

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

1990

A rhetorical analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Gail E. Rogers Sulkin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sulkin, Gail E. Rogers, "A rhetorical analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1990). *Theses Digitization Project*. 553.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/553>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

2 A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF
MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S
A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Gail E. Rogers Sulkin

June 1990

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF
MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S
A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN

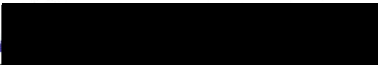
A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino


In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition


by
Gail E. Rogers Sulkin

June 1990

Approved by:


Margaret Doane
Department of English


Elinore H. Partridge
Department of English


Susan Meisenhelder
Department of English

May 14, 1990
Date

ABSTRACT

Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, published in 1792, is an essay regarding the rights of humankind, particularly of women. When Wollstonecraft began writing this essay, she set out to establish the premise that all things were not equal, particularly a woman's place in society when compared to that of a man's. This thesis is a rhetorical analysis of Wollstonecraft's writing, including argument development and techniques she used in her attempt to persuade a reluctant audience. Specifically, this thesis addresses the content of Wollstonecraft's essay, including but not limited to her dialectic, her use of embellishment, the development of her argument.

DEDICATION

To my mother, whom I know would be proud.
And to my husband and family, whom I love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
SIGNATURE PAGE	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
I. PREFACE: BACKGROUND	1
II. CHAPTER 1: MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S GRAND SOURCE OF MISERY	9
III. CHAPTER 2: THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER ARGUMENT	15
IV. CHAPTER 3: WOLLSTONECRAFT'S SLAVE/DESPOT: OR, WHAT IS AN IDEAL REALITY?	26
V. CHAPTER 4: A MEANS TO AN END: EMBELLISHMENT	37
.....	
WORKS CITED	56

PREFACE

In her essay, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft begins with a dedication to M. Talleyrand-Perigord, a French diplomat responsible for the Rapport sur L'Instruction Publique, fait au nom du Comite de Constitution. In his report, Talleyrand proposes a system of compulsory free education (Wollstonecraft 5), an idea in which Wollstonecraft found many exciting possibilities. The one flaw Wollstonecraft found in the report was that to which she took great exception: Talleyrand, when addressing man, was disregarding woman. In her dedication, Wollstonecraft confronts Talleyrand and states:

. . . if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first, to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency, that they want reason-else this flaw in your NEW CONSTITUTION will ever shew that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality. (5)

Wollstonecraft lived in a time of revolution, repression and reform. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, France was experiencing civil war. The English were watching closely the developments of the French Revolution and taking sides either supporting or censuring.

Mary Wollstonecraft was a supporter. She strongly believed in the right of humankind, regardless of gender. She was not one to sit idly by, quietly complaining. Her essay, Rights of Woman, was her stand against the injustices not only of women (although that is the major thrust) but also of men. Through her writing, she wished to become the "voice" that would generate "participation of the natural rights of mankind."

During this period of unrest, Wollstonecraft was friendly with such liberals as Joseph Johnson, her publisher, Thomas Paine who wrote The Rights of Man (1791), and William Godwin, who later married Wollstonecraft. The book that brought her fame, her first plea for human liberty, A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790), was written as a result of her friendship with this group and is a precursor to Rights of Woman.

In her essay, Wollstonecraft addresses several of the problems of the time as she saw them, such as social class, status of women, lack of education for women, and the role of reason as a God-given attribute. This last topic, the role of reason, is one that takes on major proportions in her essay. Wollstonecraft's main argument, as addressed in the dedication, was based on the fact that one half the human race was making decisions for, and acting on behalf of, the other half of the human race, without so much as

allowing women a chance to make decisions and choices of their own. She wanted to know "who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him the gift of reason?" (5).

Rights of Woman was written when Mary Wollstonecraft was thirty-two and is replete with her beliefs and experiences as an educator and reformer. She had begun her public career as a teacher in 1783 in a day-school she helped to found with her two sisters and a friend, Fanny Blood. She published Thoughts on the Education of Daughters in 1787. It received little attention. Her second educational book, Original Stories from Real Life, published in 1788, was more successful. In the same year, she wrote her first novel, Mary, a Fiction, partly autobiographical. She also began writing for the Analytical Review, which Joseph Johnson instituted in May of that year. Following the publication of Rights of Men in 1790 and Rights of Woman in 1792, she wrote much less. In 1795, Wollstonecraft traveled to Scandinavia, a trip which produced Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. After this period, she resumed writing for the Analytical Review; and she started a novel, Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman. This work was published posthumously by her husband William Godwin.

Wollstonecraft was one of four children. Her father, a failure at farming, moved his family frequently in attempts

to begin anew on new pieces of land. Mary's father was often abusive, both physically and verbally. And while she did her best to protect her mother from his outbursts, they nonetheless proved an emotional springboard from which she would later base her argument for societal reform in Rights of Woman. But, as Gary Kelly states in his article, "Mary Wollstonecraft: Texts and Contexts": "Too much attention to the life, which often degenerated into dramatic but repetitive obsessions, has distracted attention from the almost constant growth of her mind and imagination" (38-40).

Kelly makes a strong point: in order for Wollstonecraft to be heard as a serious voice, it was sometimes necessary for her to shout. Such shouting can (and often did) result in dramatics, but more often the result was pure insight into matters of human equality and life as she saw it.

Kelly firmly believes that:

The real point is that the style has, once again, to be seen whole. Then her 'flowers', her tropes, her 'prolixities', and her rhetoric can be seen as true literary counterparts of her own independent, active, and variegated intelligence. (40)

This thesis does look at Wollstonecraft's writing style as a whole and makes some fascinating discoveries.

Wollstonecraft, as a writer, is quite adept at placing herself beside her readership while at the same time tactically maneuvering them around her opinions and beliefs. Her maneuvering strategies consisted not only of a strong

argument, but also those same 'flowers' and 'prolixities' Kelly mentions.

In her article, "The Sentimental Logic of Wollstonecraft's Prose," Syndy McMillen Conger also makes a very interesting case:

We have been misreading Wollstonecraft's prose. We have been looking for linear logical progression rather than a dialectical development from the interplay of ideal and real, an interplay more productive of moods than premises, and of prophecies than conclusion. (144)

In other words, those who have been confused by Wollstonecraft's apparent lack of discipline within her writing are not considering her "interplay" of reason and love, seriousness and gaiety, modesty and her joie de vivre. Kelly agrees with Conger's principle:

Mary Wollstonecraft was versatile, and she was passionate, in a way which makes questions of her lack of 'masculine' logic and order, her lack of 'masculine' respect for facts and practicalities, merely academic. Her mind and imagination were unique. (40)

This idea of the ideal versus the real helps to explain Wollstonecraft's apparent "digressions" and obvious fervor within her writing. For although Wollstonecraft's essay is a treatise on the "reality" of women's existence, she also offers her audience many illustrations of her "ideal," thus creating the struggle of emotions within her writing.

The work I will concentrate on is her essay A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. I chose this essay for

two simple reasons: 1) it exhibits Wollstonecraft's ability at argument and persuasion, as well as her passion; and, 2) it shows her concern for human rights. When Wollstonecraft questions the lack of "voice" by women when it comes to the "participation of the natural rights of mankind," she is questioning beliefs and ways of life that few dared to question.

