Poovey 15).

teachers. In November of 1786 Wollstonecraft was employed as a governess by Lord and Lady Kingsborough in Dublin, Ireland. This position lasted only until August 1787, when she was dismissed for reasons unknown. From here she returned to London to seek out publisher Joseph Johnson. He connected her to the radicals of London, introducing her to Sarah Trimmer, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Thomas Christie, Thomas Holcroft, and Henry Fuseli (Orlando “A Writer in London”). These revolutionary minds and meetings mark another key aspect of eighteenth-century life – the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas through the expansion of print culture. As James Raven and Karen O’Brien explain in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Volume 2: English and British Fiction 1750-1820*, “the revolution in book production across all genres is dramatic. Before 1700 up to about 1,800 different printed titles were issued annually; by 1820 up to 5,500” (1). The expansion of print culture, publishing, and bookselling during the eighteenth century was a key ingredient in the recipe for the circulation of Enlightenment ideas. There was a steady rise in the growth of demand for reading material both due to the rising populations and literacy rates; however, “the book-consuming public certainly did not grow as fast as the volume of publications” (Popkin).

Another factor in the rise in print demand was the shifting attitude towards what was considered the right type of reading material. As Popkin describes, Enlightenment principles supported “a shift from the ‘intensive’ reading of a small number of books, mostly traditional religious texts, to ‘extensive’ consumption of a constantly changing literary diet, which seems to have affected at least a significant part of the European reading public, [and] stimulated the development of the book trade” (Popkin). However, “despite the strong connections between the book trade and the Enlightenment, both publishers and writers always remained conscious of the fact that the interests of the industry and those of the movement, though often parallel, were not

identical” (Popkin). This is important to this thesis because literature is part of a wider societal production which is influenced by forces greater than the whims and wishes of the author holding the pen. As Macherey’s work suggests, the development of print culture and writing habits during the eighteenth century will directly correlate to ruling ideologies at work during the time period; as literature sketches a caricature of ruling ideology, trends, acceptable forms of literature and norms can tell us a lot about what were the driving forces of the culture. Here both, moments of conflicting ideological plotlines and popular stylistic aspects in a text can show readers the limits of literary form and production as will be explored in both novels written by Wollstonecraft.

Wollstonecraft continued to put her thoughts about girls’ education into writing. In 1788, she completed a didactic children’s work, titled *Original Stories from Real Life*. The first edition was published by Joseph Johnson anonymously, but a second edition was published under Wollstonecraft’s name in 1791, with illustrations by the poet and engraver William Blake. Her next work and first novel, *Mary, A Fiction*, was published anonymously by Johnson in 1788 (the fictional “Cave of Fancy” was begun in 1787 but not completed).

The following year, Wollstonecraft published an education anthology through Joseph Johnson under the pseudonym, Mr. Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution. Titled, *The Female Reader: or, Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse: Selected from the Best Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads; for the Improvement of Young Women* (1789). During this time period in Wollstonecraft’s life, ripples from the growing French Revolution influenced the lives of intellectuals and writers everywhere. The French Revolution stands as a moment of radical critical expression and revolutionary national change in Europe. What is important about this event to this thesis is the fact that this radical expression and revolution was initially supported in

Europe and Great Britain, arguably through the dissemination of nationally sanctioned modes of literary production. The attitudes of the French Revolution could not have been reacted upon in the same way in England without the support of a growing print culture, rising literacy rates, and a growing interest in the expression of reason from the individual as sustained from still-mounting Enlightenment ideals.

In response to attitudes of the French Revolution and specifically Edmund Burke's political pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) (the first published response to Burke's work) to be followed by *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in January 1792. She moved to revolutionary Paris in December of the same year, meeting radical minds including Thomas Paine, as well as Helen Maria Williams and her new lover John Hurford Stone. Wollstonecraft found an appreciation for France during this period and gained a new understanding of revolution and radical social change. From June to August of 1793 she experienced her first real love affair with writer and American citizen, Gilbert Imlay. The couple bore a child together, a daughter, Fanny, born May 14, 1794. Imlay stayed away from Wollstonecraft even through the birth of their daughter and she later found him living with another woman, leading to their separation and Wollstonecraft's first suicide attempt.

In April of 1795 Wollstonecraft returned to London from France but her return was not to last very long. Despite their turbulent relationship, she traveled on behalf of Imlay "to trace an illicit cargo on which he was owed money" (Orlando) to Sweden, Norway and Denmark, an experience she wrote about in her *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). Wollstonecraft was distressed by Imlay's defection but in her writing suggests that she was glad of the chance to travel and of the emotional distraction this would

provide. She returned to London in September of 1795 where she soon after received a proposal of marriage that was rumoured to have come from the widowed poet, dramatist and translator, Thomas Holcroft.

Late in 1795 Mary Wollstonecraft attempted suicide for a second time when she jumped off Putney Bridge in London but she was saved. This struggle shows her fragile and unwell state of mind during this time-period but by 1796 she made her way back into London intellectual society by way of her friendship with the philosopher and writer William Godwin. Later the same year she and Godwin became lovers and Mary Wollstonecraft was concerned when she found herself pregnant later that year. Unlike Imlay, Godwin married Wollstonecraft on March 29, 1797. They shared one house, Godwin kept separate lodgings to work, and the two became happy together in companionship. On August 30, Wollstonecraft gave birth to her second daughter, Mary, but birthing complications caused her to develop septicaemia. Wollstonecraft's daughter Mary would follow her mother's passion for writing and go on to become the author of *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Wollstonecraft died eleven days after childbirth, leaving behind her a legacy of passion, struggle, and works of radical thought.

After her death William Godwin published, *Memoir of the Author of "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman"* and he assembled Wollstonecraft's literary remains in four volumes of *Posthumous Works*. Despite revealing what were considered shocking details of Wollstonecraft's life, he naively hoped to ensure her legacy in the world and to himself "with the best of intentions" (Wardle, Introduction 48). These published works included her second novel *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (published in 1798).

The development of a feminist thinker

The following section will outline the content and progression of Mary Wollstonecraft's writing, both fiction and non-fiction. This will allow for a clearer understanding of the evolution of her writing and her development as a thinker. Perceiving the development of her passion for women's education, equality and feminism in her non-fictional writing will allow for a conversation regarding the limits imposed on these ideas by the form of novel as a product of ruling ideology.

As we saw earlier, Wollstonecraft's first published work was *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). Wollstonecraft shares opinions on manners, morality, love and more, guiding the education of a woman from infancy, through the learning of accomplishments and the difficulty of becoming the head of a household at a very young age. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* is a text designed to guide female readers through the perspectives and challenges associated with being a woman and raising (and educating) a daughter. Its more conventional presentation as conduct literature nevertheless held ideas that would emerge in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792. Published by Joseph Johnson in April 1787, the work is structured as a conduct book with advice on child rearing, moral conduct, manners and etiquette, love and of course, education. As her first published work *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* is a sign of things to come, setting forth many of the major themes of concentration that Wollstonecraft would go on to explore in her future published works.

As a form of education, works of conduct and advice-giving (like *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*) were written by both men and women but "women writers increasingly took advantage of the culture's growing belief that subjective experience could be a ground of

authority to claim special understanding and knowledge relevant to women's lives" (Staves 246). Knowledge of socially approved conduct in family and public social affairs was generally a female responsibility. Similarly, "in part because letter writing was such a sanctioned activity for women, women novelists often found the letter form accessible" (Staves 235); the epistolary novel had become a popular choice for women writers during the eighteenth century.

The number of women writing during the eighteenth century continued to grow and "by 1789 women writers had become a normal, albeit minority, part of literary production" (Staves 25). In "'The First of a New Genus': Mary Wollstonecraft as a Literary Critic and Mentor to Mary Hays" Mary Waters confirms of the late eighteenth century that "besides writing romances, novels, poetry, and plays, women had done literary work of almost every kind. They had translated, edited, and written conduct books and literary criticism" (Waters "The First" 416). Susan Staves claims that "although reviewers were generally indulgent, indeed, frequently gallant or chivalric, toward women writers, this was typically so only as long as reviewers could construe what women wrote as suitably feminine" (Staves 242). In considering the fact that "suitably feminine" was a major ideological driver for the acceptance of literature, Macherey's description of ideology as ruling ideas of imaginary relationships becomes real as a limiting force in the production of fiction.

Wollstonecraft's interest in conduct books and works that guide the lives of women also resulted in her first novel *Mary, A Fiction* and *Original Stories from Real Life* in 1788. The novel continued Wollstonecraft's relationship with the publisher Johnson, and threw her into the literary world. *Mary, A Fiction* is identified as a bildungsroman with a heroine very akin to Wollstonecraft herself who "rejects the passive, escapist sensibility of her mother as vigorously as the brutal lewdness of her father" (Orlando). However, critics have noted that the heroine of

this novel remains prone to sensibility throughout the course of the work despite Wollstonecraft's aversion to the concept. The plot follows a young woman, Mary, as she tries to find comfort and inspiration while struggling in a loveless marriage. She attempted to gain this sense of love outside of marriage in friendships with others, nursing two close friends in sickness (both of whom die).

Original Stories from Real Life follows tales told by a governess to her two female charges, Mary and Caroline, on the development and cultivation of an educated mind. With sections concerning issues of anger, dress, employment and charity, among others, governess Mrs. Mason hoped to guide Mary and Caroline through didactic story to eradicate their prejudices "and substitute good habits instead of those they had carelessly contracted" (*Original Stories* "Introduction" viii). This trend continues with the publication of the collection, *The Female Reader: or, Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse: Selected from the Best Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads; for the Improvement of Young Women* in 1789 which Wollstonecraft published under a male pseudonym. This work is feminist in its emphasis on ideas of independent judgement and includes works from Wollstonecraft herself and eight other women, making twenty percent of its extracts written by women. It becomes clear that the education and upbringing of women is very important to the focus of Wollstonecraft's writing early in her career.

Wollstonecraft's strong feelings about the importance of education can easily be connected to what was known as the Enlightenment era which framed the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries across Europe. The important influence of this era on ideology and literature demands an explanation of the Enlightenment and French Revolutionary context which frames the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. This era saw a turn towards intellectualism and individuality

and stressed the power of reason over divine power and blind faith. During this time “Cartesian philosophy, Newtonian science, and the political theories of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke amounted to a radical questioning of all tradition and implied a relativizing of the European religious experience” (Tonkin). Importantly, the broadness of these ideas reached all aspects of life for people in Europe and Great Britain and changed how people were living life and how they were expressing it. In England the growth of Enlightenment ideals in the early eighteenth century has been described as conservative in nature in that “after the Glorious Revolution, the constitution incorporated such key Enlightenment demands as personal freedom under habeas corpus and (in large measure, albeit incompletely) religious toleration” (Porter “England”). However, later in the century a polarization of Enlightenment ideals led to a tendency to associate Enlightenment thought with revolution and Jacobinism. As Roy Porter suggests in *The Encyclopaedia of Enlightenment*, “once libertarian rhetoric had been appropriated by rights-of-man radicals like Tom Paine, hopes that freedom and order would march forward together were dashed” (“England”).

Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke stand as two strong political voices that produced influential political literature during the time of revolution in the late eighteenth century. Paine was English born but was exiled to America in 1774. He worked closely with Benjamin Franklin and George Washington and became known for his support of republican democracy. During the French Revolution he moved to France where he supported abolishing the monarchy and spent time in prison before moving back to America in 1802. An extremely influential individual, Paine was most successful in communicating his ideas through political literature. As John Keane explains in his entry on “Paine” for the *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, the political message and style of *Common Sense* (1776), *The Age of Reason* (1794) and the two-part *Rights*

of Man (1791–1792), ensured that they became the three most widely read political tracts of the century (Keane “Thomas Paine”).

In an opposite fashion Edmund Burke attacked revolutionary movements in France. In fact, “as early as 1790, Edmund Burke blamed the Enlightenment for this rush toward wholesale transformation” (Hunt et al.). As Seamus Deane states in *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England 1789-1832*, “Burke was responsible for the incorporation into the public debate of the names and reputations of chief thinkers of the French Enlightenment” where he branded them as “atheistic conspirators” plotting revolution (Deane 5). Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) stands as a strong defence of traditional ideals and an attack on Enlightenment political philosophies. Natalie Fuehrer suggests in *The Rights of Woman as Chimera: The Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (2007) that in *Reflections* “Burke argues that legitimate government rests on honored traditions and habits, rather than on individual rights – a notion that had gained philosophical and political currency by the eighteenth century” (Fuehrer 1). Deborah Weiss agrees, explaining in her work *The Female Philosopher and Her Afterlives: Mary Wollstonecraft, the British Novel, and the Transformations of Feminism* (2017) that Burke called for not only the preservation of these honored traditions but also an absolute and rigid reverence of them (Weiss 11). Burke’s work was highly debated by philosophers and politicians alike; in fact Wollstonecraft’s reply to this work with *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) came “just twenty-eight days after *Reflections* was published and it was the first of forty-five responses to Burke’s treatise within the first year of its publication” (Fuehrer 1). This response eventually inspired Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 where Wollstonecraft lays out her system of beliefs concerning women in the home and society.

Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke, although different in their philosophies of man and society (an example of warring ideologies during the late eighteenth-century), neither are particularly concerned with the rights of women, which points to understanding why the fight for female equality is an unspeakable topic, as it is not on the forefront of eighteenth-century ideological concerns. Gillian Skinner explains that “in the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft argued that the categorization of women as creatures of feeling rather than reason was the product of a faulty education and environment and had nothing to do with supposedly innate characteristics” (Skinner 104). Indeed, as Fuehrer explains of Wollstonecraft’s beliefs that she “does not base her claim for equality on natural rights. Rather, her demand for equality is based on the character of the human soul” (Fuehrer 5). This sets her thinking apart in that it does not forgo sensibility or passion for reason but instead idealizes the sensibility found in the human character of each and every human soul. Deborah Weiss describes Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as revolutionary in that “it conceives of women as an unjustly underdeveloped segment of mankind – that is, as a unique class of human beings whose moral and intellectual development has been delayed as a result of the culturally constructed idea of ‘sexual character,’ or gendered traits in our parlance” (Weiss 3). While Mary Wollstonecraft condemned the assignment of feeling and sensibility to women as their primary mode of engaging with the world, and possibly the only one they were deemed capable of, she retained a belief that thinking, reasoning beings could experience, though not be ruled by, a capacity for heightened emotional response.

