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SENSIBILITY AND PROGRESS IN MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S RATIONALISED "SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY"

Éva ANTAL[1]

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ABSTRACT. ***Sensibility and Progress in Mary Wollstonecraft's Rationalised "Sentimental Journey".*** Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was an ardent believer in individual freedom and self-development; consequently, she frequently discussed the possibilities of women's education and self-reliance in her writings. Being rather reckless in her life, she was often *on the move*, not only searching for better life conditions but also following her own impulses in her critical reading. The motif of intellectual mobility features her educational writings, argumentative works, novels, and her last publication, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) as well. In my paper, I will map the multiplicity of the concept of *mobility* and elaborate on the senses of escapism in Wollstonecraft's travel-letters, *moving beyond* Laurence Sterne's notion of "a sentimental journey" (*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, 1768). Moreover, in *Letters*, in her solitary walks and fanciful reveries, not only Wollstonecraft's inclination to the (natural and textual) sublime but also Rousseau's ideas on exercise and movement will be detected (cf. *Reveries of the Solitary Walker,* 1782). On the one hand, my interpretation is contextualised by the late-eighteenth-century view on women's limitations of "sensibility", displaying the constraints the age demanded; on the other hand, I intend to place the travelogue in Mary Wollstonecraft's *oeuvre* and highlight the synthesising quality of the writing as a piece of "travail" and/or "a labour of love".

[1] **Éva ANTAL** is a professor of English Literature and Philosophy at Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Eger, Hungary. In 2001, she defended her doctoral dissertation and since then she has been teaching eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature, contemporary literary theory, and aesthetics. In 2010, she was a Visiting Grant Scholar at NIAS (The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences) and in 2011 she successfully obtained a tenured professorship in philosophy. Currently, she is working on an educationalist project, focusing on women's philosophy of education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the period of 1770s–1830s. In autumn 2019, she was a visiting researcher at the University of Glasgow and in January 2020, she was a guest professor at the research centre IDEA, University de Lorraine (Nancy–Metz, France). Email: antal.eva@uni-eszterhazy.hu.

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REZUMAT. *Sensibilitate și progres în călătoria sentimentală raționalizată a lui Mary Wollstonecraft.* Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) credea cu tărie în libertatea individuală și în cultivarea sinelui. Prin urmare, ea vorbește adesea în scrierile sale despre educația și independența femeilor. Nesăbuită de-a lungul vieții sale, Wollestonecraft este adesea surprinsă *în mișcare*, nu doar în căutarea unei vieți mai bune, ci și în căutarea propriilor sale intuiții, când vine vorba de interpretarea critică a unui text. Motivul mobilității intelectuale apare adesea în scrierile sale despre educație, în lucrările sale filosofice, în romane sale, dar și în ultima sa publicație, „Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark" (1796). În acest articol, îmi propun să trasez multiplele înțelesuri ale conceptului de „mobilitate" și să discut în detaliu ideea de evadare prezentă în scrisorile lui Wollestoncraft, în încercarea de „merge mai departe" decât o face Laurence Sterne atunci când propune noțiunea de „călătorie sentimentală" (*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, 1768). Mai mult decât atât, vom identifica în plimbările singuratice și reveriile fantastice din „Scrisori" înclinația lui Wollstonecraft către sublim (atât natural, cât și textual), dar și ideile lui Rousseau despre mișcare și exercițiu fizic (cf. *Reveries of the Solitary Walker,* 1782). Pe de-o parte, contextul pe care mă axez este cel al ideilor despre limitele impuse de vârstă asupra sensibilității feminine, care se fac cunoscute la finele secolului al XVIII-lea. Pe de altă parte, îmi propun să încadrez jurnalul de călătorie al lui Wollestonecraft în întreaga sa operă și să scot la lumină faptul că, prin prisma calității sale sintetizatoare, acesta poate fi înțeles ca fiind rezultatul unui „travaliu" sau a unei „osteneli a dragostei."

***Cuvinte-cheie**: femei scriitoare, Mary Wollstonecraft, sensibilitate, călătorie, sublim, Sterne, Rousseau, reverie.*

"[...]—and I—will become again a *Solitary Walker*."
(Mary Wollstonecraft)

Wollstonecraft's Mobility

In the long eighteenth century (1660s–1830s), "the proliferation of accounts of voyages and travels reflects the fact that this was an era of ever-increasing mobility" (Thompson 2011, 45). In addition to the so-called "Grand Tour" of the previous century, which basically meant an extended visit to young aristocrats who this way completed their education, learning languages and collecting socio-cultural and scientific experiences (sometimes also sensual ones), eighteenth-century middle-class travellers were supposed to follow their own paths and they

frequently recorded their *personal* accounts. Either travelling as tourists for leisure or as entrepreneurs upon business, the visitors were influenced by John Locke's empiricist *credo*; namely, "every step the mind takes in its progress towards knowledge, makes some discovery, which is not only new, but the best too, for the time at least" (Locke 2004, 7). In this case, for such travellers, the journey was also likely to become an inner expedition, being taken "as a metaphor, or a frame" for the formation of the modern identity (Kadushin qtd. in Pettinger and Youngs 2021, 4).[2]