My analysis will focus on four aspects of the work, the first being content, primarily her concerns with the rights and duties of humankind. Wollstonecraft's foremost argument is how equality in education would lead to better lives for both men and women. She was concerned that women, not given the same opportunities in life as men, never developed reason, freedom and common sense, and, furthermore, that those inequalities also infringed upon men. The second category is argument development. Wollstonecraft based her argument on the simple truths of three concepts: reason, virtue, experience. From these concepts springs the foundation on which humankind should stand. An interesting element stemming from the development of her argument comprises the third category of reality/ideal or slave/despot. Perhaps the strongest point Wollstonecraft attempts to make is that of the "power" women seem to have over men. She argues that because of their inferiority, they do possess a type of power, only the power, ironically,

is due to their weakness.

The fourth category is embellishment, such as schemes and tropes. Wollstonecraft may profess to use direct and unadorned language, but what she ultimately delivers to her readers is in direct opposition to her declaration (but perhaps not to her true intent). One of the strongest qualities of Wollstonecraft's writing is her ability to manipulate the language as she felt her argument required; in doing so she relied on such schemes as parenthesis, variously posed questions and several types of repetition, such as anaphora and alliteration. She also used to great advantage tropes such as metaphor, simile, apostrophe, personification, and epithet. She did not settle for simple statement; she embellished her phrases with twists and turns, presenting the reader with a treatise that dances with sound, thought, feeling, and emotion. Wollstonecraft's argument surely is strong enough to stand independently of any embellishment, but what a pleasure it is to read with that passion always simmering just beneath the surface.

I hope to show that Mary Wollstonecraft was in fact a vibrant, knowledgeable, if perhaps at times volatile writer, one who deeply felt the injustices of the times in which she lived. When Wollstonecraft took up her pen, she began by stating: "It is then an affection for the whole human race that makes my pen dart rapidly along to support what I

believe to be the cause of virtue" (3). Mary Wollstonecraft, while perhaps hoping to change the world, or at least her corner of it in some small way, was even more trying to open the minds of both men and women in an attempt to "enlighten" the thoughts and actions of those in authority and of those who followed authority unquestionably. In her "Preface" to her novel, Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman she states:

The Wrongs of Woman, like the Wrongs of the oppressed part of mankind, may be deemed necessary by their oppressors; but surely there are a few, who will dare to advance before the improvement of the age, and grant that my sketches are not the abortion of a distempered fancy, or the strong delineations of a wounded heart. (21)

Wollstonecraft did not deem oppression necessary. Her essay is proof that she herself refused to be confined in any way. Her writing style itself is a celebration of freedom of thought and expression, not the abortion of a distempered fancy.

CHAPTER I

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S GRAND SOURCE OF MISERY

Then why must woman to be loved be weak?
Imperious Man! is this alone thy pride
T'enslave the heart that lingers at thy side?
Smother each flash of intellectual fire,
And bid Ambition's noblest throb expire?
Pinion the wing, that yearns for glory's light,
Then boast the strength of thy superior flight?

Go! love the fabric of unmeaning clay,
The flattered creature of an idle day!
And as the trembling partner of thy lot
Hangs on thy steps unheeded, or forgot,
Thy cradle rocks, and weeps upon thy grave,
Tis thine to fetter, scorn, disdain, enslave!
And while she smiles, submissive, on thy breast,
Debase the faithful heart that loves thee best!
Teach her a lovely, object thing, to be!
For such are generous deeds, and worthy thee!

Eternal Genius! thou mysterious tie,
That links the Mortal, and Divinity!
Say, hath thy sacred influence never stole,
With radiance unobscured, on Woman's soul;
Till, waking into greatness, it hath caught
The glow of fancy, and the life of thought,
Breathing conception, eloquence that fires,
And all that learning gives, & Heav'n inspires?
Is Woman doomed obscure, & lone, to sigh?
Comnena, Dacier, More, DeStael, reply!

-Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, written some thirty years after the death of Mary Wollstonecraft, echo beautifully those desires, frustrations, and insights into humankind that Wollstonecraft herself wrote about in her

essay A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. The very objections Browning makes clear in her poem are the very issues Wollstonecraft addressed in an age where very often a woman's worth was seriously misjudged. When Mary Wollstonecraft set about to write Rights of Woman, she had a purpose in mind: to attempt to enlighten the women and men of her day to the injustices that are inflicted upon humankind when half the population is neither heard nor seen as reasonable, thinking human beings. The topics Wollstonecraft tackles are those still prevalent today: politics, society, education and, perhaps most importantly, women's role in those areas.

Perhaps Wollstonecraft's biggest concern was the degradation that occurs throughout the whole of society when restrictions are placed on human worth, usefulness, and even strength. In Rights of Woman, she attributes these restrictions to one source, the inequality of education between men and women:

. . . the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion . . . a false system of education. (7)

From this "false system of education" springs the well of truth that Wollstonecraft shares with her readers. In her essay, Wollstonecraft addresses not only her "fellow-creatures" but also the nobility, the rich, fellow writers,

and above all, men of reason. It is to these men of reason Wollstonecraft pleads, for it is through them that she feels she will make the most headway, they who will truly listen to her pleas and perhaps initiate the movement toward a better system of education leading to a better system of humanity. Although Wollstonecraft does address the women of her day, she believed that there were, unfortunately, few women who would or could help her in her struggle toward enlightenment. In fact, much of her essay is aimed at those women who are able but unwilling to fight for a better, more equal world. The dominant concern in her essay is that many women, because of an improper education, are really unqualified to help, deprived of the most important quality of life, reason.

Wollstonecraft does not take her task lightly. Before her introduction, she addresses M. Talleyrand-Perigord, stating that she is pleased with his pamphlet on education, and wishes he would consider her ideas, which include women:

Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all. (4)

Wollstonecraft did not wish to create a woman independent of man. She recognized a need for marriage and a happy home; she simply felt it necessary for women to be more aware of their world and their own selves in order for

them to be good companions of men. By addressing M. Talleyrand, she accomplishes two things; 1) she presents herself as a woman of reason, possessing common sense and capable of logical thought, on the same level as a man such as Talleyrand; and, 2) she opens the way for her argument on the necessity of change, acknowledging Talleyrand's ideas, but also allowing for its flaws, thus leaving room for her own ideas and improvements.

Her plan of action is simple enough: she wishes to address women as "human creatures" rather than females. She especially wants to address those women of the middle class, for they do not have the bother of excess, nor the worry of poverty. She also will strive to convince people of reason, both men and women, of her convictions. She states her objectives as being the following:

- to persuade women to acquire strength of mind and body;

- to show that soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment etc., are epithets of weakness;

- to prove that elegance is inferior to virtue; and,

- to show that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being. (8-10)

Strength of mind, character, and virtue are three characteristics Wollstonecraft repeatedly espouses as the necessary components of a person of reason--three characteristics a woman must develop if she is to be a

person of reason.

As already mentioned, Wollstonecraft was not fighting for anything particularly radical; she simply wished for women the same opportunities men had: the right to a proper education, the ability to care and fend for themselves, and the chance to support themselves in professions usually open only to men, such as medicine, business, teaching. And yet, as pointed out by Mitzi Meyers in her article "Reform or Ruin: A Revolution in Female Manners," despite Wollstonecraft's often inflammatory rhetoric, at the heart of her work lies a "pattern of female domestic heroism, an image of activity, strength, fortitude, and ethical maturity, of self-denial, purity, and truth" (200). Wollstonecraft writes of parental duties, parental affections, proper education, and morals. She is far from preaching radical movements within society; she wishes solely for proper, humane treatment of every person: man, woman and child.