Yet Enlightenment philosophies continuing to develop through the French Revolution supported the development of rights for the reasoning individual man as well as emerging concepts of feminism. Anne K. Mellor explains in “Feminist Theory” in *The Encyclopaedia of*

Enlightenment (2005), “the claim made by such French philosophes as Rousseau, Voltaire, and Condorcet for ‘natural’ or universal human rights was quickly extended to women both by Condorcet and by female intellectuals during the early days of the French Revolution” (Mellor). Mary Poovey explores this idea in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* stating that “the French Revolution, with its accompanying economic, political, and ideological ferment, posed a direct threat to the principle of subordination, of which feminine propriety was a part, and thus brought the issue of “women’s rights” to the attention of men and women alike” (Poovey 30).

Although the events of the French Revolution were happening in France there was global discussion as to the effects of such social and political upheaval. This discussion extended to writers of fiction and non-fiction alike in Britain where “there was growing concern that Britain was about to disintegrate, as France had in the early and mid-1790s, in conflicts of culture, religion, class, region, and even gender” (Kelly *Women, Writing* 165). As Deane describes, “the revolution polarized British politics to an unprecedented extent. In a country where party lines had by no means run deep, profound ideological differences suddenly appeared” (Deane 4). Gary Kelly affirms that “in the late 1790s the debate in Great Britain was concerned with the decadence of the French Directory, consolidation of the Revolutionary state under Bonaparte, the spread of the Revolution to the other parts of Europe, and France’s turn to imperial expansion” (Kelly *Women, Writing* 165). This growing Enlightenment thought spilled into the literary world and was expressed through words of women writers commonly at the end of the century.

Wollstonecraft would produce her most celebrated work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) just two years after her response to Burke. Here, she addresses issues of politics, including social structures and property, but publishes in anonymity. It was here that she began

her introduction to the world of political writing and conversation which made her aware of the fact that “no woman had yet presumed to devote an entire book to the thesis that members of her sex should be granted the preparation necessary to make them intelligent wives and mothers, better citizens of this world and the next” (Wardle, Introduction 37). Reviews of this text were generally fierce and often harshly critical, but radicals responded with positivity. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was a radical response to a number of authoritative texts giving women little to no rights or consideration including Rousseau’s *Émile*. In *Vindication* Wollstonecraft intensely argues that women are rational and reasonable human beings and it is because of how they are educated that they seem inferior to men. When Rousseau says that the more women become like men the more they lose their power over men, Wollstonecraft replies that she does not wish women “to have power over men, but over themselves” (Wollstonecraft, *VRW* 107). In this way Wollstonecraft uses Enlightenment ideas such as rationality and reason to support her goal of equal education where other male thinkers, like Rousseau, had used them to argue the opposite.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was also written in response to eighteenth-century political and social voices that argued women should not receive a rational and intellectual education. In the preface of her work she calls for equal standards of education for boys and girls regardless of wealth, stating, “my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she not be prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue” (*VRW* 22). She dismisses the premises of late eighteenth-century arguments which aim to keep women as the uneducated, irrational property of man, arguing that educated women will make better wives, mothers and members of society. She also explains that “women should have representatives [legal, political, social], instead of being arbitrarily

governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government” (VRW 176). Her strength and conviction are felt in the language she uses to describe the state of women and the men who possess them and have made this work a continued subject of historical interest and study.

Wollstonecraft broke from political and feminist writings in 1796 to publish a personal travel narrative, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. But she returned to familiar feminist themes in her final years while working on her novel *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). This novel was published by Godwin in his *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) after her death in 1797. This novel, although unfinished, centres around a heroine who is wrongly imprisoned in an insane asylum by her husband and separated from her baby daughter. She falls in love with another male inmate and they bond through their love of reading and mutual compassion for the ill-treated. This text speaks strongly to Wollstonecraft’s passion for women’s rights and has been suggested that it serves as a follow-up text to her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). There is no conclusion to this novel, just a number of possible endings penned by Wollstonecraft, some of which involve the heroine’s demise and one rather appealing ending which has the heroine and another woman finding the separated child and settling down to raise her together without the presence of husband or lover. This novel outlines the struggle that women faced against the law and the lack of rights granted to them by societal authority. Anna Wilson, author of *Persuasive Fictions: Feminist Narrative and Critical Myth*, speaks of an alternative to the suffering of women as the attempt to exist in the public sphere but suggests that “Wollstonecraft’s choice of the novel [form] suggests an attempt to create that absent alternative and I have been arguing that the novel form enables her to model the workings of a counter-

public sphere as the polemic debating structure of *Rights of Woman* does not” (Wilson 46). I will suggest that what we are able to read in Wollstonecraft’s novels is the struggle against ruling ideology with which women grappled. In this way, even after death Wollstonecraft’s previously unpublished work *The Wrongs of Woman* revealed her deep yearning to explore and (perhaps) find an answer for the problem of women existing in a public sphere.

In conclusion to this biographical picture of the life and writing of Wollstonecraft I would like to point out some important issues and concepts for further contemplation. It becomes obvious from Wollstonecraft’s biographical story the ways in which the events of her life shaped her beliefs. The often-impooverished state of her family, her rootless existence, her patriarchal abusive father, and her failure in relationships (both friendships and relationships of sexual desire) all formed her passion for revolution. The independence she found in supporting herself through work, eventually through writing, was essential to her passion. In writing she was able to express her frustrations and thoughts for change but also her strength and intelligence of character.

Her novels show her desire to speak about the struggles against social convention and political traditionalism at work in the world that women face. In her letters, she quotes many of the well-known authors of the day including but not limited to Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and Oliver Goldsmith, but in her published works she was less inclined to rely on the words of others, preferring instead to present her ideas directly and originally. In her study, Anna Wilson explains that “while Wollstonecraft’s final text has been variously explained as mere autobiography, as a retreat from controversy, and as a capitulation to acceptable feminine ways of knowing, the novel in the 1790s is also readily interpretable as an act of political engagement” (Wilson 26). She suggests that Wollstonecraft uses the form of novel to express her political and

feministic sentiments because it brought the work further away from a radical association and the possibility of censorship and harassment in the wake of anti-Jacobin movements (Wilson 29). In this way, “for radicals, the Jacobin novel briefly seemed a means whereby their revolutionary ideas could be conveyed in peaceful, domesticated terms” (Wilson 31). Wollstonecraft’s heroines both claim to be something different, a different form of woman, but their ill-fated narratives struggle to reconcile their existence with the rest of the living world. What is striking about Wollstonecraft’s life is her ability to make such a strong impact through her writing. She wrote about very revolutionary concepts regarding politics and the state of women in society and almost all of her works were received at an intersection of critique that was either positive (usually by other radical voices), or negative by traditionalists. She contributed to many genres of writing including journal reviews, translations, history of the revolution, educational writing for revolutionary France, letters, novels and educational works. She is one of the strongest voices to write in both fiction and non-fiction genres during the revolutionary era of the 1790s and therefore the most fitting subject for this investigation which aims to explore the ability (or perhaps the incapacity, read through Macherey’s concept of silence) authors have to express revolutionary concepts through the form of novel.

The reception of a life

Wollstonecraft’s strong voice has been documented by a number of scholars and biographers looking to capture her life and writing in a literary form. The following review of biographical literature will serve to chronicle the reception of Wollstonecraft’s life. An overview of these works will help to identify trends in the study of Wollstonecraft and her work as well as

identify patterns of critical fallacy as outlined by the work of Pierre Macherey in the previous chapter.

We will begin with a biographical work written about Wollstonecraft by her husband William Godwin after her death in 1797. *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* appeared in January 1798 and sets out to explore, with complete transparency, the life, struggles and accomplishments of Wollstonecraft. However, its publication “provoked widespread hostility from the conservative press” as it explored many morally questionable aspects of Wollstonecraft’s life including her sexual relationships outside of marriage and her two suicide attempts (Clemit and Walker, Introduction 11) This work is intriguing because, as Mitzi Myers notes, “Godwin’s memoir is an unusual hybrid, one which unites Wollstonecraft’s notion of herself, Godwin’s reading of her character, and his analysis of the character’s impact on himself and his philosophy” (Myers, “Godwin’s” 300). Godwin’s *Memoirs*, which by the standard of the time is too candid, describe Wollstonecraft with an unflinching frankness setting a brightly lit stage for all biographers to follow.

Since the publication of Godwin’s memoirs there have been numerous biographical works examining the life of Wollstonecraft. In considering Ralph Wardle’s *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography* (1951), Janet Todd explains, “Wardle’s biography remains an impressive work, although some of its assumptions about women appear dated and some of its historical statements have been proved inaccurate” (Todd “Biographies” 728). Although some aspects of this work may seem outdated, Wardle’s biography remains a popular reference point in scholarship concerning Wollstonecraft.

Two decades later, in 1974, Claire Tomalin published *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, grouped in an assembly of Wollstonecraft biographies published beginning in

1970 with *One Woman's Situation* by Margaret George, followed by Edna Nixon's *Mary Wollstonecraft* in 1971 and Eleanor Flexner's *Mary Wollstonecraft* in 1972. Tomalin's work was published after she discovered some new genealogical material concerning Wollstonecraft's family. This biography stands as a good text for gaining a general knowledge of Wollstonecraft's life. Although acclaimed for its general structure, this particular biography often falls into a negative perspective provided to the reader by Tomalin. Her descriptions of Wollstonecraft are often harsh, having little sympathy for her subject. I would suggest that this is an example of Macherey's normative fallacy which sees the critic cast their subject in a negative or failing light as if the subject of Mary Wollstonecraft's life should be other than what it is. As fellow biographer Ralph M. Wardle explains in a review of Tomalin's work, "Tomalin shows a surprising disregard for exact detail" (Wardle, Review 147) and "has a tendency to turn a striking phrase at the cost of strict accuracy" (147). As Carol H. Poston agrees, "Claire Tomalin, having only a few more, largely insignificant, facts in hand, shows a scheming, manipulative, egoistic woman as the first arbiter of women's rights" (Poston 263). For example, Tomalin writes of Wollstonecraft's relationship with married artist and writer Henry Fuseli: "as time went by Mary, like the devil, grew more intense and demanding; she said there was nothing 'criminal' in her love, but still it proved to much for Fuseli to cope with" (Tomalin 91). A statement such as "like the devil" paints a dramatic and negative picture of Wollstonecraft which follows her throughout Tomalin's work. As much as my interest in Wollstonecraft begs me to rail against such a portrait, I think it would be wrong to disregard this biographical work. As it is true that each biography shows a slightly different picture of its subject, perhaps there is something to be gained from this view of Wollstonecraft. The inspirational passionate feminist she is known as today is definitely not how she was considered during her own time, and Tomalin's account could be a

consideration of Wollstonecraft closer to how she was viewed then. I will consider these aspects of Wollstonecraft's character but I will also note here Tomalin's use of Wollstonecraft's semi-autobiographical heroines in characterizing Wollstonecraft herself. This deep connection is useful when considering Wollstonecraft's fiction as well as the specific conditions necessary for the production of each novel, including biographical events.

Janet Todd's *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* written in 2000 stands as arguably the most comprehensive biographical work on Wollstonecraft's life to date. This biography is extremely detailed, attempting to work through all of the most important events and exchanges that occurred during Wollstonecraft's life. Todd's understanding of Wollstonecraft is very clear and as Claudia L. Johnson explains in a review of Todd's work, that it "unflinchingly conveys the rancor, the self-pity, the envy, the competitiveness, the pettiness, the posturing, the abrasiveness, and the over-sensitivity that were as much a part of who Wollstonecraft was as the courage, the daring, the thwarted but genuine brilliance, the generosity, and the lucidity" ("Review" 669). This balance in depicting Wollstonecraft's character shines through Todd's work in a way that is not present in the work of Tomalin. These aspects of Todd's work make Wollstonecraft real to the reader because we get to read not only about her passion and strength as a feminist writer but of the struggle, loss and hardship she experienced while living such a tortured life. She becomes not just a symbol of feminist thought but a radical example of a woman living a feminist lifestyle while growing up through a time that did not ideologically support it. Marilyn Boxer explains this aspect as the inconsistency between Wollstonecraft's proclamations concerning the idea that women should consider themselves to be reasonable individuals instead of relying on men, and her unflinching ability to fall into states of extreme sensibility regarding the men in her life. She states that "the contradiction between

Wollstonecraft's insistence on the value of reason and her actual surrender to the demands of sensibility stands out, however, more than the power of social constraints on her self-development to fuel her revolt or the courage she displayed in defiance” (Boxer 600). As Boxer identifies “contradiction,” I will suggest that this directly correlates to the spaces of contradictions that will be identified in Wollstonecraft’s novels as absence. This constant struggle between Wollstonecraft’s ideological state of being and acting in the world and writing will add greatly to this project’s discussion of writing as a form of ideological expression and makes interesting connections, suggesting that Wollstonecraft may not have lived the life she strove to convince other women to live.

Lyndall Gordon published a Wollstonecraft biography in 2005 titled *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*. This work offers an inspirational view of Mary Wollstonecraft and reads as a celebration of her life as well as an educational work. Gordon spends a great deal of time discussing the personal aspects of Wollstonecraft’s life, and as Brenda Ayres claims in *Between and Between: The Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft*, “Gordon provides substantial, appropriate and interesting historical and social context” (Ayres 171). I would tend to agree that Gordon’s work provides a good contextual account of Wollstonecraft’s biography and that this source becomes quite useful because this thesis considers social and historical context to be a keystone in understanding the workings of ruling ideology.

Most recently, Charlotte Gordon’s *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter* (2015) looks to make important and intriguing connections between Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter Mary Godwin Shelley. Ayres applauds this unique approach but claims that much of what Gordon’s text presents about Wollstonecraft “is haggard and redundant with what has been published already” (Ayres 202) This work may not

present much in the way of new biographical information but is fascinating in that it remarks on the future generational effects of Wollstonecraft's ideas.

