

Chapter Title: HUMAN STORIES: WOLLSTONECRAFT, MILL, AND THE LITERATURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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**HUMAN STORIES**  
**WOLLSTONECRAFT, MILL, AND THE LITERATURE  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

*(Auto)biography as Human Rights Advocacy*

Not solely philosophers of women's human rights, Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill were also literary innovators. They creatively appealed to personal narratives as forms of evidence that made their allegations of women's human rights more legitimate and persuasive in the court of public opinion. Long before the fact-gathering and testimonial approach of the human rights literature—which is based on witness, transcripts, reports, and empirical studies of crimes against humanity since the Second World War—Wollstonecraft and Mill used personal witness to shape a new genre, the literature of human rights.<sup>1</sup>

Wollstonecraft thinly fictionalized her (and her friend Fanny's and her sister Bess's) experiences of patriarchal oppression in crafting her novels *Mary, a Fiction* (1788) and *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798). In her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), she turned the drama of her recent breakup with Gilbert Imlay into a psychological subtext for her philosophical meditations on the possibility of achieving a "single life with dignity." She also developed a distinctive first-person feminist voice across her oeuvre. Speaking with the "I" and the "We," she began to make claims for women's human rights in a solidaristic fashion, seeking to unite herself with all women ("O my sisters") in the cause of "JUSTICE" for their sex.<sup>2</sup>

In his 1873 *Autobiography* and other memoirs, Mill's Romantic representation of his unconventional relationship with Harriet Taylor established another literary model for making women's human rights arguments. By poignantly recalling Taylor's life and impact on others, including the composition of his own great works of political philosophy, Mill legitimated his human rights claims on behalf of

women. In Western and non-Western cultures, his male and female readers sympathized with his remembrance of his remarkable wife, and they upheld the relationship as a standard for egalitarian reform of women's status inside and outside the institution of marriage. Especially among male intellectuals and legislators, Mill reinforced his moral authority as a women's rights advocate by virtue of his partial adherence to the customs of marriage while seeking to reform the institution from within.

Mill's disturbing personal experiences of patriarchal conventions, such as Taylor's enduring sense of obligation to her first husband despite moving out of his home, made his feminism more convincing, perhaps especially for other men. He confided in his *Autobiography* the reasons why he tolerated his extramarital predicament with Taylor for almost two decades: "Ardently as I should have aspired to this complete union of our lives at any time in the course of my existence at which it had been practicable, I, as much as my wife, would far rather have foregone that privilege for ever, than have owed it to the premature death of one for whom I had the sincerest respect, and she the strongest affection." Mill's stoic denial of any wishful thinking for the early death of the man who stood between him and his love seems to belie the pain that no doubt characterized the lives of all three adults involved in this unusual domestic arrangement. Mill, alongside John Taylor and other men, had been indirectly though profoundly hurt by the patriarchal system that directly harmed women. Yet by bravely recognizing men's share of this emotional burden—not so much through abstract philosophical arguments as through messy and complex personal disclosures—Mill could make patriarchal marriage an even more urgent problem for the human species to confront and solve.<sup>3</sup>

Wollstonecraft's and Mill's literary writings were as much autobiographical as biographical. Because Wollstonecraft and Mill wove their subjective experiences of their selves and their relationships with beloved others into intersubjective stories of love and loss, these texts are best understood as (auto)biographies. Their life writings blurred the lines between self and other, author and subject, autobiography

and biography, hagiography and history, and sometimes even fiction and fact in order to better convey the social context, interpersonal ethics, and emotional basis of their human rights claims. By grappling with the complexity of these literary works, readers of their (auto)biographies were more likely to become engaged with, if not sympathetic to, their moral goals. The stories of Wollstonecraft and Mill had the narrative sophistication and emotional power to become universal human stories, capable of moving people to care about the neglected cause of women's human rights. Indeed, contemporary psychology has confirmed the value of some of their literary instincts. In 2013, the journal *Science* published a study showing that people who read sophisticated literary fiction, rather than nonfiction or popular fiction, are more capable of expressing sympathy toward others and understanding complex social relationships.<sup>4</sup>

Wollstonecraft's and Mill's contributions to the genre of (auto) biography indicate the power of literacy and literature for human rights activism. The spread of literacy enables people to read, write, and speak about self, other, and their relationships with one another, on a broader scale than cultures with only oral traditions or an elite literary class. As Lynn Hunt has argued in her book *Inventing Human Rights* (2008), the proliferation of novel writing and reading in late eighteenth-century Western culture gave traction to the emergent idea of human rights: "Learning to empathize opened the path to human rights." Sensitive and compelling novels, such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), Laurence Sterne's series *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and *Sentimental Journey* (1768), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie* (1761), stirred the sympathy of people with their tales of strong yet ill-fated women, and unlucky but stalwart men. Reading, or just hearing others discuss, these and other novels taught men and women to feel more empathy for each other as human equals. Sterne even referred to the "rights of humanity" to which *Tristram Shandy* was entitled as a "homunculus" in his mother's womb—albeit with irony if not sarcasm.<sup>5</sup>