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was frequently *on the move* in her whole life. Searching for better life conditions, her middle-class family changed their dwelling several times; they lived in different parts of the outer London, in Yorkshire, and in Carmarthenshire. In 1778, she accompanied a widow as her paid chaperone at Bath and Windsor, and then she returned to assist her dying mother. In 1784, with her sister Eliza and her friend Fanny Blood, they opened a school in the outskirts of London (at Newington Green); in the forthcoming year, she had a short visit in Lisbon, where her married friend and her new-born baby died. In 1786, she moved to Ireland, working as a governess at the Kingsboroughs and she also travelled with the family back to Bristol. Having returned to London, she started to work for the publisher Joseph Johnson from 1788 and after the siege of the Bastille, in 1792, she travelled to Paris and lived there and also in Le Havre.[3]

Her restlessness can be presented not only on a social level and in her movements, but in the versatility of her writings. She tried her skills in different forms, shifting from genre to genre in her life-work. She wrote pedagogical handbooks to young girls (*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, 1787 and *Original Stories*, 1788), edited a collection of readings to female readers (*The Female Reader*, 1789), she composed two novels (*Mary*, 1788 and *Maria*, 1798, unfinished) and politico-historical treatises (*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, 1790; *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792, and *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, 1794). To earn her living, she published an immense amount of critical pieces in *The Analytical Review* (1788–90) and translated works to the publisher Joseph Johnson.[4] The

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[2] In *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* (2021), reading an abundance of scholarly and highly inspiring chapters, I can find only one reference to Mary Wollstonecraft and her fellow female travellers in the age, Sarah Hazlitt, Helen Maria Williams, and Dorothy Wordsworth. In the chapter on "Nature Writing," Paul Smethurst claims that those women travellers were likely to record "more intimate dealings with nature" (Smethurst 2021, 39).

[3] See more about the details of Wollstonecraft's life in Tomalin (2012), Ferguson and Todd (1984); with a focus on her mobility in Favret (2002), Horrocks (2017) and Perkins (2022).

[4] She translated Jacques Necker's *De l'importance des opinions religieuses* [*Of the Importance of Religious Opinions*], 1788) from French, Mme de Cambon's *Young Grandison. A Series of Letters*

present article focuses on her travelogue, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, written in 1796, when her existential self-realisation had reached its peak so that the work should be taken as a climactic moment in her mental quest. Having experienced the terror in France and been betrayed by her lover Gilbert Imlay, she travelled to Scandinavia to "pull her[self] from the fatal depression" (Favret 2002, 212).

Being a rather eclectic and impulsive thinker, Wollstonecraft's mobility is also expressed by her flexibility with concepts. She knew and read the influential literary, philosophical and political writings of the age: her life is dedicated to self-development in her self-education. In her lifework, one can trace the influence of the so-called "philosophical fathers," the empiricist John Locke, the naturalist Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the sensualist Edmund Burke. Their writings provided her with foundations of enlightened thinking she frequently relied on in the textual debates she published. In her political-educational treatises, and also in her reviews, she ardently criticised sensibility and defended common sense—*passionately*. As Mitzi Myers claims about this duality of hers,

> pursuing reason with emotional intensity, privileging passion while reining in sensibility, subtending a brisk no-nonsense critical posture with self-referentiality, Wollstonecraft the feminist reader shapes the critic's task to her own purposes and converts the bland fodder she reviews to nourish her own political aesthetics. […] As woman critic and model to her readers, Wollstonecraft borrows the best of two discourses; appropriating reason, distinguishing true from false sensibility, she manages a stance and style that blend the languages *of reason and feeling* to her own humanist purposes. (Myers 2002, 94; my italics)

Before *Letters*, she published her Burke attack, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, written in response to a lengthy letter by Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In 1790, a little-known lady novelist, editor and translator, Wollstonecraft undertook a very bold tone in her writing and, on the one hand, she called upon Burke to account for his earlier radical-liberal political views, and, on the other hand, in her allusions and digressions, the young Burke's revolutionary aesthetic approach to the sublime and the beautiful was revealed. She mocks his rhetoric, frequently highlighting Burke's feminine "theatrical attitudes [in] many of [his] sentimental exclamations", and calling his shallow "pampered sensibility" as "the *manie* of the day" (Wollstonecraft

from Young Persons to Their Friends (1790) from Dutch, and from German Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's *Moralisches Elementarbuch* (1783) under the title *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children* (1790–91).