Considering the wide variety of biographical accounts of Wollstonecraft published in the last 75 years alone, it is clear that a continuing fascination exists with the life and death of Wollstonecraft, her feminist ideas, and her collection of works. Of interest to this thesis is the differing accounts and utter contradiction in the depiction and reception of Wollstonecraft's life. Not only do biographers disagree on how to represent her character, but they choose to present widely different biographical accounts. This makes assessing Wollstonecraft's life a challenging task. This history of biographical accounts represents my search for answers regarding Wollstonecraft's life but I was left with none. The intense and long-lasting interest in the life of this woman demonstrates that she lived a short, strong, inspiring, sad and often contradictory life that is still impacting the world in some way. But just as biographers struggle to find consensus in her life of contradiction, so too do critics of her work who often revert to failure as an explanation of her contradictory literary expression. As we will see, there seems to be a similar search continuing in non-biographical Wollstonecraft scholarship.

There has been a large body of work published examining how Wollstonecraft's fictional writing falls into the category of feminine or sentimental writing of the late eighteenth century and what that means for her as the author of the feminist *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Much of this work understands Wollstonecraft's writing of her fictional female characters as emotional, dramatic and trapped in lives ordained by patriarchy as a failure. However, in the following chapters I will explore Wollstonecraft's two works of fiction and suggest that this sense of failure is an example of what Macherey would call the normative fallacy, where the critic expresses that the work should be other than what it is according to a normative model. The

findings of many critics and scholars suggest that if Wollstonecraft stands for feminist structures, then her fiction should reflect this when in reality this may not have been possible.

Chapter 3: Macherey, *Mary*, and the Rights of Women

George Justice declares in *The Manufacturers of Literature: Writing and the Literary Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century England* that the novel “was to become the most successful and important cultural response to the clash between the disinterested public sphere and the literary marketplace. Novel culture provides the structure for a lasting and meaningful “counter public sphere” (Justice 19). In considering the late eighteenth century, Jennifer Golightly explains that the novel “was a form that was more easily read than poetry or political theory and was thus more accessible to a larger number of people, including women and the working classes. For this reason, novels were viewed by many during the eighteenth century as a particularly pernicious influence on society but especially on young women” (Golightly 12). Consequently, novel-writing by women during this time, although popular, was thought to be a rather risk ridden pastime depending on the woman writing.

However, even women with radical and revolutionary leanings seem unable to complete novels where the heroines end up happy, married or even alive. As Golightly notes, “female radical novels published around the same time that *Hermesprong* [1796] and *Anna St. Ives* [1792] were published tend to conclude with the heroines alone or dead” (15). She observes that no radical female novel of the 1790s ends with a marriage except for Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story* (1791). However, this lone example leaves no doubt as to the unhappiness and estrangement that female heroines who pursue their lives in more revolutionary or feminist ways will face. Golightly goes on to suggest that,

The situations facing the heroines of these novels are often rooted within the historical and legal climate of their composition, but the larger struggles these heroines face— individuality and independence within the framework of sexual relationships, marriage

and maternity, expression and satisfaction of a range of desires, or articulation of the need for women to have both “public” and “private” lives—are struggles that women continue to face (21).

Exploring this claim is one of the objects of this study. Identifying the limits of the novel form, which I will suggest are directly correlated to the production of literature within the ruling ideology using work by Pierre Macherey in his *Theory of Literary Production*, can help us to understand further what it is literature can tell us. By viewing literature as a product of ruling ideology we can learn more about how we should be reading it and what it can, and cannot, tell us about the ideological issues that have shaped it. Understanding the development of women, writing and politics during the eighteenth century will clearly develop our understanding of ruling ideologies at work in the life of Mary Wollstonecraft and inevitably, as the forces producing (and dictating) her fictional novels.

In understanding the state of the novel and women as writers during the late eighteenth century in England it becomes clear that literature and in particular the novel has become a space where contemporary women’s issues of legal status and equality are explored. Many scholars agree that “the novel’s ‘newness’ of language is identified with an explicitly female authority, the form’s hybrid status between public and private modes of discourse extending opportunities for a liberty of speech often denied elsewhere in eighteenth-century culture” (Ballaster 214). It may well be the case that a number of late eighteenth-century women writers, such as Wollstonecraft, Smith and Inchbald, use the novel form as a space to express the inequalities that women are facing. However, I will suggest in what follows that this idea of “liberty of speech” is not actually the case when we analyse the fate and difficulties of a number of fictional heroines created during the late eighteenth century. The pattern of novelistic heroines ending up dead,

shunned, alone or unhappy in marriage shows us that as much as novel writing may be allowing women writers to explore new situations for women, there is no assurance that where heroines search for legal citizenship or a marriage of equality, these things are possible or that the search for them can end with the reward of happiness. I would suggest that this pattern of discontented female novel characters identifies to us the conditions available to authors forming literature. It can also show us its limits; the nonexistent contented (in love, marriage, legal consideration, and financial stability) female character written by a female author during the late eighteenth century. Here it becomes obvious that the increasing discontent among literate women of the period becomes greatly magnified through the production of literature, as described by Macherey to be a caricature of defining ideological traits. According to Macherey, reading literature in order to understand its limits gives us insight into the historical conditions and their ideological impacts and that is what I hope to explore in the fictional novels written by Wollstonecraft.

One of the main inspirations for radical novel writing and the exploration of controversial subject matter in novels in the closing decade of the eighteenth-century stems from the revolutionary debate on political and social values visible to the world through the events of the French and American Revolutions. The boldness of eighteenth-century cultural and political expression coupled with the attempt by women writers to broach the topic of the social and political state of women during the late eighteenth century led to a collection of radical novels written by women. There were women writers who did not broach revolutionary topics during the 1790s but those, like Mary Wollstonecraft, who did provide strong ideological projects which heighten the ability of the critic to read ideological gaps and silences. Themes explored by Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, Frances Burney, Mary Hays, and Hannah More become

visible in the works of Wollstonecraft and add a valuable support to understanding the culture of women's writing during this time period.

Charlotte Smith (b. London 1749)⁵ grew up to be an accomplished writer and poet, penning a number of novels including *Emmeline* (1788), *Desmond* (1792), *The Old Manor House* (1793) and *The Banished Man* (1794). Smith's novels broached topics of politics and the social position of women, concerns which echo her own life arising from her disastrous arranged marriage to Benjamin Smith. Monica Smith Hart describes her in "Charlotte Smith's Exilic Persona" as "a woman wrongfully separated from the life that is rightfully hers by a rotten deal in the marriage market, inept estate management, and unfair laws governing inheritance, property ownership, and a woman's legal status" (306). Smith's struggles for equality, family and financial security were also the aspects of her life that drove her to write professionally. As Susan Staves explains, Smith "made a disastrous marriage to a wastrel husband that left her as the sole supporter of twelve children, and she tried to maintain her family's gentility. Consequently, she was driven to write for money even more earnestly than her more humbly born contemporaries" (366).⁶ Smith is considered little more than property to be sold in marriage

⁵ All biographical information outlining the lives of eighteenth-century women writers has been sourced from the *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles Database*. All subsequent biographical information has been sourced from this database unless otherwise stated.

⁶ Cheryl Turner notes in *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, "Apart from the literary, political, moral, and educational motives for writing in other genres, the financial reasons were compelling. The average copyright fee from one novel was roughly equivalent to the annual wages of a laundry, scullery, or dairy maid, and therefore entirely

by her father to her husband. She has little to no legal control of her family's estate even though her husband is completely incapable of managing money of any kind.

In the wake of this frustrating state of living, Charlotte Smith became a part of the group of women "who relied primarily upon their income from authorship to support themselves and their families" (Turner 79). Smith struggled with pressures to produce novels which would sell. Her novels *Desmond* (1792) and *The Banished Man* (1794) focused on conflicts and events in Europe, which *The Old Manor House* (1793) looks backwards to the 1770s utilizing the then popular gothic style. Monica Smith Hart observes that

as a woman neglected by her family, disenfranchised by her nation, and strangled by Chancery, she had much to gain from the potential upheaval of English social mores and civil procedures promised by revolution. On the other hand, she also had much to lose by not conceding to anti-Jacobin pressures — most importantly, her ability to sell works and provide the sole financial support for her children, a very real need of which she regularly reminds her readers (Hart 311).

Her novels show a contradiction of revolutionary feeling where she struggles between seeing a need for social change and feeling pressure not to act on those feelings for fear of losing the ability to support herself and her family through sales of her literary works. In this contradiction we are reminded that literature is determined, not by an author's social passions or sensibilities,

inadequate for anyone attempting to maintain middle-class status" (116). For writers like Charlotte Smith, writing novels that sell can become a means of providing for herself and her family but writing novels that sell also means adhering to ideologically acceptable subject matter.

but more forcefully by the need to represent a product which supports social norms and will therefore be appropriate and produce a profit which is financially acceptable.

Smith becomes, through her writing of novels, one of many women writers, including Wollstonecraft, grappling in life with the struggles women face during the late eighteenth century trying to decide if radical or conservative writing is more worth their time; is it more important to write a product that will sell, ideologically, or write a product that struggles to express marginalized ideological ideas at the risk of failing to sell?

Elizabeth Inchbald (b. 1753 in Suffolk), grew up to become highly literate although she received no formal education, reading challenging texts of Milton, Plato and Aristotle. Her passion for writing and acting lead her to London in 1772 where she met her husband Joseph Inchbald (d. 1779) and acted on the stage until retiring in 1798 to write professionally. As we saw earlier, “by 1789 women writers had become a normal, albeit minority, part of literary production” (Staves 25) and in 1791 widowed Elizabeth Inchbald finally published her novel *A Simple Story* after many rejections as well as edits and suggestions by writers such as Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin. Inchbald “received initial payments of £200 and £150, respectively, for her novels *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796). These were high fees, but not unprecedented for a celebrated writer. The novels were a major success, and a second edition of *A Simple Story* was ordered less than three months after the first” (Turner 115). Inchbald’s (arguably most famous) work *A Simple Story* touches on a wide range of popular themes, including the education and gender roles of women, sensibility, orphaned daughters and marriage, explored by other women writers during the late eighteenth century; themes found in Wollstonecraft’s novels investigated later in this project.

Frances Burney (b.1752) was born into a lower-middle-class family of mixed Scottish and French nationality. She was self-educated and slow to learn to read but was sent to Mrs. Sheele's school in Queen Square, London in 1762. In 1768 Burney began what would become a large collection of letters and diaries and almost ten years later Burney published her first novel *Evelina* (1778), anonymously. Following *Evelina* Burney wrote a number of novels including *Cecilia* (1782), *Camilla* (1796) and *The Wanderer* (1814). Her novels relatively deal with a number of common themes of eighteenth-century novels written by women, including but not limited to marriage, absent fathers, and the dream of female happiness. Novels such as Burney's represent another commonality among novels written by women in that they focus on the growth and experiences of a central heroine who struggles with the limitations and labours women in the late eighteenth century were facing. They did so by placing heroines in situations faced by all women in the eighteenth-century world. George Justice expands on Burney's novels noting, "it is not coincidental that the heroines of Burney's novels, like herself, are relatively without social power; like her, they obtain an internal independence as thinking individuals. Culture becomes the crucial means through which the individual subject becomes the independent thinker required by the public sphere" (Justice 27). As we will see, this aspect of Burney's novels that parallels the two novels written by Wollstonecraft, who also strives to show the harsh realities that women face. I will suggest that even though many female authors and revolutionary thinkers worked to show these realities in their fiction, as Pierre Macherey suggests, this struggle will be the extent of their expression of revolutionary thought. That harsh realities for women fall into the category of ruling ideology but new ways of existing as a woman against such realities do not (are not sellable within the ruling modes of production) and are therefore not available for representation in novel form. Just as there were novelists more literary than revolutionary there were also

female novelists more revolutionary than literary. One such woman writer of the late eighteenth century was Mary Hays.

Mary Hays (b. 1760) is known as a writer of philosophical and religious pamphlets, novels and poetry. She had little formal education, gaining most of her knowledge through a determination for self-improvement and her association with well educated men. Her fiancé John Eccles died before they could be married, leaving Hays to a life comparable to widowhood when she began work as a teacher. Living as a part of the middle class she is well known for being a close friend and associate of Wollstonecraft. Some of her popular works include *Letters and Essays* (1793), *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). In *Letters and Essays* Hays speaks about the struggles that women face and the social and educational limits they live with in society that keeps them under a tyrannical patriarchy. This was followed closely by her autobiographical novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, guided by William Godwin, which explored sexuality and desire in a scandalous way. *The Victim of Prejudice* depicts sexual violence and issues of class structure when “a female victim of rape who denounces the gender construction of chastity” (Berdichevsky). Similar to Wollstonecraft’s *Maria or, The Wrongs of Woman* published posthumously a year earlier, *The Victim of Prejudice* offers little hope to female characters living in late eighteenth century society by painting an image of restrictive patriarchal culture and institutions that are impossible for its heroine to overcome (in fact heroine Mary looks to death as a relief from life and dies at the end of the novel). Hays was often criticized for her life choices because she was a woman who lived alone, never married and made her living through her writing of feminist texts. All of these aspects of Hays’ life are considerably similar to the issues in life that Wollstonecraft faced, and they shared a bond of friendship. Once again, we read of a female author writing novels during the late

eighteenth century which claim to represent the seeds of revolutionary transformation but which only continues to reproduce the state of struggle that eighteenth-century women endure.

It is important to note that there were other voices of woman writers producing literature during this time-period. One variety was of the more conservative group who chose to write about less radical subjects that did not attempt to challenge traditional culture, or politics. One such writer was Hannah More, born at Stapleton near Bristol in 1745. She received her education from her father, a tutor, and later at a school run by her sisters. She wrote a large number of moral works, most of them religiously based and many addressing the needs of the poor. Of interest in consideration of Hannah More is her work on women's education including her study *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) which outlines More's idea on women's education and how it should reflect Christian values and guide the upper classes to act as moral leaders for the lower classes. More's work on female education generally supports the social and gender hierarchies of her time-period and shows conservative and counter-revolutionary works responding to the French Revolution. This stands in stark contrast to many of the women writers of the day.

More wrote only one novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808); her heroine is intellectual and capable but a woman meeting More's high Christian standards, the only type of woman who would apply to be capable of such ability. Here religion's morality and standards impact almost every aspect in the consideration of the proper woman/wife including concerns of aesthetic qualities such as fashion. More's character recalls the directions of his mother on dress as "to dress indecently is as great an offence against purity and modesty, when it is the fashion, as when it is obsolete. There should be a line of demarcation somewhere. In the article of dress and appearance, Christian mothers should make a stand" (More 14). *Coelebs* went into a great

number of editions including four American editions; as Anne Scott explains in *Hannah More: The First Victorian*, More's *Coelebs* became one of the most popular novels of its time among the middle classes (Scott 277).