She writes about a woman capable of centering her attentions not on fashion and money, but on family, self, and marriage. She laments the fact that women seem destined to be dependent upon men, not only for economic purposes, but also for any sense of well-being: "Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to

tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning" (11).

Wollstonecraft argues against the present notion that women are incapable of rational thought and suggests that men quit "flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood" (9). Such treatment of women only perpetuates their dependency, and such treatment Wollstonecraft will not abide, expressing the hope that "her own sex will excuse [her] if [she] treat[s] them like rational creatures" (9). Anca Vlasopolos, in her article "Mary Wollstonecraft's Mask of Reason in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," states:

One of the leitmotifs of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is the sheer ineptitude of unliberated women for the roles of wife and mother, and the improvement of domestic welfare, infant survival, and effective education of children attendant upon women's freedom to strengthen their minds and bodies. (463)

That is exactly what Wollstonecraft argued; how were women expected to care for a family if they could not properly care for themselves? She believed women must first realize their strengths before they take on the role of mother; otherwise, all that is available to them are their own weaknesses. Using this belief as a strategy (restating it again and again in various ways), Wollstonecraft strives to convince her readers of its soundness and to encourage action against such instances.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER ARGUMENT

Mary Wollstonecraft's argument was not only with men and women, but also with the concepts society held at the time. In order to establish a better society, one must first look inward, to oneself. First to change must be the attitudes and misconceptions of people, then will follow a better world in which they may live. She begins her essay by stating that "in order to go forward it is first necessary to go back to first principles in search of the most simple truths" (11). Those simple truths are embodied in three concepts, Reason, Virtue, and Experience:

In what does man's pre-eminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is clear . . . in Reason. What acquirement exalts one being above another? Virtue; we spontaneously reply. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes; whispers Experience. (12)

Such concepts work to build a stable, reliable foundation on which humankind can stand together. Without such a foundation, humankind becomes divided; such a division currently exists, according to Wollstonecraft, because "prejudices have clouded reason and spurious qualities have assumed the name of virtue" (12).

The spurious qualities Wollstonecraft names take the form of hereditary honors, rank and property, and institutions such as the army, navy, and the clergy. Mincing no words, she first elaborates on this belief with the following siege upon the sacred majesty of kings:

Vile intrigues, unnatural crimes, and every vice that degrades our nature, have been the steps to this distinguished eminence It is impossible for any man, when the most favourable circumstances concur, to acquire sufficient knowledge and strength of mind to discharge the duties of a king. (16)

By placing himself in such a precarious place of authority, man has subjected himself and all others to the inevitable ruin of such a position. She insists that "surely it is madness to make the fate of thousands depend on the caprice of a weak fellow creature, whose very situation sinks him necessarily below the meanest of his subjects" (16). Any position in which subordination of rank constitutes its power is injurious by nature. She further supports her claim with examples of the army: "A standing army is incompatible with freedom; because subordination and rigour are the very sinews of military discipline" (17). She also addresses herself to the navy, arguing that "sailors are more positively indolent" (17); and, finally, to the clergy, who have "superior opportunities of improvement, though subordination almost equally cramps their faculties" (18). Wollstonecraft concludes by stating:

"Society, therefore, as it becomes more enlightened, should be very careful not to establish bodies of men who must necessarily be made foolish or vicious by the very constitution of their profession" (18).

She contends that hereditary honors lead to denigrating consequences. To support that contention, she offers various supporting examples. Presenting it inductively as she does, her argument is perhaps weaker than it would be had it been approached in a more deductive manner, but adequate nevertheless proving a methodical, direct approach at convincing her reader of her point.

After clarifying hereditary honors and positions of rank as spurious qualities, Wollstonecraft moves to her next point, a concluding assumption of the tyranny of men:

To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character. (19)

Unfortunately, where women are concerned, the attainment of different characters results in something Wollstonecraft refers to as a sexual character. She wants to know why; why should sufficient strength of mind be withheld from women since women are on earth as long as men. She completely agrees that men have every right to complain of women's "follies and caprices" because women have been taught at childhood and from the example of their mothers

that "a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of property, will obtain for them the protection of man" (19).

Through sarcasm she has twisted her agreement into an example; yes, men have every right to complain, but is it truly women's fault when they are taught from birth to behave in the very manner which offends? It is such offensive behavior that epitomizes the sexual character of a woman and helps fuel the fire called tyranny in men. Here is where Wollstonecraft approaches her theory of education.

If children were educated the same, then this weak, condescending female would no longer exist. She grants that children should be innocent but when that term is applied to women it is merely an epithet for weakness. Assuming (as she does) that women were allowed by providence to "acquire human virtues," they must be "permitted to turn to the fountain of light, and not be forced to shape their course by the twinkling of a mere satellite" (20). Besides the fact that she has embellished her writing almost to a degree of distraction, she has in fact made a wonderful point; women should not be a sexual character, for they are allowed by providence (God) to acquire virtue, just as are men.

The problem here, for Wollstonecraft, is the apparent belief that women are not viewed in the same way as men.

Women are denied the title of human and given instead the subordinate postscript of sexual character. Wollstonecraft believes that in order for women to be appreciated as human beings, and not merely as sexual characters (i.e., female only), they must be allowed to exist within the same guidelines as do men. "If she [has reason], which, for a moment, I will take for granted, she was not created merely to be the solace of man, and the sexual should not destroy the human character" (53).

If men continue to treat women as such, and if women continue to accept that level of subordination, then what will occur is the refocusing of a person's view from God, and the foundation of reason, virtue, and experience to humankind, with its spurious qualities and prejudices. God is the only Being worthy of a person's complete and total devotion and reverence; humankind cannot and should not ever try to supplant that position.

After clarifying what she feels to be the essential foundation of humankind, and the resulting cause and effect of the foundation's deterioration, Wollstonecraft turns her attention to those she feels play a significant role in the nurturing of such deteriorations, such voices of authority as Dr. John Gregory (1724-1773), who wrote A Father's Legacy to His Daughters, and Rousseau (22). By directly addressing specific individuals, Wollstonecraft strengthens her own

position, creating a bleak picture of their representation of women while at the same time building upon her own. This is an essential strategy in the development of her argument. If she could successfully disparage the present voices of authority, she could simultaneously strengthen her own. She states that they have "rendered women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been" (22). She disagrees with Gregory's belief in the proper conduct of women (28), and with Rousseau's belief in the origination of evil (14).

Through disagreement, she is trying to point out the fact that those in authority (coincidentally, men) should not be allowed the foremost word. Women, such as herself, should and must be allowed a say, be it contradictory or not. Using the following quote by Rousseau to her advantage, Wollstonecraft beautifully sets the stage for her own theory: "If man did attain a degree of perfection of mind when his body arrived at maturity, it might be proper, in order to make a man and his wife one, that she should rely entirely on his understanding" (quoted in Rights of Woman 22). Wollstonecraft would love for man and woman, husband and wife, to be one; that would mean that women have gained much needed societal respect. But, she realizes and states that could never be because "husbands, as well as their helpmates, are often only overgrown children" (22).