1999, 6).[5] In the name of human rights, she claims that reason should control emotions: "We ought to beware of confounding mechanical instinctive sensations with emotions that reason deepens, and justly terms the feelings *of humanity.* This word discriminates the active exertions of virtue from the vague declamation of sensibility" (Wollstonecraft 1999, 54). However, there are many similarities in the basic vocabulary of the two writings: after all, both authors borrowed a lot from the contemporary Scottish moral philosophers, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and Thomas Reid. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759-90), Adam Smith emphasises the role of imaginative sympathy in the development of sociability and civil society in the century and he labels the ability as the "social passion" of "fellow-feeling" (qtd. in Horrocks 7). O'Neill also discusses what is mostly echoed in the works of Burke and Wollstonecraft; namely that sentiments should work together with common sense, while taste and sensibility should play a role alongside with moral sense and manners in the development of the civilised and enlightened social human (cf. O'Neill 2007 and also Wetmore 2022). Meanwhile, as it has been claimed by O'Neill and G. J. Barker-Benfield, the eighteenth-century philosophical view of women, especially in the Scottish Enlightenment, "was central to the development of what is termed as the 'culture of sensibility'" (O'Neill 2007, 90).[6]

Sentimental Reveries in the Scandinavian *Letters*

I agree with Wendy Gunther-Canada that self-search features all of Wollstonecraft's writings and, as she claims, exactly "the quest of the female reader for wisdom and the power to govern herself that differentiates Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist theory from the works of the canonized forefathers" (Gunther-Canada 2001, 23). In 1795, moving away from her previous historical and political writings and also leaving behind England and the terror in France, Wollstonecraft started another journey, a brand new one: she sailed away to Scandinavia and she decided to publish her account in letter form. In her travel letters, the impact of different travel books can be detected in the mixture of the varied style that is coloured by her typical socio-cultural criticism; while in her strong tone, the questioning of women's public and social status is expressed.

[5] In *The Analytical Review*, in the issue of August 1789, she published a short comment on a comedy titled *The Sentimental Mother*, in which she referred to "the fashionable cant of sensibility" as "the neglect of tender offices of humanity and important duties proves it to be a sentiment varnish or a present whim" (Wollstonecraft 1989, 152–53).

[6] Originally, sensibility meant "the receptivity of the senses" and women were likely to have greater (common) *sense of sensibility,* with the capability of responding to stimuli more delicately and susceptibly (O'Neill 2007, 90).

The primary source was provided by Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), as his travelogue "pioneered new techniques for writing about the self, and for expressing the flux of inner thoughts and feelings" (Thompson 2011, 49). In the novel, the narrator Yorick differentiates several types of travellers. He labels them among others as "Idle Travellers, Inquisitive Travellers, Lying Travellers, Proud Travellers, Vain Travellers, Splenetic Travellers", and he himself exemplifies "The Sentimental Traveller" (Sterne 1986, 35). The latter type, instead of paying attention to the novelties he comes across in the visited places, rather focuses on himself, his own observations, reflections and feelings. Meanwhile, the readers are asked to identify their type, which provides "one step towards knowing" themselves; akin to the way how travelling itself can be regarded as a unique way of self-realisation and self-knowledge (Sterne 1986, 35). In Sterne's *Journey*, the sentimental tourist turns out to be the subject of his own travelogue, being "the 'egotic' traveller the century had consistently condemned as being inappropriate in nonfiction travel books" (Batten 1978, 80). Due to Sterne's ingenuity, his semi-fictional travel guide had become highly popular, its style was imitated immensely and his followers claimed that "the tour-writer must have strong feelings" (Combe qtd. in Batten 1986, 79).[7] In her "Advertisement" of *Letters*, Wollstonecraft straightforwardly refers to Sterne's sentimentalism and Yorick's egoistic narrative:

> A person has a right, I have sometimes thought, when amused by a witty or interesting egotist, to talk of himself when he can win on our attention by acquiring our affection. Whether I deserve to rank amongst this privileged number, my readers alone can judge—and I give them leave to shut the book, if they do not wish to become better acquainted with me. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 3)

Although she highlights the generic features of the fashionable guide books of the age[8] and her introduction indulges in the first person pronoun, "the little hero of each tale" (borrowed from Edward Young),[9] she promises an authentic book, providing "a just view of the present state of the countries" she has visited

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7 Batten lists several of Sterne's imitators, such as James Douglas (*Traveling Anecdotes*, 1782), Lord Gardenstone (*Travelling Memorandums*, 1786–88), Samuel Paterson (*An Entertaining Journey to The Netherlands* 1782) and the above quoted William Combe in his "Rules for Tour Writing, in the True Modern Manner" (1803). See Batten (1978, 79–80).

8 In addition to Sterne's novel, Wollstonecraft recalls reminiscences of George Forster's and Hester Lynch Piozzi's travelogues she reviewed in the *Analytical*. See more about it in Leask (2019).

9 Eve Travor Bennet quotes the phrase in her chapter on letter-travelogues in *The Routledge Companion*, but Wollstonecraft's name appears only in the endnote (Bennet 2021, 119). Actually, the source of the quotation is Edward Young and his satirical work, *The Universal Passion*.