By looking at this sample of female authors writing at the end of the eighteenth century it becomes clear that a woman's place in society, marriage, politics and the education system was a highly debated hot topic. Each of these women used literature, often novels, to present their views on the subject. The advancement of print culture and the rising number of women novelists placed numerous novels and pamphlets concerned with women's issues into homes of families of high and low birth. This chapter has attempted to give a brief picture of the ideologies and culture working during the late eighteenth century. As waves of Enlightenment ideas spread since the beginning of the eighteenth century, changing intellectual, social and political priorities open the doors to revolutions in Europe and America. These changes are communicated through the use of a growing print culture including fictional novel writing. These forces flow through every aspect of life for the people living during this time and as we will explore, specifically for women authors and their literary products. As we have seen, women authors made good use of the ability to produce novels in the growing wave of print culture. According to Mary Waters, "monetary pressures prompted numerous women to turn to writing as a source of income" (3) especially women looking to support themselves. Gillian Skinner claims that this idea of self-support connects easily to Wollstonecraft's argument "for the importance of women having a variety of respectable employment opportunities which would mean that they 'would not marry for a support'" (Skinner 105). Skinner explains that Wollstonecraft even went as far to suggest, "that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in deliberations of government" (105). As women writers make

use of the literary stage to forward causes concerning gender, equality and the woman as an individual in society we can read late eighteenth century England as a period of ideological struggle.

Nevertheless, using Pierre Macherey's approach, I will argue that despite authorial intention, opinion, or enlightening political, cultural or social sentiment, the fiction female authors produce during the late eighteenth century reflects traditional ideologies entrenched in the form of novel. I suggest that by adjusting the critical gaze we use to consider these works, we can view them as produced from within ruling ideology and therefore determined in form. I claim that Wollstonecraft's two works of fiction stand most visibly as products reflecting an inability to envision happiness and success for heroines who are reasonable, independent and who follow their passions. This is particularly interesting when considering the bold expressions of feminist thought that Wollstonecraft articulates in her more famous works of non-fiction. This clear sense of non-fictional feminist conviction (arguably the strongest of her time), contradicted by the same author's inability to synthesize these aspects through the form of novel, makes Mary Wollstonecraft the ideal candidate for exploring Macherey's determination of fiction by ruling ideology creating silence. Subsequently, the following discussion will explore two novels written by Wollstonecraft. It will also review and examine the literary criticism surrounding her novels as a consideration of work done by previous scholars in connection with Macherey's critical fallacies.

Mary, A Fiction: a sensible story

I would like to begin my analysis of Wollstonecraft's fiction with a consideration of some of the elements we have explored including eighteenth century ideologies, the life of

Wollstonecraft and Pierre Macherey's theory of literary production, specifically his understanding of the concept of silence. I will first begin by introducing Wollstonecraft's only completed work of fiction, *Mary, A Fiction*, first published anonymously by Joseph Johnson in July of 1788. As we saw, she wrote and drafted this novel while employed as a governess by Lord and Lady Kingsborough at Mitchelstown near Cork, Ireland and in Dublin. She was invited back to London by Johnson on the offer of accommodation in exchange for work done as a writer and critic (another sign of the system of the means of production which drives ruling ideology and therefore the products of this ideology – including novels). This provided Wollstonecraft with a stable living environment and it also threw her into the centre of London's radical circle which would encourage some of her most well-known works.

Mary, A Fiction has been categorized by the *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* database as a bildungsroman. This literary term denotes "a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity" (Baldick 27). If one has some general knowledge of Wollstonecraft's life, it becomes evident in reading this novel that there are many autobiographical aspects in the story's heroine. Aside from the obvious – the main character's name, Mary – there are striking parallels with Wollstonecraft's parents and family life and her development through self-education.

The novel begins with a description of protagonist Mary's parents. Her father is characterized as brutal and lewd while her mother, Eliza, is obsessed with novels, often getting lost in her own sensible imaginings. Mary is depicted as often overlooked by her family, who prefer instead to dote on her brother, the heir to her family. But unfortunately, "her brother was attacked by a violent fever, and died before his father could reach the school" where he was

staying (92). This results in a change of circumstance for Mary who now becomes the heir to her family who immediately begin to pay her more attention. She is taught a number of accomplishments, including dancing, which are considered important to a female heir of her standing (92). During this period Mary's mother becomes ill and soon dies (94-95) but not before making a request that her daughter marry Charles, a wealthy suitor unknown to Mary. The couple is married but Charles immediately leaves for the continent, leaving Mary alone (95). In her new-found state as a solitary wife, Mary befriends a girl named Ann to whom she becomes quite attached. Through the development of their friendship, Mary becomes more highly educated and grows more fond of Ann. When Ann's family falls into difficulties regarding money Mary is able to aid them as she has some control over the money in her own marriage (95-96). Unfortunately, Ann soon becomes ill with consumption and the pair travel to Lisbon in the hopes that the air and change of atmosphere will bring Ann back to good health (100). While in Lisbon, Mary is introduced to a man named Henry who is also ill and hoping to recover his health (106). Soon after this arrival and introduction, Ann dies, leaving Mary grieving in the company of Henry. The two fall in love as Mary contemplates the differences between her relationship with Henry and the state of her own marriage to Charles. Eventually, the two both return to England separately, partly due to the difficulty of Mary being married to another man (124-125). Mary continues on in a depressed state upon her return to England and returns to Henry only upon learning that his state of consumption has worsened. She stays with him until his death, after which she returns to Charles who has returned to England. The novel ends grimly as Mary contemplates her situation of being trapped in a loveless marriage. There is a strong insinuation that Mary is depressed to a state of weakness and frailty which will cause her early death.

I would like to begin my exploration of Pierre Macherey's work on silence vis-à-vis this novel by looking briefly into the concept of sensibility or the sensible woman during the later eighteenth century. I will suggest that Wollstonecraft's inability to create a fictional heroine who does not fall prey to the irrational passion of sensibility is an example of a figuration which will allow us to read moments of religious philosophy, and Mary's depression and despair, as absences in *Mary, a Fiction*. These absences will illuminate spaces where ruling ideology, surrounding the state of women, is placed into contradiction. Here the heroine that Wollstonecraft writes explores her passion outside of marriage and considers the state of women in society and marriage. Mary considers the ideological limits that govern women in the eighteenth century; like the patriarchal governing of a daughter's education, marriage and the social expectations placed upon women. Mary lives a life which ends in despair, interspersed by moments of religious conviction. These contradictory aspects of Wollstonecraft's heroine will be the focus of this chapter's explorative project. I also intend to affirm that these characteristics of *Mary, A Fiction* indicate a contradiction between Wollstonecraft's non-fictional writing and her fictional character construction and that this is addressed by Macherey's theory of literary production as an instance of determination of form (the novel).

The concept of sensibility during the long eighteenth century is a complex and much debated one. In "The Novel of Sensibility in the 1780s," Caroline Franklin notes its conception in the 1740s in epistolary novels which "explored the interaction between emotion and reason in producing moral actions," inspired by philosophers such as John Locke and Anthony Ashley Cooper (Franklin, "The novel" 1). She goes on to explain that the 1780s saw a rise in novels of sensibility where "the capacity for fine feeling became increasingly valued for its own sake rather than moralized" (1). As Janice Thaddeus writes in her review of Syndy Conger's *Mary*

Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility, “neat definitions elude both its proponents and its historians” (Thaddeus 162) but “someone who embodies sensibility can be irrational, idealistic, intellectually passionate, suicidal, or a combination of all these” (162-163). The concept of sensibility is contrasted with emerging thoughts from radical women concerning separate spheres and the history of feminine behaviour as well as gender roles in the family. Briefly defined by Laura Kramer in *The Sociology of Gender*, the concept of separate spheres is defined as a doctrine which states “that males and females should dominate in different kinds of social activities because of purportedly essential differences in their biological and psychological natures” (Kramer 27). The ideological model of separate spheres had been so long accepted that challenging it in any way becomes difficult; a woman’s place has been so long thought to be understood that offering an alternative means suggesting a change to the way things have always been. Similarly, John Robertson concludes in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* that “as Rousseau’s insistence on confining women within the family underlined, it was not easy to found sexual equality on a conception of human nature which subordinated the mental to the physical, and elevated the passions above reason” (Robertson 698). Rousseau “idealizes domestic woman” (Kelly *Revolutionary* 19) and makes it clear that a “woman has a different moral and intellectual character” and should obey men (19). Rousseau’s voice, along with those such as Dr. James Fordyce’s in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), reinforced notions of separate spheres and the domestic woman as correct. Rousseau highlights his thoughts on the different natural abilities of men and women and the accorded form of education for each in *Émile, Or, Treatise on Education* (1762). Wollstonecraft stands in opposing conversation with this text in much of her non-fiction writing where she upholds that women are rational and “ought therefore to be exposed to the masculine disciplines of natural science and politics” (Engl 44). Even as

Wollstonecraft understands issues of separate spheres and the problem of female sensibility, she struggles to explore these themes in her fictional work. As Conger explains of sensibility, Wollstonecraft “resists its extremes, she rejects its rhetoric, but she never grows out of it” (Conger, Introduction xxix). Conger is commenting on the absence visible in Wollstonecraft’s writing which inhibits her from writing fictional female characters that are not dripping with sensibility. Anne Mellor claims in “Righting the Wrongs of Woman: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria*” that “Wollstonecraft is more concerned in this novel to show the subtler wrongs which women do to themselves, unconsciously but voluntarily. The greatest of these, in her view, is an indulgence in *sensibility*” (Mellor 415). However, it is my suggestion that this exposure of female sensibility in *Maria* does little to encourage or give hope to intelligent revolutionary women (which is the aim of Wollstonecraft’s non-fiction). Macherey’s theory would suggest that an examination of what this novel does *not* say, the encouragement of women’s struggle for equality, as a form of “silence,” especially given Wollstonecraft’s encouragement of women and feminist ideas in her non-fiction, highlights the ideological conditions of the production of literature.

Conger outlines the use of sensibility in Wollstonecraft’s fiction, her treatment of the topic amongst her numerous reviews of sentimental novels, and the relationship of sensibility to feminist ideas as presented in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She concludes by explaining that,

her [Wollstonecraft’s] story deserves telling, for it says a great deal about how it felt to be an intelligent woman with literary ambitions at the end of the end of the eighteenth century. Competing doctrines and revolutionary ideas of her day meet and collide in her work... there can be little wonder that she fails to synthesize all these polarities; the

wonder is that she brazenly it out so memorably, leaving behind her a legacy of literary encounters with her enemies (Conger 181-182).

Conger insightfully suggests that Wollstonecraft creates a new language of sensibility by using the words and grammar of the dominant language forms. Conger proposes to the reader that Wollstonecraft's sensible heroines contradict her aim to reconstruct the woman of feeling as both emotional and rational. However, Conger's concluding statement still suggests a failure of some kind as Wollstonecraft seems to be unable to present a consistent ideology throughout her works of literature both fiction and non-fiction. This sense of Wollstonecraft's confusing use of sensibility is firmly echoed in Michelle Faubert's introduction to *Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (2012), where she states that "sometimes Wollstonecraft lays on the sensibility so thickly that she appears to be writing a manifesto to the form" (Faubert 38). Here Faubert's suggestion of excessive sentimentality and Conger's expression of Wollstonecraft's failure to synthesize aspects of her fiction fall into Pierre Macherey's notion of the normative fallacy. The common critical description of Wollstonecraft's use of sentimentality suggests that the work should be in some way, other than what it is; that if Wollstonecraft had been a successful feminist fiction writer of the late eighteenth century, her works would have been able to better synthesize and reconcile the contradictory elements that enveloped her life and work. This project proposes a reading of what others have called failures as instead windows into the struggle against ruling ideology and in this way not failures at all. Ashley Tauchert's *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Accent of the Feminine* (2002) echoes Conger's discussion of sensibility but enters into the normative fallacy in a different way. Tauchert proposes that in *Mary a Fiction* Wollstonecraft assumes a masculine voice in order to "accommodate a female love object" (Tauchert 52). She also speaks of *The Wrongs of Woman* as Wollstonecraft's attempt to speak to

women by emerging through the patriarchal language that fiction offers the female author. For Tauchert, Wollstonecraft is unable to correctly write as her own feminine subject; this perception of imperfection and inability to produce her novels in a certain way falls into the normative fallacy.

In following this, Angela Keane argues in *Women Writers of the English Nation in the 1790s* that Wollstonecraft "could only reproduce the logic of the system she sought to eradicate" (Keane 109). This logic, for Macherey, is ruling ideology, and it is supported through modes of production, like the production of the novel for consumption (which strengthens ruling ideologies – like the sensible woman) and the economic dependency of those writing them.

In just a brief outline of the literature examining Wollstonecraft's association with sensibility, it becomes clear that Wollstonecraft engages with the sensible aspects of the eighteenth century in a contradictory way. She outwardly rejects the concepts associated with the sensible (irrational) woman but in her fictional work, she inevitably displays the characteristics she seeks to deny her readers. Based on the concepts supported in her works of non-fiction, sensibility becomes a concept associated with feminine weakness. But, in her fiction, female heroines Mary and Maria often become lost in the sensibility of irrational passion.

Wollstonecraft aims to represent a heroine who thinks for herself in *Mary, A Fiction*. Claudia L. Johnson in *Equivocal Beings* (1995) states that, "thus while Wollstonecraft's 'fiction' on one hand testifies to her power to think for herself, on the other hand it allows that the status of that fantasy is subjunctive at best and figmentary at worst. *Mary, A Fiction* finally flounders in the discursive isolation that is at once its premise and its effect" (49-50). She goes on to propose that the novel is redeemed in its aim of producing hope for a new kind of woman as "the novel concludes by looking forward to a world where the female body will not be disfigured in the

political interests served by compulsory heterosexuality” (58). Here, Johnson suggests that *Mary* fails in its aim to provide hope and a new future for female characters (contrary to ruling ideology) in popular fiction but I will propose that it is exactly the reading of this failure, and the existence of the silence surrounding it within both of Wollstonecraft’s novels, which represent a very real struggle by Wollstonecraft to express revolutionary ideology. I claim that the categorization of this novel as a failure, by Johnson and a great number of other literary critics that have considered this novel, brands their considerations with Macherey’s normative fallacy where they express that the work in question should be something other than what it is. To discover something new in the consideration of Wollstonecraft’s novels we must dispense with failure as critically, in the understanding that literary creation is determined, there should be no right or wrong way to produce literature. There is only one way, and it is determined through the forces of ideology and modes of production. The perception of this determination ensures that the critic does not commit the normative fallacy and opens up the possibility for a greater understanding in considering what a piece of literature can and cannot express.

