

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



MARY
WOLLSTONECRAFT

Edited by Claudia L. Johnson

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EDITED BY
CLAUDIA L. JOHNSON

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The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft

Once viewed solely in relation to the history of feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft is now recognised as a writer of formidable talent across a range of genres, including journalism, letters, and travel writing, and is increasingly understood as an heir to eighteenth-century literary and political traditions as well as a forebear of Romanticism. *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* is the first collected volume to address all aspects of Wollstonecraft's momentous and tragically brief career. The diverse and searching essays commissioned for this volume do justice to Wollstonecraft's pivotal importance in her own time and since, paying attention not only to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, but also to the full range of her work across disciplinary boundaries separating philosophy, letters, education, advice, politics, history, religion, sexuality, and feminism itself. A chronology and bibliography offer further essential information for scholars and students of this remarkable writer.

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CLAUDIA L. JOHNSON is Professor of English at Princeton University. She is the author of *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988), *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (1995). She is currently finishing *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*, which investigates

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ANNE K. MELLOR is Professor Above Scale at UCLA. She is the author or editor of numerous books and articles on women's writing and British Romantic literature, including *Blake's Human Form Divine* (1974), *English Romantic Irony* (1980), *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. (1988), *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988), *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), *British Literature, 1780–1830*, ed. with Richard Matlak (1996), and *Mothers of the Nation – Women's Political Writing in England, 1780–1830* (2000). She is currently working on the intersection of race and gender in British Romantic-era writing.

MITZI MYERS teaches English and writing at UCLA. She has published many authoritative essays on Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and children's literature. She is currently working on a literary life of Maria Edgeworth, the Norton Anthology of Children's and Young Adult's Literature, and the subject of war and violence from the Irish Rebellion of 1798 to modern times.

ALAN RICHARDSON is Professor of English at Boston College. His books include *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (2001), *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (1994), and (as co-editor) *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture 1780–1834* (1996). He has also published numerous essays on Romantic-era literature and culture, particularly in relation to gender, childhood and education, colonialism, and early neuroscience.

BARBARA TAYLOR teaches history at the University of East London, and is an editor of the *History Workshop Journal* and director of the international

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SUSAN J. WOLFSON, Professor of English at Princeton University, is the author of *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (1997), coeditor of *The Romantics and their Contemporaries* (1999), editor of *The Cambridge Companion to John Keats*, and a contributor to several other Romantic-era volumes in this series.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In recent years, Mary Wollstonecraft has been exceedingly well served by scholars working in the fields of literature, history, feminist and gender studies, and political philosophy. It has been a privilege to collaborate with many of the leading figures in Wollstonecraft studies and in the history of her period. My deepest thanks go to the colleagues who joined me in this volume, for their splendid essays as well as for their patience with my editorial nagging; and to the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press, whose advice and encouragement were decisive when this project was in its earliest stages. I am particularly grateful to Linda Bree's expert judgment not only as an editor but also as scholar of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature.

It is impossible to think about Mary Wollstonecraft without being haunted by the untimeliness of her death. This volume is perhaps doubly haunted, for in the course of its production, one of its contributors, Mitzi Myers, died suddenly. Myers's work on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers has been wide-ranging and illuminating, and her many publications on Wollstonecraft have been particularly influential. Critics and scholars of the period will feel her loss keenly. This volume is dedicated to her.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

- 1759 MW born on 27 April in Spitalfields, London to Edward John Wollstonecraft, the son of a weaver, and Elizabeth Dickson Wollstonecraft, who was Irish. MW is the second of seven children. Her older brother, Edward (Ned) was born in 1757; Henry followed in 1761, Elizabeth (Eliza) in 1763, Everina in 1765, James in 1768, and Charles in 1770.
- 1763–68 Determined to set up as a gentleman farmer, MW's father moves his family successively from London to Epping, Barking (both outside London), and Beverley (in Yorkshire). Unsuccessful in these (and later) efforts, MW's father is violent at home. Disgusted with her father's brutality, contemptuous of her mother's acquiescence to it, and resentful of their shared preference for her older brother, MW is intensely unhappy at home and driven to seek affection and nurture elsewhere. While in Beverley, MW develops a close friendship with Jane Arden.
- 1774 The Wollstonecraft family moves to Hoxton, on the outskirts of London. MW is befriended by a neighboring clergyman, Mr Clare, and his wife, who assist in MW's education and become a second family for her.
- 1775 Through the Clares, MW first meets and develops an intense friendship with Fanny Blood, later the model for Ann in *Mary* and the namesake of her first daughter.
- 1776 The Wollstonecraft family moves to Laugharne, Wales
- 1777 The Wollstonecraft family returns to Walworth, a suburb of London.
- 1778 As her father's finances continue to deteriorate, MW resolves to live away from home and takes a job as a paid companion to Mrs Dawson, of Bath, one of the few kinds of employment conventionally open to women of Wollstonecraft's position.