Such are the consequences of man's tyranny and woman's ignorance. Wollstonecraft stresses that such conditions would be minimal if there existed an opportunity for equal education. She further illustrates this argument with a comparison of women to military men. Again, not resting on her statements alone, she turns either to authority, or, as in this case, to a body of men looked upon with high regard:

As a proof that education gives this appearance of weakness to females, we may instance the example of military men, who are, like them, sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles. (23)

When referring to education in the above quotation, Wollstonecraft in fact means the lack of education where women are concerned. Military men, being of a subordinate occupation, are in fact quite similar to women who are quite subordinate to men. This chain of hierarchy is one Wollstonecraft struggles to snap: "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience" (24).

But, unfortunately, it is a chain long on tradition, as Wollstonecraft notes: "But, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing" (24). And although she expounds on the injustices of positions of rank and subordination, she agrees with the

prominent belief that her sex is the "weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species" (35). She has previously denied making any direct comparisons between the two sexes, but now insists "that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures" (35).

Now the issue is no longer black and white; Wollstonecraft herself seems to struggle with the question: is woman's subordinate role due to an improper, unequal education? or to man's tyrannical behavior? I believe the answer she arrives at, after much debate, is one of compromise. After all, her essay is directed at both men and women, and she is reluctant to lean too far in one direction when placing blame.

In an attempt to explain herself, Wollstonecraft begins with an analogy; she compares women, "naturally weak [and] degraded by a concurrence of circumstances" (52), to men everywhere who "submit to oppression, when they have only to lift up their heads to throw off the yoke" (52). Women, Wollstonecraft continues, despise the freedom "which they have not sufficient virtue to struggle to attain" (52). And because she is working from the assumption that women, as with men, possess reason, Wollstonecraft fails to understand why such circumstances exist. She does acknowledge though that men have viewed education "in a false light" (53) and

thus have worked to further the oppression and ignorance of women.

To support her claim, Wollstonecraft elaborates on the many factors she believes to contribute to women's inferiority, factors men are as much responsible for allowing as women are for accepting. The primary factor, of course, is a lack of proper education. Girls should be educated as boys, allowed fresh air and exercise, equal education and equal treatment for equal actions. She offers some ideas as to what would better develop the mind of women. Instead of needlework, which allows for too much idleness of mind and body, women should endeavour to take up gardening, experimental philosophy, and literature. Gardening exercises the body, philosophy and literature the mind. The present form of education only "robs the whole sex of its dignity, and classes the brown and fair with the smiling flowers that only adorn the land" (53). And like those flowers, women have been too long admired for their beauty alone. Wollstonecraft insists that "there must be more equality established in society, or morality will never gain ground" (141).

She also cites as a factor in a woman's plight sentimentality, that wasted, expanded emotion brought about by the "reveries of stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales" (183). She laments the

fact that women are not more involved with something other than their own lives. And although women are supposed to possess more sensibility, and even humanity, than men, the "clinging affection of ignorance has seldom anything noble in it" (188). She continues by clarifying:

Though this kind of exclusive affection, though it degrades the individual, should not be brought forward as a proof of the inferiority of the sex, because it is the natural consequence of confined views . . . their narrow affections . . . render the sex apparently inferior. (188-189)

She then likens herself to moralists: "Moralists have unanimously agree[d], that unless virtue be nursed by liberty, it will never attain due strength" (192). She insists that she is of the same belief but extends the rationalization from man only to all of humankind, insisting that in all cases, morals must be fixed on immutable principles. She also insists that she has "not attempted to extenuate [women's] faults; but to prove them to be the natural consequence of their education and station in society" (194).

By claiming women's faults a "natural consequence," Wollstonecraft has made her compromise. She will not place blame solely on men and instead develops her argument into a cause and effect theory; because society has lost its foundation of reason, virtue, and experience by allowing spurious qualities such as rank and honor to weaken it, and because such factors as rank and honor necessitate

subordination within society, tyranny has become the inevitable outgrowth. She makes it quite clear that there is a definite relationship between a woman's place in society and man's tyranny; one is fuel for the other. A man's action toward a woman only makes worse her subordinate behavior, and Wollstonecraft wants to make very clear that it is an "apparent" inferiority and weakness.

But women, on the other hand, are themselves as much to blame for not rising above such behavior and claiming liberty. Position of rank and hereditary honors lead to subordination not only within occupations, but also within society--creating in woman a sexual character, further eroding a once-solid foundation on which society could build.

Through arguing by cause and effect, Wollstonecraft establishes herself as a person of reason, one who is able to look at a problem objectively, cite the contributing factors and urge the (necessary) modifications. Those modifications come in the form of equal education, a solution Wollstonecraft feels would not only free women, but also enlighten men as to the evils of a society comprised of one half tyranny and one half sexual character.

CHAPTER III

WOLLSTONECRAFT'S SLAVE/DESPOT: OR WHAT IS AN IDEAL REALITY?

As established by Wollstonecraft, the relationship between man's tyranny and woman's apparent weakness is a perverse one. She appears to base the existence of one on the permission of the other. In other words, if women were to demand greater respect and a broader education, then men would have no basis for their tyrannical control over women. But looked at more closely, Wollstonecraft's theory becomes one of even greater import. Up to this point, she has been very careful to stress the appearance only of a woman's weakness, always emphasizing a belief on her part that (most) women only appear weak, for whatever reason and albeit from whatever consequences. Delving further, one begins to notice a certain pattern within Wollstonecraft's argument incorporating two dichotomies: the reality of tyranny, in whatever form, straining to repress an ideal image of a society resting on its original foundation of reason, virtue, and experience.

Wollstonecraft's reality is in fact a dichotomy, one in which women obtain a perverse type of strength over the very men who restrain their growth. By the very weakness that so

inhibits them, women become despots, ruling men through the very overt effeminate qualities Wollstonecraft so loathes. While women are slaves to men in society, they are at the same time rulers of those men by means of their weakness. Wollstonecraft's ideal world would be one in which women no longer feel the need to impress men with their so-called delicacies, and men would no longer feel it necessary to compensate for such susceptibilities. Elissa Guralnick, in her article "Radical Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," agrees with Wollstonecraft's theory, adding:

And powerful in the very weakness that is the beauty and cunning by which they lord it over the men who imprison them . . . Thus, women can be seen to 'act as men are observed to act when they have been exalted by the same means.' They are, in short 'either abject slaves or capricious tyrants'-different sides of the same devalued coin. (157)

Wollstonecraft visualizes a world in which women are permitted to support themselves in ways only men are allowed, such as through education and career. She argues, throughout her essay, that women must be permitted a more equal footing if they are to earn any respect from society. She acknowledges the "reality" as she sees it as a world in which women, not allowed that type of equality, are forced into situations that demean them even further, such as prostitution or begging from family. She visualizes the "ideal" as a world that works together in order to support

all of humankind, a world based on reason, virtue, experience.

Sydney McMillen Conger, in her article "The Sentimental Logic of Wollstonecraft's Prose," comments that Wollstonecraft's "ideal image incessantly struggles to superimpose itself on the actual--things as they ought to be displace things as they are" (145). This is an accurate point; Wollstonecraft constantly vacillates between what is and what should be and back again to what is. She very rarely is able to resist presenting the reader with an idealized situation after she has presented an example of reality. This tactic works extremely well for her, for after she paints a very dim picture of the world as it is now, she immediately turns around and presents a stunning portrait of the world as it could be, if people were to follow her beliefs and allow women a more thorough and equal education.