In her contribution “Mary Wollstonecraft’s Novels” to *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (2002) Johnson claims that heroine Mary differs from other heroines in novels of sentimentality who usually die for their love in that she lives and understands an inevitable death as an escape from the conventional marriage life (198). In some ways she rejects married life physically when reacting in a negative manner to the presence and touch of her husband but inevitably she still remains an unhappy married woman at the end of this novel despite her thinking powers and any form of resistance she hoped to show.

In considering these aspects I would suggest a reading of this novel where sensibility and the sensible novel represent a figuration which will allow us to identify spaces of absence

according to Macherey. Macherey defines this idea of identifying figurations as a shifting of the critical gaze where ideology is modified and placed into contradiction, where the critic can then identify gaps and silences in the text. By exploring the figurations illuminating examples of absence in relation to the ideological project which shape and produce the work, the critic will be able to view the work “from the limits which hold it in check and impose upon it a certain shape by preventing it from being a different ideology or something other than ideology” (217).

Sensibility becomes a viable figuration because it is the structure which allows us to see ideology in contradiction when studying the presence of religion and despair in the heroine Mary.

Macherey explains that, “there is no first, independent, innocent language” (50) and this suggests language’s truth which is “the illusion that it produces its own peculiar norm” (50). He goes on to state that if an author’s “decisions are determined” (54) then writing literary works becomes a “game of free choice according to the rules” of a previously established model (54). He situates the unconscious as not creating works but rather creating effects within works (55) and explains that because the work is dependent on its form it becomes “the mythical product of a process it can never mention” (55). Here then, *Mary, A Fiction* becomes a work dependant on the form of novel, being identified by readers only through its similarity to examples of novel written before it. Sensibility becomes a sign of this work that is in line with ruling ideology. Therefore, even as Wollstonecraft strives to use fiction and the novel to express her revolutionary feminist ideals, she is struggling with a strong lineage of the novel form that describes heroines living in separate sensible spheres.

Religion appears in *Mary a Fiction* as a source of Christian belief for Mary throughout the novel. The text describes her as “always connected with devotional sentiments” of religion and when considering God, often “dwelt on his wisdom and goodness” (84). She seeks religious

comfort in the sublimity of nature and in moments of emotional passion, as when Henry dies and she commends his spirit to heaven stating, “Father, receive his spirit” (146). The figuration of sentimentality allows us to read *Mary* as a religious character, putting into contradiction a character who is radical in some ways as she looks for love and happiness in other women and an extramarital love affair. As Daniel Robinson claims in his article “Theodicy versus Feminist Strategy in Mary Wollstonecraft's Fiction,” “*Mary* reveals some feminist strains of thought in its critique of the condition of women in the late eighteenth century, although its feminism is not as pronounced as in Wollstonecraft's later novel” (184). There is a clear criticism of the conditions of that eighteenth-century women face when *Mary* states that “Their minds were shackled with a set of notions concerning propriety, the fitness of things for the world’s eye, trammels which always hamper weak people” (*Mary* 105). This passage stands as one example of Wollstonecraft’s style of critique used in *Mary*. Here she speaks of a group of women she meets when she leaves England with her friend for a medically recommended change of air. The line strikes a note of the gothic; minds that are “shackled” become more visible in Wollstonecraft’s second novel. Wollstonecraft implies here that the female consciousness is chained by an idea of personal correctness suitable for the public space which weighs down what she calls weak people. I suggest that this directly correlates to the figuration of sentimentality discussed earlier, as it presents sensible female characters who reflect feminine weakness of emotional and rational character. Religion here becomes visible as a part of the sentimental novel where characters, including heroines, examine propriety in an emotional way which usually upholds prevailing views of female passion and irrationality.

It also becomes clear that as much as this quotation is an attempt to illuminate issues of feminist concern it is also a critique of women who continue to concern themselves with notions

of propriety, whom she defines as weak in character. For Wollstonecraft's heroine, there is a freedom in acting outside of the public consideration of what is proper. It is another question entirely as to whether or not this belief in freedom results in happiness of any kind for Mary.

In this novel Wollstonecraft also writes on the state of female education and the institution of marriage in a similar manner of disapproval, but it is also often true that in this novel, she does not seek to offer any remedy to these social and political issues apart from a love of God or of finding peace in the nature of true faith. It is here that we as readers are able to see an obvious disdain for 'the way things are' in the world but in *Mary* the strength of these observations is somewhat lost on a true radical spirit because the power to change what is, is taken away from women and men and given only to a higher religious power. For example, Mary states at the beginning of the novel "she [Mary] thought that only an infinite being could fill the human soul, and that when other objects were followed as a means of happiness, the delusion led to misery, the consequence of disappointment" (*Mary* 90). This passage implies a complete belief in the idea that an "infinite being," presumed God, fills the human soul as a means of happiness. This idea seems to in some ways contradict the non-fictional ideas that Wollstonecraft so strongly expresses concerning the ability of woman to reason and empower herself to happiness through ideas of education and equality. However, the figuration of sentimentality allows us to change our critical gaze in a way which places ideas of religious dependency (traditional ruling class representations) into contradiction. By placing religion in *Mary* into contradiction with Wollstonecraft's feminist thought, we can read these seeming ideological differences as directly correlated to the fact that fictional literature is a product, always produced inside of ruling ideology.

It is important to note that little has been written about Wollstonecraft's religious views. The religious aspect of Wollstonecraft's life often gets hidden behind her strong feminist voice. I suggest that there is a lack of focus on Wollstonecraft's religion in life because as Robinson explains, "Feminist critics have found it difficult to reconcile Mary Wollstonecraft's religious faith with her feminist polemic" (Robinson 183). Reading the inclusion of religion in *Mary* as a result of ruling ideology rather than Wollstonecraft supporting traditionalist sentiments allows us to reconcile these two aspects of her fiction. It could also be said that as many scholars or readers would now find it difficult to associate religious debate with feminist passion perhaps there is a more modern ideological inability to read Wollstonecraft's fiction with the understanding that for Wollstonecraft, religion and feminism were akin to each other. Wollstonecraft "always attended church" (Todd *A Revolutionary* 30) but as Robinson suggests, "Biographies of the last twenty years or so have tended to downplay Wollstonecraft's religious thought because it is difficult to trace. Most biographies can pinpoint her religion as conventionally Church of England until 1787 when, as Godwin reports in his *Memoir*, she stopped attending church services regularly" (187). But as Barbara Taylor explains, "for the first twenty-eight years of her life she was a regular church goer and her first published work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), was steeped in orthodox attitudes, advocating "fixed principles of religion" and warning of the dangers of rationalist speculation and deism" and that "for women in particular, the young Wollstonecraft argued, clear-cut religious views were essential" (Taylor 100). In remembering that *Mary, A Fiction* was published in 1788 it becomes more understandable as to why a heroine who is considered a genius and a rational thinking individual also engages so closely with a strong set of religious ties. Taylor claims that acknowledgment of Wollstonecraft as a religious thinker is not handled well by scholars who "usually dismiss it as ideological baggage foisted on

her by her times, with no positive implications for her views on women” (99) and asserts that there are “at least fifty discussions of religious themes” (99) in Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*. Taylor goes on to explain that after the publication of *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) Wollstonecraft “stopped attending church” (100) and notes that and by the time she published *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) Wollstonecraft was in support of intellectuals who denied Christ and the Christian system (100). I, in this work, also explain this strange feminist religious devotion in *Mary* as a result of ideological influence but am I in no way dismissing it. In fact, I would suggest that this work hopes to engage with Wollstonecraft’s discussion of religion just as sentimentality and unhappiness. Through the lens of Macherey, we can see that religious devotion in a feminist heroine existing in a novel of sentimentality does produce a silence, a gap that is contradictory, showing that fiction is produced in ruling ideology and therefore represents it, despite authorial passion for something else. I think that this shows an influence of ruling religious ideology on Wollstonecraft herself until she finds the two aspects too hard to reconcile later in life. However, the implications of ruling ideology on the lived life of the individual is not something that this work has the space to explore.

Sentimentality or the sentimental novel figures moments of religious expression as an inability to produce outside of ruling ideologies but also that fiction is sold (therefore produced) for consumption which depends on a number of aspects including the subject matter being aesthetically and morally (for eighteenth-century readers religiously) pleasing or rewarding. Religion and religious themes are visible in late eighteenth-century novels including *Mary, A Fiction*. Thomas R. Preston claims of eighteenth-century reading habits, that “almost all evidence points to an almost astonishing interest in religious works generally and biblical

criticism specifically” (98). This suggests an ideological interest in religion and biblical criticism which Wollstonecraft’s *Mary* engages with in a way that supports the sentimental novel as an example of Macherey’s figuration in *A Theory of Literary Production*. As religion is inextricable from eighteenth-century ideology and life so too is it inextricable from novels as a product which reflects eighteenth-century ideology.

Mary, a hopeless heroine

The second aspect that I wish to address concerning *Mary, A Fiction* follows closely modern discourse surrounding the difficulty that women writers seem to have imagining optimistic futures for their heroines during the late eighteenth century. This same trend, as referenced in earlier chapters, becomes evident in Wollstonecraft’s first novel. As Jennifer Golightly suggests, novels written by women in the 1790s “tend to conclude with the heroines alone or dead” (Golightly 15) and Mary in *Mary, A Fiction* is just as unfortunate. The final lines of Wollstonecraft’s first novel read: “Her delicate state of health did not promise long life. in moments of solitary sadness, a gleam of joy would dart across her mind – she thought she was hastening to that world *where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage*” (148). This quote is an allusion to a biblical passage in Mark 12:25 which Michelle Faubert notes is “a suggestive reworking of Jesus’ words regarding the condition of people in heaven” (*Mary* 148). Wollstonecraft describes a heaven for Mary where she is alive and allowed to live for herself. Mary is clearly in a full state of depression and in delicate health (perhaps due to the former). It is clearly insinuated that she will die young and it is also suggested that the reason for all of her suffering and pain is marriage. She has married a man, obedient to her mother’s deathbed wish, with whom she has little to nothing in common and is not able to imagine any kind of healthy or happy life for herself. In fact, when the couple begins to live together near the end of the novel,

she tried to appear calm; time mellowed her grief, and mitigated her torments; but when her husband would take her hand, or mention any thing like love, she would instantly feel a sickness, a faintness at her heart, and a wish, involuntarily, that the earth would open and swallow her (Wollstonecraft *Mary* 147-148).

This is clearly an example of Wollstonecraft's method of feminist critique. First, Wollstonecraft portrays marriage as a form of torture and slavery for a woman who has no choice in her partner. Mary is disgusted by the presence, touch and sentiments of the man who is her husband and the fact that she must live married to him makes her wish for what appears to be death.

Wollstonecraft is critiquing the whole institution of marriage in this novel because the point in the story when the heroine is married results in a plot turn towards the grief and destruction of her main character. Being married to Charles prevents her from being happy even when she finds love with Henry. Golightly suggests that it is because of the general unhappiness of heroines in late eighteenth century novels that certain feminist concerns are able to be explored. She states, "the omissions of these securities – families, friends, mentors, happiness – allows Inchbald, Fenwick, Hays, and Wollstonecraft to explore specific problems facing eighteenth-century women. Issues such as independence and dependence, education and occupation, marriage and individuality, desire and sexuality are foregrounded in their works" (15). Although Golightly is speaking specifically to novels written during the 1790s, I will suggest that *Mary, A Fiction* shows signs of similar patterns, being written just two years earlier, in 1788. Both of Mary's parents die in the course of the novel. Her best female friend Ann dies of consumption, as does Henry, the man she falls in love with, and any possibility of happiness is taken away when she lives the remainder of her life as a wife to a husband who disgusts her.

These hardships do allow Wollstonecraft to paint a clear picture of the difficulties facing women during the eighteenth century but it is important to recognize the gap that these unhappy endings represent. I argue that the unhappiness of these heroines is not simply there to allow space to portray women's issues, it is there as a result of ideological silence. Unhappiness and hopelessness are arguably brought on by Mary's inability to find love and contentedness in marriage, in friendship or in an extra marital affair. By reading this through the figuration of sentimentality, we can begin to see how writing a novel of sentimentality through a ruling ideology of fiction where heroines are ideally/traditionally not overly rational, forward-thinking or passionate outside of marriage, Mary is bound to be read as a space of contradiction.

As is evident from Wollstonecraft's later non-fictional writing, she offers clear ideas about why the education, occupation, public involvement and independence of women would make their lives better. However, through the expression of these issues through the form of the novel, Wollstonecraft is unable to express an ending to her stories where her heroine becomes happy. Claudia Johnson states that "Wollstonecraft considered her first novel so bad as to be beneath embarrassment" (Johnson *Equivocal* 48). This directly correlates to Macherey's ideas about literary determinism (understood in the terms of the conditions of production) and through these ideas I suggest that the unhappy heroine is a sign of the contradiction between what is produced in literature, itself directly correlating to ruling modes of production and ideological reproduction, and the struggle to resist this form of production. This contradiction is revealed through the juxtaposition between figuration of sensibility and the work's ideological project, to further the cause for women's equality by showing the injustices marriage and the judicial system impose on women's lives.

Although Mary is considered by many readers to be sensible, often overcome by her sense of passion, she also possesses qualities that support Wollstonecraft's ideas surrounding the betterment of the lives of women. Mary is self educated, not unlike Wollstonecraft herself, she is internally philosophical and complex, and she finds love in non-traditional spaces. If we accept this as possible then it also becomes true that Wollstonecraft would not have been simply writing a novel that depicts a heroine struggling in the restrictive conditions surrounding women during the eighteenth century. She is writing a heroine who possesses characteristics that she valued as potential traits that need to be understood, emphasised and explored in order for women to move forward in the development of feminism. What is of interest here is the idea that, in her non-fictional works, Wollstonecraft has many ideas about how women should be moving forward in the public sphere and how there should be changes to the discourse surrounding the capabilities of all women. In *Mary, A Fiction* she begins by writing, perhaps cautiously, a heroine who can be read as having the intellectual capabilities that Wollstonecraft claims are real and possible in her own society. However, even though Mary is independent, shows intellectual depth, is self-educated, and learns that love is often not associated with marriage, she is unable to gain a measure of happiness by the novel's closing. Correspondingly, Wollstonecraft is unable to use the fictional novel to imagine the solutions that she begins to express in her non-fictional feminist works.