(Wollstonecraft 2009, 3). In contrast with Sterne's fragmentary travel narrative, Wollstonecraft's work is epistolary; she publishes her own letters written to Imlay. That is, while giving voice to "a witty or interesting [Sternian] egotist" in the accounts of sentimental-emotional adventures, she is also promising a thoughtful and thought-provoking travelogue *on her own*.

In 1795, Mary Wollstonecraft started her therapeutic travel after having returned from France in her disillusionment and immediately after her (first) suicide attempt. On the one hand, her journey was a mental cure, having been suggested by Imlay, on the other hand, she was asked by Imlay to enquire about two ships and regain some of his money from his business associates in Norway. Moreover, she sailed away with her new-born baby, Fanny, and a French nanny, Marguerite. Thus, even the reason of her travel and the circumstances were more complicated than the fictitious Yorick's leisure; mainly, she intended to escape from her emotional disturbances. In accordance, also echoing Sterne's sentimentalism, Mary Wollstonecraft gives the account of her emotional reflections while visiting Northern Europe. Her rhetoric is greatly influenced by "Sterne's characteristic dashes, broken statements, interruptions of sentiment, and general focusing on trivialities" (Batten 1978, 79), but she also questions the light-hearted and "saucily" quality of "a sentimental journey". In *Letters*, there is one textual reference to Sterne's work, to the Maria episode which exemplifies Wollstonecraft's overt criticism. In Tonsberg, in Norway, during one of her walks, she has a reverie ("I not gazed—and gazed again, losing my breath through my eyes") and her temperament is highly affected by nature:

> With what ineffable pleasure have I not gazed—and gazed again, losing my breath through my eyes—my very soul diffused itself in the scene—and, seeming to become all senses, glided in the scarcely agitated waves, melted in the freshening breeze, or, taking its flight with fairy wing, to the misty mountains which bounded the prospect, […].My bosom still glows,—Do not saucily ask, repeating Sterne's question, "Maria, is it still so warm?" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 50)

She recalls Yorick's meeting with Maria, who has such a "warm heart" that she offered to dry the man's wet handkerchief in her bosom, while cooling her passion as well.[10] The Maria episode is slightly misquoted but the overt sentimental (pitiful) and erotic tone of the original is mocked here: Wollstonecraft feels that she has to find her own way to subdue her agitation and control her emotions.

[10] In *Letters*, it goes as "Maria, is it still so warm?", while in the original it reads: "—And where will you dry it, Maria? said I—I'll dry it in my bosom, said she—'twill do me good. And is your heart still so warm, Maria? said I" (Sterne 1986, 139). See more about the Maria episode in Weiss (2006).

The choice of the above mentioned episode is self-revealing, since the traveller admits that her passionate nature is even intensified by the sublimity of the natural surrounding:

> You have sometimes wondered, my dear friend, at the extreme affection of my nature—But such is the temperature of my soul—It is not the vivacity of youth, the hey-day of existence. For years have I endeavoured to calm an impetuous tide—labouring to make my feelings take an orderly course.—It was striving against the stream.—I must love and admire with warmth, or I sink into sadness. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 50)

Mary Wollstonecraft emphatically presents the characteristics of the Sternian light-hearted narrative, his dashes and fragmentary statements, but with the help of (t)his rhetoric, she is able to display her inner struggles; this Maria/Mary is to comfort herself in her self-exploration (cf. Horrocks 2017). In her travelogue, Wollstonecraft goes beyond the experience of the Sternian artificial and superficial sentimentalism and, describing her feelings, she genuinely records her thoughts and philosophical meditations. In this practice, she was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas on solitude and wandering. In his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782, op. posth.), he highlights the interconnectedness of his walking and thinking—solitude and meditation:

> Having therefore decided that I would describe the habitual state of my soul [...], I could conceive of no simpler or surer way of carrying out my plan than by keeping a faithful record of my solitary walks and the reveries that fill them when I let my mind wander quite freely and my ideas follow their own course unhindered and untroubled. These hours of solitude and meditation are the only time of the day when I am completely myself, without distraction and hindrance, and when I can truly say that I am what nature intended me to be. (Rousseau 2011, 11)

From her early age, Wollstonecraft loved wandering in nature as it was commemorated in her first, rather autobiographical novel *Mary*, or even in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where she refers to the freedom of the boyish girl, "a romp" (Wollstonecraft 1999, 110).[11] However, at that time, especially for women, reveries were condemned and solitude was suspicious of being opposed to the social skills, as Barbara Taylor observes (Taylor 2017, 219–21 and Taylor 2009). Wollstonecraft read Rousseau's work that was supposed to be the third part of his philosophical autobiography, *Confessions*. In a review of April 1790, she even evaluated the authentic voice of the second part, pointing out

[11] Although the Wollstonecraftian romp is a criticism of Rousseau's ideal lady Sophie, who is trained to be the perfect partner to Emile in his *Emile, or On Education* (1762). See more about it in Reuter 2017.