- While employed by her, MW visits Bath, Windsor, and Southampton.
- 1781 MW's mother becomes sick, and MW goes to London to nurse her.
- 1782 MW's mother dies. MW's father remarries and moves to Wales. Angry with the familial indifference of her older brother, now an attorney in London, MW feels responsible for the care of her siblings. MW moves in with Fanny Blood's family in Walham Green, west of London, and helps to support them as well. In October, MW's sister Eliza marries Meredith Bishop.
- 1783 MW's sister Eliza gives birth to a daughter in August, and thereafter suffers from acute postpartum depression. Fearing a repeat of her parents' marriage, MW attributes her sister's unhappiness to Bishop's cruelty.
- 1784 MW convinces Eliza to take the bold step of running away in secret from her husband and child, who dies later in the year. After an attempt to start a school in Islington fails, MW starts one at Newington Green, a dissenting community north of London, with Fanny Blood and Eliza. MW begins a friendship with the celebrated non-conforming preacher Richard Price, and she becomes a member of his circle. MW is introduced to Dr. Samuel Johnson. Everina Wollstonecraft joins her sisters at Newington Green.
- 1785 Fanny Blood leaves the school at Newington Green, and sails for Lisbon to marry Hugh Skeys. MW journeys to Lisbon to assist Fanny during her pregnancy. Fanny dies in childbirth in late November. MW returns to London in December.
- 1786 MW closes her school because of financial problems that had mounted during her absence. To raise money and improve her spirits, MW begins *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. Faced with debts, MW helps her sisters find positions as teachers, and agrees to become a governess for the Viscount Kingsborough family of Mitchelstown (County Cork) in Ireland. On her way to Ireland, MW visits Eton, confirming her disapproval of public school education and suggesting material she would later use in her education writings. MW passes the winter with the Kingsboroughs in Dublin.
- 1787 *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* is published by Joseph Johnson, earning MW 10 guineas, which she gives to the Blood family. MW travels with the Kingsboroughs to Bristol, and composes *Mary* and "Cave of Fancy." In August Lady

- Kingsborough dismisses MW, in part because she disapproves of her daughter's attachment to her. Returning to London and working as a reader and translator with Joseph Johnson, MW begins her career with a hard-earned sense of satisfaction. She joins Johnson's circle of progressive writers and artists, eventually meeting such figures as Thomas Holcroft, Henry Fuseli, Joel Barlow, Horne Tooke, and Anna Letitia Barbauld.
- 1788 *Mary: A Fiction, Original Stories from Real Life and Of the Importance of Religious Opinions* (trans. from Necker) published by Joseph Johnson. MW begins reviewing for the *Analytical Review*, a monthly progressive periodical recently started by Joseph Johnson and Thomas Christie.
- 1789 *The Female Reader* published, under pseudonym of Mr. Cresswick. On 14 July, the Bastille falls, and the French Revolution begins.
- 1790 MW publishes *Young Grandison*, a translation of Maria van de Werken de Cambon's adaptation of Richardson's novel, and a translation of Salzmann's *Elements of Morality*, illustrated by William Blake. On 29 November, MW publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* anonymously, in response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (published 1 November). On 18 December, MW's second edition is published, bearing MW's name and establishing her reputation as a partisan of reform.
- 1791 MW publishes a second edition of *Original Stories*, illustrated by Blake, and starts writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. MW meets William Godwin for the first time through Joseph Johnson in November.
- 1792 MW's portrait is painted by an unknown artist. In January, MW publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which receives several favorable reviews. MW meets Talleyrand, whose proposals regarding women's education in France had disappointed her. A second edition of the *Rights of Woman*, somewhat revised, is published later that year. MW plans to write a "Second Part" but never does so, though Godwin published her "Hints [Chiefly designed to have been incorporated in the Second Part of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*]" in her *Posthumous Works* (1798). MW becomes passionately attached to the painter Henry Fuseli. After Fuseli and his wife refuse to let her join their household as she wishes, MW departs alone for France in December. In Paris, she meets leading Girondins and English friends of the Revolution, including Helen Maria Williams and Tom Paine.