In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Wollstonecraft writes that men and women should be educated together which is a large leap from the pioneering work of Mary Astell and her late seventeenth-century proposal for a religious retirement for unmarried women only. She states, "day schools for particular ages, should be established by government, in which boys and girls might be educated together" (250). Wollstonecraft recognizes that knowledgeable,

intellectual women are often disliked in society because it is believed that if women are smart and educated that they will lose their feminine qualities and become like men. She explains this as “the fear of departing from a supposed sexual character” but insists that a woman can be both intellectual and modest; that there needs to be a sense of equality to create a good personality balance (Wollstonecraft, *VRW* 95).

This marriage of intellectualism and virtue in a woman seems a brave claim to make for Wollstonecraft writing at the end of the eighteenth century and it is clear that she wants to imagine something different for the lives of women in society. However, there is still a limit lying within this suggestion that makes it prescriptive in that women are still expected to exist as wives and mothers first. This keeps the concept of separate spheres very much alive and offers a world of intellectualism but still expects women to remain confined as housewives and mothers. In other words, she wants women to become educated like men but gives them no room to use their equality out in the world. She argues that women will be made better citizens and mothers by being educated but gives no alternative to the frivolous lives to which women in the middle and upper ranks are restricted. This sense of limits to the equality of women will be further considered in connection to Macherey’s sense of ideological silence; where ideology in writing becomes inseparable from the real limits of the lived experience.

This inability shows us the determination of fiction as produced by ruling ideology. The endings of late eighteenth century novels written by women, in particular *Mary, A Fiction*, illustrate the determinative qualities of literature that Macherey claims are working upon an author at all times. Macherey also claims that there is an element of literature that must hold onto the reality from which it is produced. This is what creates the determinism, as ruling ideology creates products through ruling modes of production. Macherey clarifies that even though

literary text is an art, the illusion of reality that it represents “must contain a certain reality of its own” (64) and is specific (holds power) only situationally in itself (“within the system of the text”) (65). He furthers this point in figuring that at the completion of a literary work, ideologies (or gaps in them) become visible which makes literature a secondary work; existing only in itself and mimicking the real through illusion (68-69). Macherey argues that art is a form of production (a type of creation) in determinate conditions instead of a pure creation (77). The paradox in this concept for him is the paradox created which implies that creation is the release of what is already there (humanism) but also possibly an “interruption, an epiphany, a mystery” (77). This leaves no possible explanation for a change or creation and an elimination of real knowledge (77). It is for these reasons that Macherey proposes that literature criticism is actually a production (77). This production comes from the critics’ ability to read the silences in literature and produce something new, or bring to light a new understanding. This is how I wish to position these eighteenth-century unhappy endings. They have already been identified and explored in modern literary discourse as what they are, and not as what they are not – what the absence of a happy ending suggests about the limits that ideology places upon an author writing a fictional novel during the late eighteenth century.

In bringing the lens of Macherey’s theory of literary production to Wollstonecraft’s first novel we can begin to understand better the gap that unhappy heroine endings represent. The questions that this exploration brings forth concern how much capacity an author has in not only representing what they want to represent but changing what is produced through works of literature such as the novel. I will look next at Wollstonecraft’s second novel, which, albeit unfinished, could potentially be a space of change in analysing the patterns of novels written by women during the late eighteenth century that we have looked at so far.

Chapter 4: Depicting *The Wrongs of Woman*

Maria; or The Wrongs of Woman is Mary Wollstonecraft's second attempt at novel writing. Although this work was left unfinished upon Wollstonecraft's death in 1797, her husband William Godwin published the unfinished manuscript pages in 1798. The incomplete work has been read as a view into Wollstonecraft's later feminist thought. However, the situation of its heroine does not offer optimism in considering the state of women in late eighteenth-century society who are strong enough to stand up for their belief in their own strength and ability as individuals. In this chapter I will situate this novel within Wollstonecraft's biographical and historical context and give the reader a sense of the ideas that inspired Wollstonecraft to begin such a project. I will utilize Macherey's theoretical approach to give an analysis of how the form of novel shapes the ideas that Wollstonecraft is working with. My analysis will focus on Wollstonecraft's use of gothic imagery, slavery as an unsatisfactory metaphor for the state of women in marriage and society, and suicide as an escape from the struggles that Wollstonecraft's heroines face. I will investigate how these novel aspects coincide with eighteenth-century ideology and what these relationships can tell us about the limits of the novel form for Mary Wollstonecraft.

A gothic tale of excessive distance

Wollstonecraft begins by establishing a strong sense of the gothic genre in its opening scene, employing the norms of fictional gothic and clarifying her scene by stating,

Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the

wandering mind. But formed of stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavoring to recall her scattered thoughts. (Wollstonecraft *Maria* 161)⁷

Maria sits alone in an isolated asylum contemplating her situation where from her window she sees “a desolate garden”, crumbling old buildings covered in ivy, and hears the moaning of other inmates (161-4). Her husband, George Venables, has had her committed to an insane asylum and taken away their child from her. Maria befriends an asylum attendant, Jemima, who sympathizes with her story and brings her books to read. Maria falls in love with fellow inmate Darnford after reading his marginal comments in the books Jemima was bringing for her. Jemima then tells her own story of struggle explaining her life as an abused bastard, servant and prostitute before her work in the asylum. After this Maria gives a lengthy account of her own life with the express desire that her written words are intended for her daughter. From here the novel moves into the unknown, with two apparent trajectories of possible narrative paths with a total of five different possible endings. In both plots Maria’s husband George Venables wins a lawsuit against Darnford for criminal conversation (seducing his wife). Maria then discovers that Darnford has abandoned her for another mistress after which Maria loses the child she was carrying by Darnford. The plot suggests that this could either happen through miscarriage or abortion. From

⁷ Quoting from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* the line “We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on” (4.1.1887), Wollstonecraft describes Maria’s situation (an illusion of life) as excessively dreamlike, perhaps nightmarish, when compared to common frightening gothic scenes. Michelle Faubert notes this as Wollstonecraft’s attempt to utilize diverse literary forms (Wollstonecraft *Maria* 161).

the surviving manuscript fragments, the most complete plot ending suggests that Jemima reunites Maria with her first child by Darnford and they decide to live; others end with miscarriage, or suicide.

In considering Macherey's concept of an ideological project, this novel is working to show the lack of rights that women suffered within the institution of marriage and the English legal system. In Michelle Faubert's 2012 edition of Wollstonecraft's novels, Faubert speaks of Wollstonecraft's use of the term "woman" and its connection to not one woman but all of womankind, connecting it to Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The concept of the rights of womankind is an idea – some would say an ideology – for Wollstonecraft which she is able to express through her non-fiction. To talk about women in the sense of the real-life women and their lives (and to connect this to her ideas of what women should be as womankind) as she attempts to tell through the story of Maria, she clashes with ruling ideologies which shape the form of novel. According to Macherey, the literary novel form exists as a mode of production which furthers the construction of objects which support ruling ideologies – such as female sensibility, and lack of reason, therefore also personhood under the law and in marriage; it begins to make sense why this project will be difficult to realize for Wollstonecraft.

Mary Poovey claims that "by the end of the eighteenth century, then, the qualities that a century earlier had been described as necessary defences against women's appetites were increasingly considered to be "natural" female traits, invaluable to society as a whole" (Poovey 14). Conduct material strengthened this sense that feminine, ladylike, propriety (once learned) is now the "natural" way for a woman to act (15). However, it is most important to note that women's legal status was a strong barrier against equality during this time period. Gillian

Skinner notes that when a woman was single “she ‘enjoyed, for the most part, the same rights and responsibilities as men did. She owned property and chattels, which she could bequeath by will. She made contracts; she sued and was sued’” (Skinner 91). Marriage becomes a moment in a woman’s life where she loses any public and private legal rights that she had. Skinner continues,

her existence was, figuratively, “covered”, subsumed into that of her husband. Upon marriage, a woman’s property passed into the control of her husband; she was not able to enter into contracts, to sue or be sued. She had no legal rights over her children, nor did she have the right to leave her husband’s house without his permission – if she did so, she gave up the right to his support, but also could be legally compelled to return (92).

In identifying this situation, it becomes easier to understand why marriage and the struggle for female equality are major focus points in women’s novel writing as the moment when all female legal power is given to a husband, whose whims and sentiments determine the state of that woman’s life from that point on.

As Caroline Franklin claims, “Wollstonecraft’s new novel was designed to show the injustice and immorality built into marriage as presently constituted” (Franklin, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 177). In the author’s preface to this novel Wollstonecraft states that her main objective is “the desire of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society” (157). It is clear that Wollstonecraft wishes to engage with the very timely issue of social and political revolution and the consideration of women during the late eighteenth-century.

These aspects of injustice and incidents of immorality surrounding female characters in marriage (loss of personhood, rights, and the ability to possess wealth and control circumstances)

are used here as examples which support what seems to be a call to the betterment of the situation of both the public and private woman, which much of Wollstonecraft's non-fictional work explores in depth. Arnold A. Markley suggests in *Conversion and Reform in the British Novel in the 1790s: A Revolution of Opinions* (2009) that "the society that Wollstonecraft depicts through the lens of these women's sufferings is a profoundly corrupt and damaging one, from the highest political and judicial levels to domestic life in the private home" (64). Wollstonecraft is trying to proclaim that eighteenth-century law leaves little space for the rights of women. She is attempting to show through the description of the lives of fictional characters Maria and Jemima that class status and circumstance do little to change the fact that women suffer hardships which they are powerless to ameliorate.

Yet in trying to understand what it is that Wollstonecraft is trying to proclaim through the production of this text, there is some degree of doubt. This doubt comes not only in the wake of the unfinished nature of this work but also in Wollstonecraft's seeming struggle with the form of novel. Looking back to her first novel, *Mary A Fiction*, in chapter four, there is some evidence that suggests that Wollstonecraft was not herself satisfied with her first attempt to represent her ideas on the issues of women, female hardships and marriage through the form of the novel. That, in spite of her strong voice in the world of non-fiction surrounding these issues, her novel concerning the same often seems to rely heavily on traditional religious doctrine and sentimentality. *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* however, speaks to a more public persona of woman and the law which removes some of the sentimentality that was often overly present in her first novel. Important themes range from marriage, self-discovery, and the struggle for women to gain rights as public and private subjects. The lack of a clear, decided ending leaves some questions regarding how Wollstonecraft views the fate of her struggling female characters

but overall this story, as it is, does not leave room for the reader or critic to question what Wollstonecraft thinks about the state of women both privately and publicly, in her society.

In considering the ideology presented in this novel it is the job of the critic to study it and possibly place it in contradiction by shifting the critical gaze, which allows us to make visible the contradiction “in relation to that which limits it” (Macherey 194). In this way ideology is not contradictory but can be placed into contradiction. This is done by once again going through the process of transforming the gaze on ideology “from the level of representation to that of figuration” (194) where ideology “undergoes a complete *modification*” (194). I will now address two examples of absence that are made visible by reading the figuration identified as gothic in the excess. I will suggest that suicide and slavery as related to the state of women in the eighteenth century are signs of the excess gothic figuration which allows us to understand what cannot be represented (and which manifest as silence and absence).

The choice of the gothic genre to construct aspects of this novel represents ideology in contradiction and hints at an example of what Macherey would describe as an absence. The choice of gothic form gives details of frightening circumstances told from a perspective which distances the reader from the reality of the horror. This distance allows the reader feel comfortable reading and makes terrifying situations more aesthetic and pleasing to consider. By using the form of novel, during a time when gothic writing is popular amongst women writers, Wollstonecraft allows her readers to consider the terrible circumstances that Maria and Jemima face but it also restricts her ability to give a fully realistic account of the hardships that women face because their lives become objects of fantastical horror and mystery. This popularity of the gothic suggests a figuration which accommodates more and more to ruling ideological

expression. However, in this particular case the use of gothic language allows us to view ideology in a modified way where its absence and silences make the limits of form visible.

This aspect of the novel becomes a denial of itself in its insufficiency to represent women's issues. "The Gothic is "formed of such stuff as dreams are made of"—it is the genre of the unreal and fantastic, but here, Wollstonecraft endeavors to portray the very real Wrongs of Woman" (Sherman 100). By reading the gothic as a figuration the critic places the work and its ideological production into a space of contradiction, in this case, using fantastical figurations to interpret real aspects of the eighteenth-century women's struggle. When Wollstonecraft describes things gothically in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* she suggests that even the gothic is not drastic or 'real' enough to encompass the horror and terror of the things that she is attempting to describe. As Sherman explains, Wollstonecraft uses the

Gothic to pronounce its very insufficiency as a means of description, and then again to reinstate it—seemingly as the best, or only, means available to accomplish this portrayal of wrongs that must make a right. At times the eruption of a Gothic element seems nonsensically gratuitous, as in this puzzling comparison, a description of Maria's gaze meeting that of a fellow inmate at the asylum: "she shrunk back with more horror and affright, than if she had stumbled over a mangled corpse" (17). Maria's sentiments are always in excess of the Gothic's capacity for description, yet still can only be portrayed by means of a descriptive overkill that invokes the genre only to demonstrate that there is an excess that escapes it and that remains unstated (Sherman 104).

Maria describes her nights in the asylum; "often at midnight was she waked by the dismal shrieks of demonic rage, or of excruciating despair, uttered in such wild tones of indescribable anguish as proved the total absence of reason, and roused phantoms of horror in her mind, far

more terrific than all that dreaming superstition ever drew” (179-180). Here again she uses gothic elements such as darkness, demons, ghosts and horror to portray Maria’s existence as an arguably sane woman trapped in an asylum by her scoundrel husband. Interestingly again even these terrifying images are not extreme enough to capture the true horror of this woman’s situation. As Wollstonecraft writes, Maria’s experience is worse and more frightening than anything one could dream up or suppose concerning the position of such a woman in such a place.