the struggles of the Swiss thinker and also highlighting the short happy period he spent on the island of St Pierre. There, "in his retreat he tasted again tranquillity", as she says, adding that in his mute admiration of the delightful prospects, in his "delicious reverie," Rousseau was able to find Deity (Wollstonecraft 1989, 234). In his *Reveries*, Rousseau describes his time spent in the island with a focus on his passion for botany since "the more sensitive the observer's soul, the more he delights in the ecstasy aroused in him by this harmony" of plants and flowers and he gladly allows his imagination to roam freely about "the gentle but sweet impressions" in its enjoyment of natural beauties (Rousseau 2011, 71–72).[12]

Similarly, emotional passages can be read in Wollstonecraft's *Letters*, when she allows herself to be lost in nature—like in the continuation of the Maria episode:

> [...]— I pause, again breathless, to trace, with renewed delight, sentiments which entranced me, when, turning my humid eyes from the expanse below to the vault above, my sight pierced the fleecy clouds that softened the azure brightness; and, imperceptibly recalling the reveries of childhood, I bowed before the awful throne of my Creator, whilst I rested on its footstool. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 50)

But what makes Wollstonecraft's wandering in Scandinavia different from Rousseau's is that she mainly struggles to control her emotions and she rationalises her passionate impulses. Leaving behind false sentiments and imaginative reveries, even in her wandering of the epistolary form, she makes great efforts to phrase her female experiences and to display her process of self-exploration.

Self-Realisation in Rationalised Reveries and the Natural Sublime

In style and tone, the composition of the Scandinavian *Letters* finitely owes a lot to Sterne's and Rousseau's egoistic travellers but what is radically different is the female traveller's characteristic sensitivity in social and gender observations. However, as Nancy Yousef claims, the female traveller's "self seems protean", since "the narrator herself displays an inconsistent character: sociological observer and tour guide [...] poet of rocks and waterfalls and pines, critic of lives structured by the pursuit of profit, woman acutely aware of her own mortality, rugged traveller, insomniac" (Yousef 1999, 543). Truly, Wollstonecraft shares with the readers her meditations and solitary walks. Meanwhile, her character-forming and soul-searching can be followed in the rationalisation of her emotional outbursts. Being often overwhelmed by her feelings and also by the natural landscapes,

[12] I cannot help "reading" Rousseau's mania of botany as a Sternian hobby-horse, defining his character as being inclined to study small and delicate beauties of nature. In *Letters*, Wollstonecraft refers to the famous Swedish botanist, Carl von Linné (Wollstonecraft 2009, 27). On the naturalness of solitude in Rousseau, see Tánczos (2018).

she records that her rhetoric fails her—in the Sternian manner but with a Rousseauvian depth: "I cannot write composedly—I am every instant sinking into reveries—my heart flutters, I know not why" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 75).

Regarding the dominant roles the traveller's self manifests in the work, the socio-critical observer takes a strong part in the discussion of the national characters and gender standards in the Scandinavian countries. Wollstonecraft followed an intensive itinerary, visiting cities and the countryside in Norway, then in Sweden, and finally in Denmark. She provides rather exact and detailed observations—and also some awkward stereotypes—of the Northern European life-style as she visited farmers' cottages, countryside manors, small and big cities, inns, museums, and palaces. In the conceptualisation of the national character, she is influenced by Rousseau (whose mother country she wishes to see and Scandinavia is said to display some resemblance to Switzerland), Godwin and Montesquieu. On the different national character, recalling Godwin's ideas, she writes that "the natural, […] on due consideration, will be found to consist merely in the degree of vivacity or thoughtfulness, pleasure, or pain, inspired by the climate, whilst the varieties which the forms of government, including religion, produce, are much more numerous and unstable" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 33). Accordingly, she pays attention to the political and social structures of the countries she visits, enquiring about the historical events of the Danes, Swedes and Norwegians that assist her to have a greater understanding of the present relations—in the Lockean spirit.

She states that the Norwegians are freedom fighters, "more industrious and more opulent" than the other nations in Scandinavia, also presenting them as "a free community" with "an independent spirit" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 32 and 41). Moreover, she finds some similarities between Norwegian and Irish history, although she also features the Northern character as "sensible, shrewd people with little scientific knowledge, and still less taste for literature" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 43). She even highlights some Utopian elements (in the style of More's *Utopia*). Hence, in the house of correction in Christiania (Oslo), whipping is humanely abolished and slavery is taken as the greatest punishment. She remarks on their free press and religious tolerance, which makes her utter that "the inhabitants of Denmark and Norway are the least oppressed people of Europe" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 45). In Denmark, she sees that they lack graces but they started to translate German writings to achieve some improvement in "manners" and to acquire "finer moral feelings" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 71). When the oppression of the Irish comes to her mind, she criticises charity since, "acting like a demi-god", one cannot provide their fellows a real solution in poverty; whereas she radically claims that reforms are needed, meditating upon her "favourite subject [...], the future improvement of the world" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 122). Being influenced by Rousseau's political views, she attacks "knavery," "an art of the statesman and swindler" that is

practised in "the adoration of property", which is "the root of all evil" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 106). In contrast with expressing her sympathy towards the Danes and the Norwegians, she condemns the Swedes due to their lack of taste in eating, drinking and entertainment. In addition to forming these stereotypes of the national character, she cannot help commenting on the first-hand sensory experience of hers; namely, the smell of "the putrifying herrings" that linger on during her Swedish days (Wollstonecraft 2009, 27 and 31, "herring effluvia").