Wollstonecraft states that it is not necessary to go back to the "remote annals of antiquity to trace the history of woman; it is sufficient to allow that she has always been either a slave, or a despot" (54). One may ask how a person could be both, but she leaves no doubt as to her point:

Exalted by their inferiority (this sounds like a contradiction), they constantly demand homage as women, though experience should teach them that the men who pride themselves upon paying this arbitrary insolent respect to the sex . . . are most inclined to tyrannize over, and despise, the very weakness they cherish. (55)

Wollstonecraft has very interestingly created a creature that is both slave and ruler, which is exactly her idea of women; because of their apparent weaknesses and inferiority, women are exalted, thus becoming rulers of man while remaining dependent on man due to that very same weakness. Guralnick, noting this view of Wollstonecraft's, states: "Wollstonecraft argues that women are born to indulgence, and powerful in the very weakness that is the beauty and cunning by which they lord it over the men who imprison them" (159). By affirming that women are powerful in their weakness, Guralnick acknowledges Wollstonecraft's creation: a woman apparently content with the power gained through the weakness possessed. Wollstonecraft abhors this creature; she advocates equality of education so that women will not have to be ignorant of their true powers and natural rights. She wants women no longer to be dependent on man; she wants women to be dependent on themselves only, allowing themselves the benefit of respect justly deserved.

The compelling aspect of this theory is that the woman of the ideal possesses one very prominent strength, that of reason. Reason, in Wollstonecraft's estimation, is a characteristic of tremendous importance. Unfortunately, in Wollstonecraft's opinion, too few fight to develop that cherished trait, harboring instead a too-pronounced sensibility, concerned only with the self. Wollstonecraft

defines reason as the faculty that distinguishes "man's pre-eminence over the brute creation" (12). It is "the simple power of improvement; or more properly speaking, of discerning truth" (53). Sensibility, on the other hand, is that abominable trait that over-extends the emotions, producing less than clear thought, no capacity for reason or discernment of truth. These two antitheses, slave/despot and reason/sensibility, come together in a very natural way; women, who possess an "over exercised sensibility" are "made slaves, because it is by their sensibility that they obtain present power" (61). And thus there is the dichotomy. Wollstonecraft's answer to this problem lies of course with education. Her "ideal" education would:

Slowly sharpen the senses, form the temper, regulate the passions as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity; [and it would] enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent. (21)

Here we have come full circle; society no longer rests on a foundation of reason because spurious qualities have eroded it, resulting in man's tyranny and woman's subordinate role in society. The "reality" of the situation as seen by Wollstonecraft and as offered to her readers is one of frustration: "But for this we must wait--wait, perhaps, till kings and nobles, enlightened by reason, and preferring the real dignity of man to childish state, throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings" (21-22). And it is

due to this "reality" that Wollstonecraft believes women have gotten what little "power" they possess, a power due to weakness.

Wollstonecraft uses example in order to illustrate her point on reality versus the ideal. She offers two women, one a wife and one a sister. Because of the wife's shallowness and narrow-mindedness (for the present form of education does not enlarge the heart any more than the understanding), she becomes jealous of her husband's sister and insists he throw her out. Wollstonecraft goes on to explain that both women are victims of society due to their lack of education, the wife because of her lack of sympathetic understanding, the sister because she has no way of supporting herself. Wollstonecraft then offers her "ideal." Had society's support of education been stronger, "the wife would not have had that sensibility, of which self is the centre, and the sister might have been able to struggle for herself instead of eating the bitter bread of dependence" (66).

Wollstonecraft believes that women are weak due to their education and are thus "the slave[s] of sensibility" (125). And what is more, they are "made slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright" (145). She demands that women start to guide their own

steps and stop relying on men for such a purpose. She emphasizes the importance of the faculty of reason, so much so that she uses the word, in various forms, 229 times throughout the course of her essay. Want of reason becomes the very means by which women are so "chained" to men and "oppressed" by cunning, the natural substitute for reason. Wollstonecraft allows that women, different as they are from men, possess certain "common appetites" and should be allowed the "passions of their nature"; but, when unchecked by reason, those appetites and passions become the downfall of every woman resulting in a form of slavery (130).

Vlasopolos believes that Wollstonecraft, "in an effort to save her work from charges generally leveled at women and their enterprises, such as frivolity, sentimentality, and cunning, [exalted] Reason as the supreme faculty" (462). Vlasopolos also feels that "Wollstonecraft's emphasis on Reason to the virtual exclusion of passions from human faculties serves to strengthen her credentials as thinker, to separate her from the general run of women" (462).

Wollstonecraft's view of women is not flattering, nor is her view of men who relinquished their reason in order to attend to the needs of females: "She was created to be the toy of man, he rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused" (34).

When considering woman's "reality," she turns to men,

condescendingly addressing them as "kind instructors," berating them for their insistence on keeping women innocent, claiming that "we might as well never have been born, unless it were necessary that we should be created to enable man to acquire the noble privilege of reason" (61). By benevolently referring to men as "instructors," asking them if they know the purpose of woman and offering the theory that women are here to give men reason, Wollstonecraft has moved quite smoothly from insincere kindness to insightful sarcasm. If man does in fact have the faculty of reason due to the injustices done to women, then women (inadvertently, perhaps) have done some good, and men, having the faculty of reason, should not continue to enslave women in childish innocence. Following this she turns to humor in order to emphasize the idiocy of such actions:

Fragile in every sense of the word, [women] are obliged to look up to man for every comfort. In the most trifling dangers they cling to their support, with parasitical tenacity, piteously demanding succour; and their natural protector extends his arm, or lifts up his voice, to guard the lovely trembler--from what? Perhaps the frown of an old cow, or the jump of a mouse; a rat, would be a serious danger. (51)

Because of the weakness inflicted upon women, they become "parasitical," "pitiful" in "trifling" situations. Condemning such a reality, she turns angry and demands to know, "in the name of reason, and even common sense, what can save such beings from contempt; even though they be soft

and fair?" (62). It is such behavior on man's part that makes women such contemptible creatures, and ironically this behavior is brought about due to a woman's "fairness."

Wollstonecraft believes that man cannot possibly respect and regard in a positive light that which is so contemptible.

Yet, men are the ones who indulge women, forcing them to remain weakly servile. Women, taking advantage of such situations, remain, although the weaker sex, the despot.

By entwining these concepts of slave/despot and reason/sensibility, Wollstonecraft first forces the reader to acknowledge the reality of the situation and then tries to convince that reader of the senselessness of it all. Women should not have to settle for the "power" of dependency. Men's loyalty should not be so conditioned by such subservience. The most important aspect of this theory is that women are not the only ones to suffer; men and children also suffer from such an unbalance and society itself becomes degraded and weakened when one half of humankind is not allowed the same opportunities as the other. Mary Wollstonecraft closes her essay by stating: "Let woman share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty" (194). Women, sharing the same rights as men, was Wollstonecraft's ideal. Her insistence that the reality of

society change was unrelenting; she refused to condone men and their behavior and could not accept the "power" women gained through such behavior. She believed:

Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers--in a word, better citizens. (150)

Wollstonecraft was but one who tried desperately to unchain the minds of men and women in the hopes of their growing ever stronger. Through her words, Wollstonecraft fought to reach the emotions and thoughts of thousands of people, men and women, in an attempt to convince them of a better reality, one in which women were as much of the mainstream as men. She spoke directly to her reader with the assumption that he/she was a person of reason, someone who would not simply ignore her pleas, but someone who would listen and perhaps take action.