Maria uses gothic language to describe the dissolution of her relationship with her husband as a severing but also as a release from captivity. She explains that “he cut the Gordian knot, which my principles, mistaken ones, respected; he dissolved the tie, the fetters rather, that ate into my very vitals – and I should rejoice, conscious that my mind is freed, though confined in hell itself; the only place that even fancy can imagine more dreadful than my present abode” (224). Maria’s past relations with her husband become mythical experiences associated with unhealthiness and being held captive. Here she uses the image of hell but even an image of hell does not describe the dreadfulness that she wants to convey but that it is the only concept worse than her current situation that her mind can conjure.

Wollstonecraft describes Maria as considering other inmates as “poor wretches who strayed along the walks, and contemplated the most terrific of ruins – that of the human soul” (170). Faubert notes that “Wollstonecraft uses the popular Gothic image of architectural ruins to represent another great Gothic theme, the ruined mind, or madness” (170), a central theme of this novel. Interesting here is the contemplation of the human soul (arguably human worth) as directly connected to the health of the brain – or the ability to reason. Maria (a woman) is

imprisoned with the likes of slaves and the insane – cast into a population of individuals with no respect, rights or reason in society.

Also of interest is the fact that the gothic image of the prison is used by Wollstonecraft to describe Maria's situation and her sense of yearning for escape. She states "Maria wished to pass the threshold of her prison" (the insane asylum) (171) and Maria later states that "marriage had bastilled me for life" (243). In this way not only does the gothic prison image describe the forceful placement of Maria in an asylum but before this in the act of marriage itself. Gothic prison therefore becomes an expansive metaphor for the limits and confinement of women in society; a counter to the consideration of women as individuals controlled by emotion rather than by reason. The use of metaphor in this way also suggests the lack of a language that can be used in the production of the novel to describe the state of women; therefore Wollstonecraft borrows from the gothic and the mad to attempt to convey her ideological project striving for women's equality.

This notion of excess or gothic in the excess stands as what Macherey would call a figuration within the literary product which allows the ideological project's absences and silences to be read. On the one hand this aspect of *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* signifies the struggle against the ruling mode of production but on the other it is a gap or silence which shows how the form of novel is shaped by ruling ideologies. This makes it difficult for an author like Wollstonecraft to use this product to express concepts which are not expressible through ruling modes of literary production.

Similarly, gothic in fiction becomes an interesting concept because it is used as a form of popular expression in the novel but it also displaces unpopular themes into a foreign realm. Issues of a sensitive nature are figured as 'away from home' or in unreal, fantastic spaces. The

gothic allows authors a way to represent the struggle of issues not in line with domestic ruling ideology. However, ruling ideology limits the ways that these struggles can be represented through ruling modes of production. For example, the gothic theme of sexual abuse is in some ways allowed space for consideration (somewhere in a dark foreign castle) but it is not made real by placing it in domestic circumstances. Macherey claims in *A Theory of Literary Production* that “there is no book which is entirely innocent” (30-31). He brings for example a book entitled *Les Visions D’un Chateau Des Pyrenees* which has often been incorrectly credited to Ann Radcliffe and published after her death (32). Although this work is known to be a forgery Macherey explains that this is a good example because “the skillful imitation can be more revealing than the model” (32). He identifies in this work (a gothic mystery) the important concept of “double movement” (32). This example is relevant to Wollstonecraft’s novel in that the use of gothic imitation reveals more to the reader about what the novel they are reading is not and perhaps what it could never be. The gothic aspects of *Maria* identify one of the only forms of writing available to writers looking to explore difficult subjects. However, the gothic style also makes very obvious, the limits literary production has in expressing these subjects with realism.

Wollstonecraft has been said to fail in her attempt at producing feminist fiction in her use of the gothic style (and in turn its insufficiency to express these themes properly) in Devon Sherman’s “‘Nothing but human’: Righting the Rightless in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria*” (2014). I suggest that the language of ruling ideology through modes of production for the purpose of earning a living (such as the use and consumption of the popular gothic form) will always be insufficient in communicating anything else.

Well-known eighteenth-century women scholar Gary Kelly makes note of this pattern of failure in a number of his works including his anthology of Wollstonecraft's writing, where he states (of both of Wollstonecraft's novels) that, "the conclusion must be that both of these novels are failures" (Kelly *Mary and the Wrongs* xx). He goes on to explain that when

faced with the problem of imagining a solution to the 'wrongs of woman', Mary Wollstonecraft, like Charlotte Smith, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson and the rest of her female contemporaries, could only fall back on the masculine virtue traditionally recommended for women, the resolution of 'fortitude'... in the midst of the greatest happiness she had ever known, her imagination succumbed once again to the errors of sensibility she had devoted her life and her works to correcting (xx).

Kelly remarks on a widely observed pattern in female writing during the late eighteenth century. In this way a similar study could be done on a number of women writers producing literature during this time-period. Kathryn Temple justifies critics studying these aspects of failure in Wollstonecraft's novels as contradiction and "by this dissonance, they have made of her a cultural icon for feminism, discussing her in a seemingly endless series of attempts to reconcile personality with ideology and ideology with behavior" (Temple 373). However, it is the fact of Wollstonecraft's iron conviction in her non-fiction surrounding change for women falling to silence in the production of her novels that piques this project's particular interest. The silence, the lack of proposed solutions in fiction written by a woman who claims to know what they are in her works of non-fiction, represents the struggle, the clash, between Wollstonecraft's ideas of feminism and the real world of production and making a living the only way possible, through modes of production cast in ruling ideology.

The *contradiction* here then becomes obvious as the gothic is invoked but the description of its excess shows that its presence is only a part of this literary product in order to show what the ruling mode of literary production cannot represent. The horror and fear found in a gothic tale is the only mode of literary production that comes close to intimating eighteenth century women's issues but it does not fully do the subject justice and so there exists a gap or silence where there is an ideological inability to express the struggle against ruling ideological literary representation. Here then, thematic signs such as suicide and slavery are situated awkwardly inside the language of the gothic excess and make visible, spaces where ruling ideologies are placed into contradiction.

Slavery, the plight of woman

The first sign that I will address, present within the figuration of this gothic tale, that allows the critic to read the ideological limitations of the literary form is the eighteenth-century woman as akin to a slave (seen at the outset of *Maria* in the reference to "manacled arms" (163)). Wollstonecraft's work involved a number of "evolving categories on the status of European women in relation to slavery" being greatly influenced by the French Revolution in 1789 which "highlighted aristocratic hegemony and bourgeois rights" (Ferguson 82). Jeanette Ehrmann claims in *Political Ideas of Enlightenment Women* (2006) that

the French Revolution was a catalyst in the shift of women's discourse on slavery.

Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges (1749-1793), both writing in the midst of revolutionary turmoil and at the height of empire, challenged the philosophical discourse of their male contemporaries. They critiqued the supposed universalism of the white man's emancipation by reference to the subordinate status of both women and black people (Ehrmann 192).

This concept of comparing the state of women to that of a slave was a familiar analogy in the eighteenth century and in revolutionary women writers. In the 1706 Preface to Mary Astell's *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, for example, she famously asks why, if all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves? (18). Jeanette Ehrmann explains that in "representing marriage as slavery, Astell portrays as plainly scandalous this contradiction between freedom and rule of law (in the state) and inequality and arbitrary power (in the family)" (191). Astell compares marriage to slavery as both fall under the "*inconstant, uncertain, unknown Will of Men*" (Astell 18) and asks why Englishmen can repudiate the status of slavery yet uphold, at all costs, the constitution of marriage (19).

Generally speaking, Wollstonecraft represents the voice and concerns of English women from the middling ranks. Her connection between the struggles they face and the horrors suffered by women in the labouring ranks (even slaves) often seems extreme. But once we read Wollstonecraft's *Maria* as an invocation of gothic in the excess, we can see how simply speaking about women trapped by marriage and societal law would not offer sufficient expression of the difficulties women of her class are facing. This is because the issues that women face, in Wollstonecraft's eyes, are not recognized as warranting attention or concern of the ruling class and traditional gender ideologies of her time period. In this way then, Wollstonecraft uses the terminology of slavery to describe the issues that white middle-class women are facing because there is not terminology for the struggles that she wishes to express through her novels. The formation of The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787 and the rise of the abolition movement resulting in England outlawing the importation of slaves in 1807 makes Wollstonecraft's comparison of women and slaves, a timely one (Yale "Abolitionism Timeline"). Her use of allusions to slavery (as a language available to authors to use in literary

production) to describe the state of eighteenth-century women makes visible the inability of literature, as a product and example of ruling ideology, to represent the theme that is woman as a subject in the eyes of the law and society.

Wollstonecraft uses the imagery of slavery to describe the state of women in life and marriage in both of her novels as well as her works of non-fiction, particularly *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which is riddled with metaphors of slavery, calling women the slaves and playthings of men (Wollstonecraft, *VRW* 50-51) concerning the state of women in society. Of particular interest to this novel is her tendency to use images of slavery and captivity to describe Maria's situation as a woman and a wife. There are many instances of such language; for example a description of Maria which states, "resentment gave place to tenderness, and more tranquil meditation; though anger once more stopt the calm current of reflection, when she attempted to move her manacled arms" (Wollstonecraft *Maria* 163). Michelle Faubert suggests in a footnote that this language of "manacled arms" emphasizes "her humiliating lack of freedom and represent powerfully women's bondage on many levels" (163). This example is echoed again and again in *Maria*, most memorably in Maria's description of her marriage being a form of lifetime imprisonment; "marriage had bastilled me for life" (243). As a driving symbol and ideological force during this time period of revolution and calls for societal and political change, an image of the bastille as the institution of marriage for a woman is a strong one indeed. Not only is this comparison extreme (showing a language gap for writing about the state of women) but it is also highly relevant to Wollstonecraft's time period, being both a symbol of contention and revolution. Anne K. Mellor goes on to explain that Wollstonecraft's novel explores this struggle in every class of woman stating, "Wollstonecraft's relentless depictions of the oppression of British women of all classes is designed to document the necessity for legal

reform” (Mellor 414). Wollstonecraft makes it clear that changes must be made but cannot imagine a different ideological reality or, more accurately, even a fiction for her heroine.

Later Maria describes the unfaithful husband as remaining “the master of his own fate” (245) in contrast to the “many aimable women, the *out-laws* of the world” (245). Here, the term “master” is used to describe men and “*out-law*” is used to describe women suggesting slave-master relationship which sees slaves as property and not as reasonable citizens who have rights under the law. Like slaves, women for Wollstonecraft can be imprisoned and controlled by men in places like Maria’s asylum where things happen which are worse than anything the gothic language could describe. But once again it must be stated that although akin in some ways, women’s lack of equality and the issues surrounding slavery are not the same thing. There is no abolition movement for marriage and so Wollstonecraft uses the language of slavery because there is no language of ruling ideology, the producer of novels, which supports the struggle for women’s equality.

Suicide and death as silence

The theme of suicide stands as the second sign within the gothic figuration of this novel which allows us to read the instances of silence within it. Maria speaks of yearning for death before the end of the novel stating that “death I had hailed as my only chance for deliverance; but, while existence had still so many charms, and life promised happiness, I shrunk from the icy arms of an unknown tyrant, though far more inviting than those of the man, to whom I supposed myself bound without any alternative; and was content to linger a little longer” (Wollstonecraft, *Maria* 253). Excessive in theme as slavery and the gothic style, suicide or the imagining of death as relief offers a conceptualization of the struggle of women, and what it makes them feel. In this

specified place in the text, Maria does not actually commit suicide in the finished parts of the novel but speaks about considering the relief of death. The main instance (possibly the action) of suicide in this novel is found in the unfinished ending (s) left behind in Wollstonecraft's manuscript. The bleakest of these partial endings is written as "Divorced by her husband – Her lover unfaithful – Pregnancy – Miscarriage – Suicide" (286).

Another ending speaks of an attempt at suicide by an overdose of laudanum (which she later throws up after realizing that her long-lost child still lives),

She swallowed the laudanum; her soul was calm – the tempest had subsided – and nothing remained but an eager longing to forget herself... "What have I not suffered! – may I find a father where I am going! – Her head turned; a stupor ensued; a faintness – 'have a little patience,' said Maria, holding her swimming head (she thought of her mother), 'this cannot last long; and what is a little bodily pain to the pangs I have endured?'" (286).

This ending echoes the scene where Mary finally rejects her husband and yearns for death as an escape from life (253). In this way suicide, death and relief from marriage become inextricable. There has been much debate from scholars including (but not limited to) Michelle Faubert, Kathryn Temple, Tilottama Rajan and Mitzi Myers about what the fragmented endings Wollstonecraft left behind might reveal to us about Wollstonecraft's thoughts and intentions regarding the future she envisioned for women. Michelle Faubert claims in her article "The Fictional Suicides of Mary Wollstonecraft" that in this ending "the message is that, if women are like colonial slaves because they are similarly ensnared by their bodies, then killing the means of their imprisonment is a logical form of protest against the tyrants who rule them. In this way, suicidal rebellion expresses that, though their bodies may be enslaved, their minds are free – and rational enough to choose liberty" (Faubert 657). Faubert suggests that the endings which include

suicide are connected to the theme of slavery as advancing the “notion of female suicide as a protest against male tyranny over the female body” (Faubert “Fictional” 657). Faubert and Nicole Reynolds elaborate on the subject of suicide, explaining that authors including Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson and Mary Wollstonecraft “use the suicide motif both to affirm and test the limits of female autonomy and how it might best be expressed at a time when it was barely recognized by the church, the law, or the state” (Faubert and Reynolds 648). In more than one of the proposed endings Wollstonecraft envisions the consideration or the action of suicide for heroine Maria. It is intriguing to consider the implications of Wollstonecraft publishing this novel with an ending of suicide as an act of protest. Perhaps this could have been read as a sign of the struggle against ruling ideologies in literary production. However, I argue that suicide, like slavery becomes a sign which illuminates an absence. Ending one’s life as a heroine in a 1790s novel (like Maria) stands as a signal of the impossibility for literature produced within 1790s ideology to end any differently.