Moreover, in her judgment of the national character, the female traveller does not only rely on her historical knowledge and socio-critical observations, but she also highlights the conduct of the two sexes and the treatment of women in the Scandinavian countries. Quite early does she enquire about the socio-economic and political situation when the host at an inn tells her that she is "a woman of observation" for asking him "*men's questions*" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 11; italics in the original). In all the three countries, she pays attention to women's manners, fashion and household duties; that is, the general suppression of the female sex. In Sweden, she is the bitterest when she criticises the values of the Swedish merchants, while she is moralising on such causes of bad marriages as lack of education and taste, early boredom, or too much drinking (Wollstonecraft 2009, 97–8). On the whole, she describes the men as "domestic tyrants" being indulgent in debaucheries and the women being interested in tasteless luxuries. She asks angrily:

> I have every where been struck by one characteristic difference in the conduct of the two sexes; women, in general, are seduced by their superiors, and men jilted by their inferiors; rank and manners awe the one, and cunning and wantonness subjugate the other; ambition creeping into the woman's passion, and tyranny giving force to the man's; for most men treat their mistresses as kings do their favourites: *ergo* is not man then the tyrant of the creation? (Wollstonecraft 2009, 107)

She sees that women are only free and have pleasures in the interregnum between the reign of the father and then of the husband, mainly during the days of courtship (Wollstonecraft 2009, 108).[13]

While in her account of politico-historical and socio-cultural concerns, Wollstonecraft presents her rationality, the authentic source of her passionate emotions is provided by the beauties and the sublime of the natural landscape. Leaving behind her companions, she frequently rambles alone in the countryside, in the woods, at the coast and in the rocky mountains. In these poetic accounts, she frequently illustrates the description of the scenery with quotations from her favourite writers—she frequently cites Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Young,

[13] Wollstonecraft refers to the Danish Queen Matilda's tragic love affair, which probably influenced her daughter, Mary Shelley who had given that name to her struggling heroine in her scandalous novel (cf. *Mathilda* 1819–20; op. posth., 1959).

Thompson, and Cowper. In her vital rock-climbing, she is able to move away from her inner feelings of melancholy and dejection; she is still lonely but she feels to be "part of a mighty whole" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 11-12). In Norway, she enjoys her wild seclusion in the woods as there she can focus on herself; it is like a therapy to gather herself before returning to society:

> Whatever excites emotion has charms for me; though I insist that the cultivation of the mind, by warming, nay almost creating the imagination, produces taste, and an immense variety of sensations and emotions, partaking of the exquisite pleasure inspired by beauty and sublimity. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 62)

Listening to "the melody of nature" and "flying from thought to find refuge from sorrow in a strong imagination—the only solace for a feeling heart," she is likely to conjure her phantoms of bliss (Wollstonecraft 2009, 67). She praises the beauty of the beech trees (though they lack the S curve, the "accepted" line of beauty) and she finds that the erect pine is sublime; the fertile and cultivated lands in the Scandinavian lovely summer with the "wild perfume" of nature even balances the odour of the herrings (Wollstonecraft 2009, 39).

She is also influenced by contemporary writings on the picturesque, the beautiful and sublime. In the *Analytical Review*, she wrote about William Gilpin's *Observations* that discussed the enjoyment of the natural landscape, placing it mid-way between the sublime and the beautiful while the latter pair was famously contrasted by Edmund Burke (Brekke and Mee 2009, xx). In Wollstonecraft's poetic reveries, imagination, taste, and emotions are combined, as she writes,

> Nature is the nurse of sentiment,—the true source of taste;—yet what misery, as well as rapture, is produced by a quick perception of the beautiful and sublime, when it is exercised in observing animated nature, when every beauteous feeling and emotion excites responsive sympathy, and the harmonized soul sinks into melancholy, or rises to extasy […]. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 39)

Wollstonecraft is disturbed by Burke's rather Gothic taste in his aesthetic discourse, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), where the sublime "ought to be dark and gloomy, beauty should be light and delicate"; the great is "vast," "rugged and negligent," "solid, and even massive", and "loves the right line"; while the beautiful is "comparatively small", "smooth and polished", and "should shun the right line," the former providing pain, the latter pleasure (Burke 2004, 157). In her first *Vindication* (1790), she also refers to Edmund Burke's differentiation of the feminine beauty vs. masculine sublime since he defines the sublime (cf. the great) as respectful and fearful while the beautiful as amiable and vulnerable: "We submit to what we

admire, but we love what submits to us," he says (Burke 2004, 147). According to Burke, to make an impact on the opposite sex, women *naturally* "learn to lisp, and totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, even sickness" (Burke 2004, 144 and qtd. in Wollstonecraft 1999, 45). In her second *Vindication* (1792), Wollstonecraft argues that the main problem with this Burkean sensualist or even libertine approach is that the idea of beauty is independent of reason, and reason does not attribute gender to virtue: "That Nature, by making women *little, smooth, delicate, fair* creatures, never designed that they should exercise their reason to acquire the virtues that produce opposite, if not contradictory, feelings" (Wollstonecraft 1999, 46; italics in the original).