Wollstonecraft was a woman of action; her essay proves that. From her introduction where she confronts Talleyrand-Perigord and his pamphlet on education's future, to her conclusion with notes about a future sequel, Wollstonecraft fought to move her readers' minds and hearts. She followed no formal plan; she simply stated her intent and moved forth from there. She is at times long-winded, abrasive, offensive, but at others she's touching, poetic, and completely convincing. Guralnick acknowledges this attempt of Wollstonecraft's to stimulate her readers:

We must . . . humanize philosophy, arrange for argument to touch the heart, allow for sentiment to complement reason, permit disorder to replace dull organization with creative chaos--all the things that Wollstonecraft attempts to do in the frantic, eddying rush of her text. (178)

Wollstonecraft saw the present structure of her society as being "dull organization." She wished fervently to clutter it up a bit with "creative chaos," a chaos leading to a more open awareness of the need for social equality.

CHAPTER IV

A MEANS TO AN END: EMBELLISHMENT

The development of Mary Wollstonecraft's argument was based on such sound concepts as reason, virtue, and experience. Women, not given the opportunity to practice reason and virtue due to a lack of experience, were denied the same societal privileges as men. It can be said that the development of her argument was all "dull organization." Such a basis in developing an argument is just when considering her need to convince so many. But upon closer examination, one soon realizes that the true strength and character of her essay lie not in its development, but in its embellishment, the "creative chaos" so important to any conviction.

Wollstonecraft herself offers a clue as to the direction her style will take in her introduction:

. . . should I express my conviction with the energetic emotions that I feel whenever I think of the subject, the dictates of experience and reflection will be felt. Animated by this important object, I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style;--I aim at being useful . . . wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods . . . and shall try to avoid that flowery diction . . . [those] pretty superlatives. (10)

The above quotation accomplishes two things for

Wollstonecraft. First, she establishes the fact that she possesses conviction and reflection; she is a woman (unlike many) who can claim experience. Secondly, she alerts her readers to the possibility of embellishment, an animation within her writing brought about by the very conviction she holds for her subject. I find it interesting that Wollstonecraft feels she must clarify exactly what she intends to do; obviously this is an important subject--the "vindication" of women--and obviously she felt it necessary to explain to her audience at the outset that, because of her emotional attachment, she may indeed give way to "energetic emotions." But she insists that the seriousness, the "dictates of experience and reflection," will be apparent to her readers.

She also considers the formulating of balanced sentences to be less important than the message being sent, so she will not bother about "rounding periods." However, this emotionally charged energy that comes through her essay in the form of embellishment and "flowery diction" is exactly that which provides for so much enjoyment, so much of the life that the reader realizes Wollstonecraft breathed into her writing. Whatever reasons Wollstonecraft felt it necessary to try to subjugate her emotions when writing this essay are unimportant. Perhaps she wished to present herself as a woman of reason, one of authority, something

she perhaps felt could not be accomplished if succumbing to emotions. The fact of the matter is that by succumbing to her emotions, she delights the reader, practically on every page, with some beautifully turned phrase which just happens to suit the purpose at hand.

Wollstonecraft's embellishments take many forms. She experiments with numerous techniques throughout her essay, evidently with the intent of further strengthening her argument. She fully takes advantage of many forms of scheme: parenthesis, questions, repetition. She also puts to excellent use such tropes as metaphor, simile, personification, apostrophe, and epithet. The interesting aspect of this use of embellishment is the fact that she apparently seems quite reluctant to acknowledge it as a part of her rhetorical play, an obvious (and at times apparently quite calculated) part of the whole.

But a part of the whole it is, so much so that hardly a point is made that is not in some way embellished. Wollstonecraft, throughout her essay, resorts to all kinds of embellishment, embellishment that sometimes detracts from her argument, but in many more instances highlights the points being made. She runs the gamut from subtle imagery to full-blown manipulation of words, phrases, and sentences. It is because of this word manipulation that Wollstonecraft's argument is so strong. Rather than detract

from the strength of her message, this word usage lends vigor and conviction to an already powerful treatise.

Before I begin to delve into Wollstonecraft's use of language, I would like to point out that she always did manage to maintain her air of "woman of reason." Throughout her essay, although continuously resorting to embellishment, she also kept strict adherence to the seriousness of subject. One way in which she tried to obtain and preserve her readers' understanding to such seriousness was by drawing them into her topic, making them a part of her discussion. The way she accomplished this was by asking them questions, some direct, some to incite pity, some to incite thought, and some which she chose to answer lest there be any confusion as to the answer she expected.

Wollstonecraft asks 279 questions. The majority of those are strictly rhetorical, asked not to get information but to emphasize a point to be made. She uses the rhetorical question strictly to support her argument, whether it be to question those she disagrees with, such as with Rousseau: "How could that energetic advocate for immortality argue so inconsistently?" (14); or, simply to strengthen her own statements:

. . . is not that government then very defective, and very unmindful of the happiness of one half of its members, that does not provide for honest, independent women, by encouraging them to fill respectable stations? (148)

The point of her argument, the need for women's liberation from stifling societal strictures, is not only Wollstonecraft's topic of concern, but through direct questioning of her readers, becomes a topic of concern for them as well.

Wollstonecraft liked the effect of the rhetorical question so much it seems, that she used it 245 times in the course of her essay. What she accomplished by this was the active participation of her reading audience. Many of the questions are directly addressed to the reader, forcing him/her to decide the answer, as in the following example where she uses repetition of the phrase "Do you?" to emphasize her intent of reader participation:

Do you believe that there is but one God . . . ?

Do you believe that all things were created by him?

Do you rely on his wisdom . . . ?

Do you acknowledge that the power of looking into futurity . . . is an attribute of the Creator?
(179)

Through direct address, Wollstonecraft has made her readers a part of the dialogue, for Wollstonecraft also expects an answer, and not just any answer, but one that will satisfy her argument.

She also uses questions that excite pity, such as: "Who can recount the misery, which many unfortunate beings, whose minds and bodies are equally weak, suffer in such situations,--unable to work, and ashamed to beg?" (65). And

she employs questions that she may answer: "The passions thus pampered, whilst the judgment is left unformed, what can be expected to ensue?--Undoubtedly, a mixture of madness and folly!" (61). In my estimation, rhetorical questioning works well as far as Wollstonecraft's style of argument is concerned; remember, she is addressing a topic many do not want to take seriously. Thus, she is forced into trying to convince those skeptics to consider her words.

Such skeptics came in the form of reviewers who took her essay to be a sensible treatise on female education, ignoring those recommendations in the work that might unsettle the relations between the sexes. According to R.M. Janes, in his article "On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," William Enfield, a dissenting minister, wrote in the Monthly Review to endorse Wollstonecraft's effort to raise women from a state of degradation, but rejected those ideas that women assume an active part in civil government (293). Many of her critics were merely interested in the theory of making woman a better helpmate to man, not truly allowing woman a chance to grow for humanity's sake.

In the Critical Review (1756-1817), Wollstonecraft's theory on education was favored, but not her belief in the need for societal equality of men and women. According to the reviewer "no women exist or have existed who are the

intellectual equals of men, and demonstrate the same strength of reasoning or reach of intuitive perception" (Janes 294).

Clearly the reviewer failed (refused) to understand Wollstonecraft's essay. The sad comment, "no women exist [who] demonstrate the same strength of reasoning [as men]," was the unfortunate point Wollstonecraft was trying to make. She realized the despairing truth that few women demonstrated those qualities, but she refused to believe that they truly lacked those qualities. The reality of such a miserable situation is the reality Wollstonecraft hoped to change. Apparently Wollstonecraft anticipated such a near-sighted understanding of her argument and thus sought direct participation of her readers through questioning. By shared participation, reader and writer would become more closely involved with the subject at hand. Furthermore, direct involvement of her reader not only strengthens her own position with an effective, active use of scheme, but also strengthens any commitment her readers may have as well as any resolve they may muster with which to act.