Even though Wollstonecraft did not complete this literary work, the manuscripts and multiple possible endings allow us to better glimpse into the process that is literary production. Rajan would agree, stating in “Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel” that, “it is partly because Wollstonecraft herself did not superintend the publication of the manuscript that we can, to borrow Macherey’s distinction, read *The Wrongs of Woman* as “produced under determinate conditions” rather than “created by an intention,” and hence as available for historical reading” (Rajan 239).

Alternatively, the fact that someone other than the author chose to publish this literary work speaks to the determinedness of this novel’s production and leaves it more open for historical analysis. As Macherey explains, the job of the critic is to read a work not for the

ending (normative fallacy) but to work at exploring the product as a whole. Many previous critics of this novel have committed Macherey's normative fallacy where "criticism proposes to modify the work in order to assimilate it more thoroughly, denying its factual reality as being merely the provisional version of an unfulfilled intention" (Macherey 19). By reading the signs as determinate developers of the process that is the literary product, instead of reading the ending of the work as a sort of beginning, it allows us to see the work as complex and made up of a series of threads (including signs, absences, and themes). Reading *Maria* this way allows the reader to make the connection between any ending of suicide or yearning for death as a product of the story of the life of women. Only in reading the lives of Maria and Jemima do we understand these deathly endings; only by reading the lives of these women can we read what is not written, that is, a future of hope and solutions for late eighteenth century female novel characters.

During the latter half of this novel, heroine Maria addresses the court in a written statement which concerns her situation as a mother and wife beginning "married when scarcely able to distinguish the nature of the engagement, I yet submitted to the rigid laws which enslave women, and obeyed the man whom I could no longer love" (281). She continues, "I appeal to my own sense of justice, and declare that I will not live with the individual, who has violated every moral obligation which binds man to man" (283). She finished by claiming that in the moment that her husband neglected her and separated her from her child, "I believed myself, in the sight of heaven, free – and no power on earth shall force me to renounce my resolution" (284).

Kathryn Temple suggests that "at the beginning of the novella, she [Maria] is all object: objectified by her family, then by her husband, then by the law when she is incarcerated in a madhouse, the object of legal action. By the end, she is a legal subject, a person in a legal sense,

with a person's right to present a case and be heard" (Temple 379). However, I would disagree with this statement in considering it as an example of Macherey's normative fallacy, where the suggestion that this novel gives the heroine legal subjectivity seems to be claiming a reading of what the novel should be. That Temple would transform Wollstonecraft's words to mean female legal subjectivity I believe to be too grand and far-reaching for what actually happens. Maria does get the chance to give a statement in court which means that she is in some way recognized but none of her possible endings benefit from this court statement. She is completely disregarded and dismissed by the judge and court, in effect nullifying any use in giving the statement in the first place. Maria's "address to the court demanding her liberty from Venables enlists both passion and rational argument to plead for individual conscience against procrustean legalities. Yet, whatever her hard-won maturity, Maria is impotent before the symbolically retrograde judge whom neither feminine feeling nor radical ideology can swerve. What with social conditioning and constraint, the achievement of female autonomy and wholeness seems almost impossible" (Myers "Unfinished" 113). This begs us to question the meaning of "suicide" for someone with no voice and no legal existence; suicide seems to become more a loss of property than a murder.

This sense of impossibility is echoed in Mary Hays' work *Emma Courtney* (1796) where heroine Emma is challenged and torn between reason and passion, a common theme explored in fiction written by both male and female authors during this time period. Kelly claims that Hays' novel presents a "message of revolutionary hope – that the internalization of 'things as they are' inevitably produces the conditions, first subjective and then social and political, for their revolutionary transformation" (Kelly *Women, Writing* 106). He goes on to clarify that despite this ideological project the novel still produces a story where "Emma remains powerless to change 'things as they are' and is left with only a transposed revolutionary hope that young

Augustus, ‘the son of my affections’, will escape ‘from the tyranny of the passions’ intrinsic to court culture” (106). Here is yet another example of a novel (not unlike the novels written by Wollstonecraft) with an unsatisfactory ending that fails to fulfill the revolutionary hopes of its beginnings. Interestingly, in many ways this situation of radical passion falling on deaf traditional ears, seems a symbol of how the production of literature seems to work. That no matter how radical the feelings of the author, there is only one language to use in the production of literature and that is the language of the ruling ideology.

When we shift the critical gaze away from authorial intention and towards the text as produced, we can better understand the presence of these signs which seem like absences, signaling an inability for Wollstonecraft to imagine revolutionary female characters who overcome their struggles. We recognize these signs as absences in their inability to completely cohere with all aspects of the ideological project of the novel. The ideological project includes the struggle that women in Wollstonecraft’s time face but also the knowledge that Wollstonecraft possesses regarding possibly revolutions for the state of women in her society. Maria committing suicide does not match up with Wollstonecraft’s insistence throughout her life that there are solutions for these issues including the recognition of woman as a rational, intellectually capable individuals and the creation of educational opportunities not yet afforded them.

As scholars like Jennifer Golightly have identified the inability for a number of female writers producing literature during this time to represent successful, happy female heroines, I suggest that this is because they are writing within ruling ideology. Gothic as a common literary form becomes excessive in its attempt to describe the real struggles of the rational woman. The sign of slavery alerts us to the fact that there is not a language for discussing the 1790s revolutionary thought surrounding the struggle of women, which Macherey would identify as an

absence. The sign of suicide shows us a contradiction between the struggle towards women's equality (including possible revolutionary thinking as found in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*) in the mind of Wollstonecraft and in the literary product we have considered as *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*. Essentially, there is no detectable difference between the lived real of eighteenth-century women's lives and the ideological representations of women's lives in fiction. Maria's fictional life is limited by the same ideologies which limit the real, lived life of Wollstonecraft. The fictional representation of suicide echoes the impossibility of equal female existence in eighteenth century ideology, which Wollstonecraft herself felt in becoming a social pariah due to her atypical marital and familial statuses. Each of the ideological lines which build "real" eighteenth-century life for women can only be echoed in fiction. These ideologies create a language for fiction (a product which must ultimately be sold/ and accepted) which results in a predetermined set of heroine plot possibilities seen here in Wollstonecraft's fiction. As Maria speaks through the language of the product that is the novel, she can only be and speak as an acceptable eighteenth-century female novel character would, where her strength, rationality and passion fade into the silence of the eighteenth-century woman.

Chapter 5: Conclusion – Reading the Silence

After exploring these works of fiction by Mary Wollstonecraft it becomes strikingly clear that there is an evident disconnect between the strength of her feminist ideas communicated through her radical non-fiction and the unsatisfying spaces that her fictional heroines inhabit. It is because of Wollstonecraft's radical work in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where she advocates female education for the eradication of sentimentality as a female weakness of character described as "women subjected by ignorance to their sensations" and the better rearing of children (215), the study of moral works, "something superior" (217) to flimsy novels filled with "sentimental jargon" (215) which will move women away from the imaginary artificial life experience formed by reading only novels (217), and the correction of female vice and folly through the freedom of women's physicality, morality, and civil sense (226) that we can read the limitations of self-expression when we come to her works of fiction. Throughout these novels, Wollstonecraft does not at all fail to express the struggles that women face in the world but she fails to be able to characterize a difference in and for the lives of these unique and strong female characters as they step outside of gender norms. The confidence with which she writes and speaks about the abilities, strength and opportunities that women could gain from struggling against ruling ideological gender roles is lost in the lives of her fictional heroines who exist in lonely, depressed and shockingly unequitable situations even though they are portrayed as strong unique women with characteristics defined as necessary in Wollstonecraft's vindications.

Many have commented on the gap between Wollstonecraft's powerful political polemic and her "failed" fiction. As we step back from the details of these works and look instead to Macherey's understanding of the task of the critic we can question the use and importance of this type of study. Macherey suggests that the critic must ask a question about the work (after the

fact). The meanings derived from the answers (understood by seeking the conditions which make the emergence of knowledge possible) to this question create a new product entirely. By asking what Wollstonecraft is not expressing about the struggle for women's equality through the plot and characterization of her novels, we understand what the novel cannot express during the late eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft's novels say that there is a struggle for women in society to be free in a number of ways. Character Mary is forced to marry, has no sense of true occupation, can be educated in histories and moral essays (like a man), and can find love (however fleeting) outside of marriage. What *Mary, A Fiction* cannot say is that women who are educated and understand what real equal forms of love/companionship should involve will be able to find success and contentedness in eighteenth-century society. Character Maria is educated and literate enough to have the same tastes and sensibilities as a man, finds love outside of marriage, and expresses her keen sense of inequality concerning the few rights that women have under the law. What *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* cannot even imagine is that when women truly understand the oppression that they live under and express their educated sentiments concerning their lack of rights, they will be listened to and taken seriously as valued, intelligent and capable members of society. Investigating what both of these novels cannot say (the aspects on which they remain silent) reflects the state of ruling ideology which governs the content and production of literature. This thesis has created a new sense of the effects that late eighteenth-century ideology has on the production of literature by Mary Wollstonecraft.

In thinking about the observations that have been made in consideration of the inability to imagine stories which include female characters who uphold feminist ideals and who end up successful and content in Wollstonecraft's two works of fiction, it is natural to ask why this is important to know and understand. What does this tell us about fiction, reading fiction, issues of

slow change like feminism, and the eighteenth century? I will urge upon the reader to consider that, when reading historical works of fiction, we are not only reading patterns of ruling ideology but also the struggle against it. Being able to read the silence expressed here gives readers and critics the opportunity to acknowledge the existence of ideological struggle rather than simply reading the ideological norms represented by the realism that these novels express. This question of the abilities of representation and the realist novel has recently been explored by author Amitav Ghosh in his work *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016). Ghosh explores the irony of the realist novel explaining that,

the very gestures with which it conjures up reality are actually a concealment of the real. What this means in practice is that the calculus of probability that is deployed within the imaginary world of a novel is not the same as that which obtains outside it; this is why it is commonly said, “If this were in a novel, no one would believe it.” Within the pages of a novel an event that is only slightly improbable in real life – say, an unexpected encounter with a long-lost childhood friend – may seem wildly unlikely: the writer will have to work hard to make it appear persuasive (Gosh 23-24)

The reality explored in the realist novel can only represent the pinnacle of ideological societal norms. When novels step outside of this, they become fantastical and no longer a representation of reality. Trying to explore radical issues through the realist novel becomes in many ways impossible. Because the realist novel aims to embody, solely, a representation of real-life, its example becomes a pure representation of ruling ideology and it is therefore easier to read as limiting. However, as explained earlier in the first chapter, Macherey understands *all literature* to be “revolutionary” (363) in how it represents and imagines reality. In turn, even though Wollstonecraft’s novels would not be described as purely realist, they are a part of this

revolutionary literature as a representation of how Wollstonecraft and the production of the novel exist, at all times, in ideology.

Many have identified these spaces of seeming contradiction or inability to express certain issues through fiction as authorial failure but Macherey gives us a different language to comprehend it. He tells us that the novel is a product which is a part of the capitalist means of production. This means that it is created to be sold and that what sells is a representation of and therefore inseparable from ruling ideology; “a caricature of customary ideology” (68). It becomes clear from this quotation that this concept is widely and currently applicable to any written novel attempting some aspect of realism, as novels today (just as in the eighteenth century) still remain a product to be bought and sold. In line with what we saw in Gosh’s example of silence when it comes to literature concerning climate change, it could be interesting to expand this study to include a critical look at what novels written from a more modern feminist figure cannot say.

During the late eighteenth century in England, a time of dramatic social and political change, it is clear that the expression of thought (both revolutionary and traditional) through the act of writing was a popular mode of communication, whether through conduct literature, political and religious pamphlets or works of philosophy. In coming to discover the unique and extraordinary voice of Wollstonecraft in her fight to make visible the rights of women we can see the through reading silence there is evidence of her attempt to express something ideologically different using the novel. Golightly has observed that the radical heroines (heroines written by women during the 1790s) are defined by characteristics such as being “intelligent, well-spoken, witty upon occasion, and aware of the potential dangers in marriage” (Golightly 114). Perhaps these characteristics, rather than a fully evolved form of feminist heroines content in happy

lifelong marriages, show the extent of feminist ideological progress of the decade. Interestingly Golightly goes on to give account of heroines written by women during the nineteenth century who, although they retain some of these 1790s qualities, are “modest, decorous, prudent, and practical” (114). She continues by elaborating that women writers of the early nineteenth century would reshape the previous more radical ideas about women expressed in 1790s novels and “entrench the notion of a feminine domestic sphere as essential to the well-being of the nation” (115). The silences identified in this thesis confirm a novel language (as used by Wollstonecraft and presumably others) constricted by ruling ideology. The content and ideological projects of Wollstonecraft’s novels support the ideological struggle being pursued by women during this great time of political and social re-evaluation. However, the lack of clear direction for different, more feminist characters verifies a lack of largescale real-world, real-individual change, perhaps confirmed by the feminist regression that Golightly indicates in the conclusion to her own work.

In this way, rather than reading the silences which inevitably inhere in the novel (a product which can only speak using the language of ruling ideology no matter, and in some cases despite the author’s wish to express something different) as merely a limit of expression, we can read silences as signs of real human struggle against ruling class ideology. Macherey gives power to the literary critic as someone who can make visible the invisible. That by reading what is not said we can learn a great deal more than what is allowed by ideological language accessible to authors during their time period. Reading silence allows us to perceive the process of ideological change as it is happening. The example of expressing successful feminism has been a long (many would say ongoing) struggle. I have explored two novels written during the late eighteenth century and studied what it is their spaces of silence say about their historical moment (including the striking comparison between the texts and the author producing them).

I will conclude that both of Wollstonecraft's novels offer moments of silence which identify the strong ideologies at work in and on the novel as their product of them. Both novels struggle to offer successful feminist protagonists, but by reading Wollstonecraft's use of figurations exemplified here by both the gothic and sentimental novels we can identify moments where the language of the product which is novel, does not allow for the discussion of topics that fall outside of proper plot and character lines drawn by ruling ideology. It then becomes clear that Wollstonecraft did not fail in her intention of character in her novels but she was using a platform (novel) which did not possess the language to express radical ideas falling outside of customary ideology. We can then conclude that the novel, as contrary as it sounds, is not a form that could be used to express new or radical concepts for the reason that new and radical insinuates not in-line with ruling ideology and therefore will not be represented by the available language of the novel. I would propose that further study concerning the development of feminist characterization and representation in novels could tell us a lot about the modern development of women's struggle for equality.

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