- 1793 On 21 January, Louis XVI is executed. On 1 February, France declares War on England, and English nationals come under suspicion. MW meets American fellow radical Gilbert Imlay and begins her affair with him. MW's friends, the Girondists, fall from power in late May. The Reign of Terror begins, dampening MW's enthusiasm for the Revolution. In June, MW moves from Paris to Neuilly to escape increasing revolutionary violence. MW is pregnant and returns to Paris in September. Although they are not married, Imlay registers MW at the American Embassy as his wife so that she can claim the protection of American citizenship (America being an ally of France during this time). On 16 October, Marie-Antoinette is executed.
- 1794 In January MW moves to Le Havre and starts writing *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*. Fanny Imlay born in May at Le Havre. In late July, Robespierre falls and the Terror ends. Imlay returns to England, leaving MW and Fanny alone. In December, MW's *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* is published in London.
- 1795 In April, MW returns to London to join Imlay, and learns of his infidelity. MW attempts suicide, but is prevented by Imlay. In June, MW agrees to travel to Scandinavia with her infant daughter Fanny and with Marguerite, their maid, in connection with Imlay's business concerns. MW returns to England in September. In October, increasingly depressed over her disintegrating relationship with Imlay, MW attempts suicide by jumping off Putney Bridge into the Thames. Anti-sedition legislation is passed in England.
- 1796 In January, MW publishes *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. In March, she meets Imlay for the final time, and in April meets Godwin again. MW starts to write *Wrongs of Woman*. By mid-summer, MW begins her relationship with Godwin.
- 1797 John Opie paints MW's portrait. On 29 March, MW marries Godwin at Old St. Pancras Church, although the couple retain separate households. Their marriage is something of a scandal, in part because Godwin had denounced marriage as an monopolistic institution, and in part because its occurrence underscored the fact that MW had not in fact been previously married to Imlay. Some friends drop MW as a result. Their daughter, Mary, born on 30 August. MW dies on 10 September of complications resulting from childbirth, and is buried at St. Pancras Churchyard.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1798 Godwin publishes MW's *Posthumous Works*, including *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, "The Cave of Fancy," her *Letters to Imlay* and other miscellaneous pieces. Also included is Godwin's own controversial *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, MW's first biography.

TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of the short titles of Mary Wollstonecraft's works cited in this volume. Except where otherwise indicated, all citations from texts by Wollstonecraft are taken from *Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 7 vols., eds. Marilyn Butler and Janet Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto; New York: New York University Press, 1989). The abbreviation, volume, and page numbers will be provided parenthetically; errors have been silently emended. Citations from Wollstonecraft's letters are from *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Ralph M. Wardle (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

AR	Reviews for the <i>Analytical Review</i>
CF	"Cave of Fancy"
FR	<i>Female Reader</i>
Hints	"Hints"
HMV	<i>Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution</i>
IRO	<i>Thoughts on the Importance of Religious Opinions</i>
L	<i>Lessons</i>
Letters	<i>The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft</i>
LI	<i>Letters to Gilbert Imlay</i>
M	<i>Mary, A Fiction</i>
MI	<i>Letters on the Management of Infants</i>
OP	"On Poetry"
OS	<i>Original Stories</i>
PCFN	"Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation"
SR	<i>Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark</i>
TED	<i>Thoughts on the Education of Daughters</i>
VRM	<i>A Vindication of the Rights of Men</i>
VRW	<i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>
WWM	<i>Wrongs of Woman, or Maria</i>
YG	<i>Young Grandison</i>

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