As well as the use of questioning, Wollstonecraft also applied parenthesis in various forms such as dashes, parentheses, and commas. Parenthesis worked quite well for Wollstonecraft, further strengthening an important point; only occasionally did it result in a sprawling, disjointed

sentence. In the following example, she uses parenthesis as a parenthetical expression within a rhetorical question:

Merely to observe without endeavouring to account for anything, may (in a very incomplete manner) serve as the common sense of life; but where is the store laid up that is to clothe the soul when it leaves the body? (54)

The parenthetical insertion appears to be quite a subtle aside when in truth it is the true crux of her argument: completeness of a person comes with completeness of action and responsibility in life by that person. In the following example, she uses parenthesis, set off with a dash, to expand an inference: "I am aware of an obvious inference:-- from every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women" (8). And in the next, she uses it as an appositive:

It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,--the only way women can rise in the world,--by marriage. (10)

By the use of parenthesis, Wollstonecraft manages to reemphasize her statements. She strengthens her points and clarifies her stand again and again, reiterating to the reader the importance of the topic under discussion. Wollstonecraft is not a passive writer, and she does not want a passive reading audience. They must be made aware of the importance of her words, thus the use of parenthesis.

Various uses of repetition, such as alliteration, anaphora, and anadiplosis, is yet another way in which Wollstonecraft embellishes her argument. Although she uses repetition less frequently than other techniques, it nevertheless evinces a conscious effort to cull her phrases and polish her style. Take for example the use of alliteration in the following scathing commentary, richly dressed within deceptively beautiful language:

Proud of their weakness, however, they must always be protected, guarded from care, and all the rough toils that dignify the mind.--If this be the fiat of fate, if they will make themselves insignificant and contemptible, sweetly to waste life away, let them not expect to be valued when their beauty fades, for it is the fate of the fairest flowers to be admired and pulled to pieces by the careless hand that picked them. (149)

In such instances, it is nearly impossible for the reader to know whether Wollstonecraft wanted her argument understood or her poetic delivery enjoyed. Although the bottom line of such commentary is the need for women to gain and deserve respect for other than their beauty, one cannot deny that Wollstonecraft put great thought and energy into the delivery of her point. And though she has plainly slipped into the flowery diction she was so intent on avoiding, she has in no way detracted from the strength of her argument. She insists (covertly) that women, "fairest flowers," should not be proud of their weakness. And by being protected and guarded they simply further their own insignificance, remaining contemptible.

As a woman, Wollstonecraft deeply resented the fact that women were often treated differently from men simply because of an apparent lack of reason and common sense, and the obvious difference in appearance. The topic of appearance, a woman's beauty, is one she addresses quite regularly. What she was attempting to accomplish by reiterating the importance of reason was the refocusing of people's preoccupation with appearance. Wollstonecraft believed that beauty was not found without, but within a person. In order for civilization to return to its original foundation of reason, virtue, and experience, it must first put aside its debilitating obsession with that which is not important.

In the following quotation, Wollstonecraft voices such thoughts: "It is this power of looking into the heart, and responsively vibrating with each emotion, that enables the poet to personify each passion, and the painter to sketch with a pencil of fire" (166). Her repeated use of alliteration proves not that she was unable to argue rationally, but only that she could argue emotionally. The ability to look into the heart is an ability everyone, not only the poets and painters, must strive toward.

She also enlivens a case against nobility with her statement: "It is the pestiferous purple which renders the progress of civilization a curse" (18). Here, she manages to reiterate her loathing of hereditary honors within the

realm of poetic diction. Following her original belief in the evil of individual power as bestowed through the dictates of heredity, she reemphasizes the negative role the "pestiferous purple" plays within the structure of society.

Wollstonecraft also uses anaphora as a way to further appeal to her readers, creating a marked rhythmical effect which has an emotional appeal. She uses this quite frequently. Not only does it emphasize her statements, but it also works to convince the reader of the importance of such reasoning. "I war not with his [Rousseau's] ashes, but his opinions. I war only with the sensibility that led him to degrade woman by making her the slave of love" (91). Appearing quite objective, Wollstonecraft makes clear that it is not Rousseau himself with whom she argues, but that sensibility which led him to his convictions; such sensibility she not only disagrees with, but emphatically wars against. And in this case, she is not only arguing against such convictions, but, more importantly, she is arguing against the convictions of a (male) figure in authority. The use of anaphora in this instance fortifies not only the point to be made, but also her own position as a voice of authority.

She further argues with Rousseau when she questions his logic:

Is this the man, who, in his ardour for virtue,
would banish all the soft arts of peace, and almost

carry us back to Spartan discipline? Is this the man who delights to paint the useful struggles of passion, the triumphs of good dispositions, and the heroic flights which carry the glowing soul out of itself? (25)

Although Wollstonecraft is quick to admit admiration for Rousseau and "admire[s] the genius of that able writer," she insists that "indignation [will] always take the place of admiration, and the rigid frown of insulted virtue [will] efface the smile of complacency" (24-25). And because Wollstonecraft's virtue has been insulted by something Rousseau has written, she questions his authority as a writer and as a man. She has trouble understanding how one man could both enthrall and repulse her. By voicing her turmoil in the repetition of the words "is this the man," she also forces her readers to question the authenticity of any voice which can claim authority.

The third form of repetition Wollstonecraft uses is anadiplosis, the repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause. With anadiplosis, as with other forms of repetition, Wollstonecraft creates a rhythm that strengthens her point: "But for this epoch we must wait--wait, perhaps, till kings and nobles, enlightened by reason . . . throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings" (21-22). By repeating "wait," Wollstonecraft acknowledges the unfortunate state of people; true freedom for everyone is slow in coming. As much as she argues for change, it is

necessary to wait for the enlightenment of reason.

She cuts to the core of what she sees as the failing of parents (mothers) and children by claiming: "The mother will be lost in the coquette, and, instead of making friends of her daughters, they are rivals--rivals more cruel than any other" (49). She could have very easily manipulated this quotation to stress the word friend but instead emphasizes rival.

In the same fashion she stresses the word duties in the following quotation: "She abstains, it is true, without any great struggle, from committing gross crimes; but how does she fulfil her duties? Duties!--in truth she has enough to think of" (49). Duties here is ironically mentioned, she is instead lamenting the fact that so few women seldom consider anything at all.

Wollstonecraft also employs various tropes, such as metaphor, simile, repetition and apostrophe, quite lavishly. Tropes, rather than changing the order of words as do schemes, stipulate change in the signification of a word.

Metaphor is one of Wollstonecraft's favorite tropes; she uses it about three times as frequently as the simile. The following example is an image of men and women she would love to witness: "The graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it, would form a whole in which strength and beauty would be equally conspicuous" (22). By transforming animate beings (man and woman) into inanimate objects,

Wollstonecraft has felled the sexual barrier. And without such a barrier, no longer are a woman's beauty and a man's strength separate entities, they are now equally conspicuous. Using the image of light, Wollstonecraft illustrates the detrimental affects of a woman's inexperience:

A woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone. (27)

She again uses the image of light when describing man's preoccupation with social stature:

False, indeed, must be the light when the drapery of situation hides the man, and makes him stalk in masquerade, dragging from one scene of dissipation to another the nerveless limbs that hang with stupid listlessness, and rolling round the vacant eye which plainly tells us that there is no mind at home. (141)

In the first example, the direct antithesis of "oblique sunbeams" mirrors the same contrast Wollstonecraft sees between women's position in society and men's. Through metaphor, she has successfully illustrated the ephemerality of a woman's beauty, and in so doing strengthens her advocacy for reason.