Thus, in *Letters*, she deliberately mixes the sensations the scenery provides her, being "delighted with the *rude beauties* of the scene; for the sublime often gave place imperceptibly to the beautiful, dilating the emotions which were painfully concentrated" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 10). Instead of meditating upon the Burkean differences, she rather allows herself to be engulfed in her feelings. In her passionate natural descriptions, Wollstonecraft gets closer to the romantic-natural—the Wordsworthian and Coleridgian—notions of the aesthetics of sublime, moving beyond the Burkean and also being influenced by the dissenter minister, Dr. Price's idea; namely that in nature you can sense the presence of God, as she admits it (Wollstonecraft 2009, 84). In addition to Price's dissenter teaching, at the Radicals' meetings organised by the publisher Joseph Johnson in London, she had discussions with the two poets, which helped her reach a deeper understanding of the moral and divine greatness in nature (Tomalin 2012, 99). Due to her intellectual flexibility, Wollstonecraft was able to combine and fuse the different approaches, and, on her tour in Scandinavia, she reflected on them in her complex and emotional records on sublimity. The two most memorable sublime experiences are her visits to the two cataracts in Letters XV and XVII (which influenced S. T. Coleridge in the composition of his "Kubla Khan").[14] She travels from Christiana by ferry to the cascade near Fredericstadt/Friedrichstadt and the sight makes her express her astonishment in a flow of ideas:

> Reaching the cascade, or rather cataract, the roaring of which had a long time announced its vicinity, my soul was hurried by the falls into a new train of reflections. The impetuous dashing of the rebounding torrent from the dark cavities which mocked the exploring eye, produced an equal activity in my mind: my thoughts darted from earth to heaven, and I asked myself why I was chained to life and its misery? Still the *tumultuous emotions this sublime object excited, were pleasurable;* and, viewing it, my soul rose, with renewed dignity, above its cares—grasping at immortality—it seemed as

[14] The young Wordsworth and Coleridge shared some notions with Wollstonecraft, since all of them advertised the great emotional and moral impact of nature on man (Wolfson 2002, 167). Wollstonecraft died before the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1797.

> impossible to stop the current of my thoughts, as of the always varying, still the same, torrent before me—I stretched out my hand to eternity, bounding over the dark speck of life to come. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 89; my italics)

In addition to the uniting of pleasurable emotions and excitement, she also admits that the river seems to be peaceful and picturesque, which provides contrast with the "ruggedness of the scenery" in the deep valley. What is more emphatic that the sublime waterfall itself is not really described, since Wollstonecraft is rather immersed in her reflections and ideas on the greatness of the soul.

The other waterfall at Trollhätte near Gothenburg (in Kattegat) is presented more accurately. First, "the grand object" gives her disappointment but she later reaches "the conflux of the various cataracts, rushing from different falls, struggling with the huge masses of rock, and rebounding from the profound cavities" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 95). Here, again, the contrast is presented in the form of a picturesque island with firs so that she should be able to display the most sublime and passionate passages of *Letters*:

> [...] one half appearing to issue from a dark cavern, that fancy might easily imagine a vast fountain, throwing up its waters from the very centre of the earth. I gazed I know not how long, stunned with the noise; and growing giddy with only looking at the never-ceasing tumultuous motion, I listened, scarcely conscious where I was, […] for the huge grey massy rocks which probably had been torn asunder by some dreadful convulsion of nature, had not even their first covering of a little cleaving moss. There were *so many appearances to excite the idea of chaos*, that, instead of admiring the canal [...], I could not help regretting that such a noble scene had not been left in all its *solitary sublimity*. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 96; my italics)

That is the peak moment of her Scandinavian travels: she has experienced the greatest enjoyment a solitary wanderer can long for. In the description of the natural sight, she cannot even rationalise – she is overwhelmed by the power though she feels, she has to state for the sake of control, how unique the experience is.