The second example of metaphor is, in my opinion, one of the strongest. Again, using the image of light, Wollstonecraft creates a man hidden in shadow who is no more than a mindless animal no longer required to properly

exercise his duties toward humankind. This creature drags nerveless limbs listlessly, and turns a vacant eye upon all he sees. This creature is man, someone who has lost all sight of his original foundation and has instead built an empty life upon the unsteady stones of social status.

As with metaphor, Wollstonecraft uses simile to create powerful images. And also as with metaphor, she uses a common image, that of an animal: ". . . and the patient drudge, who fulfills her task, like a blind horse in a mill, is defrauded of her just reward" (67). That same drudge resembling a blind horse also is "confined in cages like the feathered race, [having] nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch" (56). What an incredibly bleak picture of woman! Twice she is likened to an animal, possessing no more freedom or respect. By transfiguring women into animals, she figuratively bestows upon them all the characteristics of animals as well. Women are either blind horses fulfilling a task (presumably for a man), or narcissistic creatures pluming themselves (again, presumably for a man). In either case the woman is trapped within the confines of another's will, apparently unable (unwilling) to break free. I would like to reiterate that this type of metaphorical illustrating does not lessen the strength of Wollstonecraft's argument. Such rhetoric merely forces the reader to acknowledge the existence of like situations.

I found Wollstonecraft's occasional use of personification to be quite intentional; in the following examples, she makes it quite clear that reason, the all important characteristic, has a very definite voice: ". . . reason tells me that [attributes] cannot clash with those I adore--and I am compelled to listen to her voice" (46). In the following reference to reason, not only has she personified the word, but also granted it a state of added importance by capitalizing it: "I would not impress by declamation when Reason offers her sober light" (36). There can be absolutely no doubt as to Wollstonecraft's intent with such obvious usage of figure of speech. She could not have made her point any more clear; woman is worthy of importance, and, like reason, should be considered as more than just intended for man.

Perhaps her grandest display of language manipulation is apostrophe, concentrating on virtue (a part of the foundation to which people should return), religion (that source of comfort from which people have apparently turned), and modesty (the offspring of sensibility and reason). She hails their importance repeatedly throughout her essay, so it seems only natural that she should further address them so formally.

She begins with an apostrophe to modesty: "Modesty! Sacred offspring of sensibility and reason!--true delicacy

of mind!--may I unblamed presume to investigate thy nature"
(121). She then addresses herself to religion,
incorporating the apostrophe with metaphor:

Religion, pure source of comfort in this vale of
tears! how has thy clear stream been muddied by the
dabblers, who have presumptuously endeavoured to
confine in one narrow channel, the living waters
that ever flow towards God--the sublime ocean of
existence! (160)

And finally she exalts virtue:

Virtue, true refiner of joy!--if foolish men were
to fright thee from earth, in order to give loose
to all their appetites without a check--some
sensual wight of tastes would scale the heavens to
invite thee back, to give a zest to pleasure! (192)

Virtue, religion, and modesty are those necessities in life
that work to create and nurture a sound society in which men
and women may live together.

Yet another form of trope with which Wollstonecraft
embellishes her argument is epithet; she uses the word eight
times in addition to employing it: "This negligent kind of
guesswork, for what other epithet can be used to point out
the random exertions of a sort of instinctive common sense,
never brought to the test of reason?" (22). This is in
attack of women's lack of orderliness, caused, of course, by
their disorderly kind of education. After describing a
particular emotion she quips, "yet, that affection does not
deserve the epithet of chaste" (124). Perhaps her most
embittered references to such usage springs from that which
she claims men instigate:

I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness. (9)

Wollstonecraft hated the fact that men apparently found it necessary to toast weakness and susceptibility in women, but she hated even more that women imbibed delight in such a toast.

As evidenced by the numerous schemes and tropes illustrated, Mary Wollstonecraft could not contain her energetic emotions, displaying various rhetorical devices. She attempted to exhort her readers in a variety of ways; from overblown metaphors and grand apostrophes, to rhetorical questions and flamboyant language. Wollstonecraft worked her audience in a grand manner. The prolixity of her language is often evident in her apparent need to demonstrate a show of excellence:

She who can discern the dawn of immortality, in the streaks that shoot athwart the misty night of ignorance, promising a clearer day, will respect, as a sacred temple, the body that enshrines such an improvable soul. (124)

And, as if such rhetoric is not enough, she then brings to life a "shadowy phantom" as if requiring help from a muse:

--A shadowy phantom glides before us, obscuring every other object; yet when the soft cloud is grasped, the form melts into common air, leaving a solitary void, or sweet perfume, stolen from the violet, that memory holds dear. But, I have tripped unawares on fairy ground, feeling the balmy gale of spring stealing on me, though november frowns. (124)

Wollstonecraft was not unaware of the ground she had encroached upon. She knew exactly what she was doing; with every metaphor, simile, turned phrase and poetic tactic she took, she was quite aware of the effect it would have on her argument as well as on her reading audience.

Although Wollstonecraft claimed at the outset of her essay that she would keep her writing simple and straightforward, what actually materialized was the result of her apparent joy in her ability to turn a lavish phrase. From the beginning of her essay to the very end, she made good use of her ability to make words dance and come alive. I strongly feel that this abundant use of poetic license did not in any way hamper the strength of her argument. In fact, in my opinion, it worked to invigorate and fortify an already distinctive style. This is merely the joining of her "energetic emotions" with the "dictates of experience and reflection," a marriage of what she evidently considered to be two otherwise opposite traits coming together in a harmonious balance.

The beauty of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is due to that joining of her emotions with the dictates of her experience. Wollstonecraft knew of which she wrote and believed in what she felt to be right and true for all humankind. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is her testimony to such a belief.

WORKS CITED

1. Works by Mary Wollstonecraft

Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. London: J. Johnson, 1796.

Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman. With an Introduction by Moira Ferguson. W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Mary, a Fiction. London: J. Johnson, 1788.

Original Stories from Real Life. With an Introduction by E.V. Lucas. London: Henry Frowde, 1906.

Thought on the Education of Daughters; with Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life. London: J. Johnson, 1787.

A Vindication of the Rights of Men. With an Introduction by Eleanor Louise Nicholes. Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1960.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. ed. by Carol H. Poston. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1975.

2. Works Cited

Adams, Ruth M., Ed. The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974.

Conger, Synda McMillen. "The Sentimental Logic of Wollstonecraft's Prose," Prose Studies, Leicester LE1 7RH, England. 10(2) Sept., 1987.

Guralnick, Elissa S. "Radical Politics in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," Studies in Burke and His Time, 18.

Janes, R.M. "On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman." Journal of the History of Ideas, (39) 1978.

Kelly, Gary. "Mary Wollstonecraft: Texts and Contexts,"
Eighteenth-Century Life. Vol. 2, 1975.

Vlasopolos, Anca. "Mary Wollstonecraft's Mask of Reason in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman." Dalhousie Review
(60) 1980-1981.