In her own self-analysis, she admits that trapping the reader in "affectionate reveries, the poetical fictions of sensibility," she is able to share her meditations and rational thinking on mankind (Wollstonecraft 2009, 90). In her solitary walks and reveries, Wollstonecraft attempts to find not only her own peace but she also wants to find her way back to her humanity. Visiting the simple and tranquil farms, she meditates upon the lost Golden Age of mankind:

> The description I received of them carried me back to the fables of the golden age: independence and virtue; affluence without vice; cultivation of mind, without depravity of heart; [...]—I want faith! *My imagination hurries me forward* to seek an asylum in such a retreat from all the disappointments I am threatened with; but *reason drags me back*, whispering

> that the world is still the world, and man the same compound of weakness and folly, who must occasionally excite love and disgust, admiration and contempt. (Wollstonecraft 2009, 86; my italics)

I agree with Deborah Weiss that Wollstonecraft has "created a new authorial persona in order to bring out the connections between feeling and thinking, between pain and politics, and between female victimization and the culture of sensibility" (Weiss 2006, 202). The unique quality of *Letters* is given by the "hybridized protagonist's" (Weiss 2006, 205), the narrator's melding of her emotions and her own efforts to understand her feelings in massive self-reflection. In an account with a gentleman, she praises man's ability to rely on his common sense and heart simultaneously, since sentiments are needed to feel sympathy but the combination of feelings and reasoning "has a higher source; call it imagination, genius" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 67). She thinks (and feels) that the latter one characterises her passionate endeavours in life: "[...] yet it is this very delicacy of feeling and thinking which probably has produced most of the performances that have benefited mankind. It might with propriety, perhaps, be termed the malady of genius; the cause of that characteristic melancholy which 'grows with its growth, and strengthens with its strength' [Pope ref.]" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 112).

Conclusion: On the Self-Actualisation of the Solitary Walker

According to Mary A. Favret, in her travelogue, Wollstonecraft frequently and "quietly hints at the *travail*, the work or suffering that lies beneath the word travel, even as it constructs an image of self-possession or independence" (Favret 2002, 213; italics in the original). In a sentimental framework, the letters are written by a woman in love (even her private love-letters sent to Imlay during the tour are appended in the collection), expressing Wollstonecraft's struggles to forgive the man who has betrayed her. After the Scandinavian voyage, the couple was supposed to be united in Hamburg, but they finally met in London, where Imlay turned out to live together with an actress. They ultimately departed and in her despair, Wollstonecraft had her second suicide attempt. Rather soon afterwards she started an intimate relationship with her radical fellow-thinker William Godwin, the future father of her second daughter, Mary. In this new love, she moved on and it meant the continuation of her rationalised emotional-sentimental life-journey, in the progress of her development to gain self-fulfilment with the vague possibilities of becoming "again a *Solitary Walker*" (Wollstonecraft 2003, 349).[15]

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[15] This statement also taken as my motto is from a letter Wollstonecraft sent to Godwin in the morning on 17th August 1796, expressing her fear of losing his love. Taylor also cites from the letter but she fails to give the correct reference and date of the letter (cf. Taylor 2017, 216–17).

Mary Wollstonecraft as a rebellious solitary walker does not only realise the gravity of her journey but she also reflects on the significance that she is female traveller, claiming that "when most of the struggles of an eventful life have been occasioned by the oppressed state of my sex: we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel" (Wollstonecraft 2009, 107). In their introduction to the Letters, Brekke and Mee sum up the novelties of the work, claiming that "the brilliance of *A Short Residence* lies in its exploitation of the language of sentiment, which marks an important change from the rhetoric of the vindications [cf. Wollstonecraft's *Vindications*], but also in the way it combines the sense of a self responding to personal and political disappointment with a refusal to abandon her political and intellectual commitments, not least her concern with the condition of women" (Brekke and Mee 2009, xvii).

Nancy Yousef convincingly argues for Wollstonecraft's enlightened understanding of her emotions, "drawing attention to the paradoxical connection between her dark preoccupation with human vulnerability to doubt and betrayal and her confidence in the possibility of authentic compassion, fellow-feelings, and trust" (Yousef 1999, 540). Truly, Wollstonecraft was influenced by the Scottish moralists' ideas—particularly, by Hume's and Adam Smith's emphasis on empathy and sympathy—but, moving beyond false (Sternian) sentiments and in her rationalising of her own emotions, she displays the romantic struggles of the isolated self. The latter feature owes a lot to Rousseau, while the passionate descriptions of the wild scenery foreshadow Wordsworth's and Coleridge's notions on the natural sublime. Moreover, in accordance with her intellectual mobility, wandering in nature and being engulfed in her self-reflection on the landscape and on the depth of her own mind, she is able to *sense* the common roots of sense, sensibility and sentiments: the sublimity of divine nature and human morality.[16] As she claims in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*,

> […] for truth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful. […] But that it results from the eternal foundation of right—from immutable truth—who will presume to deny, that pretends to rationality—if reason has led them to build their morality and religion on an everlasting foundation—the attributes of God? (Wollstonecraft 1999, 5–7)

[16] The famous Kantian maxim from his *Critique of Practical Reason*, summing up the sublime quality of human existence, comes to my mind: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*" (Kant 2015, 129; italics in the original). This closure can be an opening of another article dedicated to Wollstonecraft's Kantian references.

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