Eighteenth-century epistolary novels, like the later (auto)biographical writings of Wollstonecraft and Mill, broke down the di-

vide between literature and history in a way that allowed readers to strongly identify with their heroes and heroines as though they were real people. A common trope of Richardson and Rousseau was to use an editorial frame story, by which the author represented the novel as an (actual) collection of letters by the (supposedly real) protagonists. Although Wollstonecraft remained skeptical of some of the gender messages that these eighteenth-century novels directed at women, she was sufficiently moved by the stories of Julie, Clarissa, Tristram, and Yorick to allude to them in her private and published letters. Her epistolary memoir *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* referred to Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* and shared its lightly fictionalized (or heavily edited) approach to autobiography. Moving beyond the merely "pleasing" female characters of Rousseau and Richardson, Wollstonecraft was inspired to write two novels with new "models" of "thinking" women who "wish to speak for themselves" and "not to be an echo." But it was hard to completely break ties with her literary mentors. The heroine of *Maria* is deluded into believing she is in love as a result of reading Rousseau's *Julie*, before she comes to her senses.<sup>6</sup>

Mill, too, was indebted to late eighteenth-century literature, especially Rousseau's 1782 *Confessions* as received by William Wordsworth and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Alongside these authors he had an interest in autobiography as the genre best suited for relaying the tough yet vital journey of self-discovery. He even quoted Rousseau's *Julie* in an 1831 letter to the *Examiner* that defended the Royal Society of Literature's provision of publically funded stipends for literary writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge. For the state to renounce this duty would be to establish a dangerous "maxim" that would in turn produce "ten thousand" bad actions: not just the economic deprivation of the nation's best authors but, worst of all, the cultural deprivation of society. The political import of literature was clear to the young Mill.<sup>7</sup>

By modeling (auto)biographical approaches to women's human rights advocacy, Wollstonecraft's and Mill's literary works raise a series of epistemological and moral questions for their readers. Is it

legitimate to use the human stories—of our families, our friends, and ourselves—as evidence to support human rights claims? Do appeals to subjective, or even fictionalized, stories undermine the truth and universal reach of human rights arguments? Finally, can the use of human stories be consistent with the practical ethics of human rights activism—especially the obligation to respect the intrinsic value of the individual human being? It would appear that using personal stories to defend human rights could exploit either the emotions of the audience or, worse, the very lives on which the stories are based.

On the question of whether to use human stories in human rights advocacy, contemporary feminist theorists have generally affirmed the legitimacy of this literary and legal strategy. Personal testimony is a necessary form of evidence for documenting violations of women's human rights. For decades, the radical feminist legal theorist Catharine MacKinnon has chronicled the wide range of women's personal experiences of sexual violence as a way of raising awareness of the depth and breadth of women's subjection around the globe. By recording women's personal testimony of sexual violence, she has also contributed to the prosecution of rape as a weapon of war, especially in the Bosnian War. In another documentary approach, Martha Nussbaum interwove *Women and Human Development* with biographical portraits of two lower-caste Indian women whom she met, interviewed, and befriended as part of her field research for the book. These two personal stories gave weight to her arguments for the necessity of listening to local women's self-interpretations of what is needed for improving human development in a particular region or nation. There is a growing consensus among feminists that only by building into theories of justice a plurality of women's perspectives can we even begin to enhance women's sense of "agency and well-being" in general. The universality of human rights claims is partly established by the personal testimonials of women and other historically oppressed groups who need rights in order to flourish.<sup>8</sup>

On the question of whether human stories can compromise the truth of human rights claims, there is some justified suspicion of the attempts of advocates to closely identify with the people whom they

are striving to help. Deep empathy—whether purported, attempted, or actual—can be politically dangerous because of its personal biases. Unduly sympathetic reformers may fail to demarcate a clear space for objective reporting of human rights violations. Given the widespread disregard of the scale of massive crimes against humanity such as the genocidal rape of women during the Bosnian War, human rights advocates have a special obligation to improve knowledge of the facts of these atrocities. Fact-finding may at times require the adoption of a cooler professional demeanor, or even the sacrifice of an emotional sense of involvement in the case at hand. Any storytelling, including (auto)biography and fiction, that blurs the line between author and subject will not achieve this kind of empirically verifiable objectivity, but it can foster a kind of intersubjective perspective that inspires sympathy for the plight of others. Both elements of human rights advocacy—fact-finding work and sympathy-inspiring literature—can productively work in tandem. If they are sufficiently grounded in the culture of the local community, activists might achieve the kind of “multisited” perspective necessary for choosing the right times, places, and people for gathering hard facts or composing quality literary reflections on the issues at hand.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, there is a potential internal conflict between the moral purpose of the literature of human rights and its reliance on biographical narratives. By building human rights arguments on another person’s story, the author risks treating the subject of her biography as a means to an end, rather than as an end in herself. A biography would not appear to promote human rights if it does not respect its human subject as such—a person with the capability to tell her own story.

The most influential exponents of the latter line of argument are postcolonial feminist critics of Western liberalism, such as Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, and Inderpal Grewal. In their visionary work from the 1980s and 1990s, they identified the moral problems with Western liberal attempts to “speak for,” rather than listen to, the subaltern and oppressed in the developing, democratizing, and non-Western world. They theorized why the voices of women in the

Two-Thirds World had to be heard and incorporated into international dialogue on human rights and social justice, in order for such dialogue to be inclusive and egalitarian in process and outcomes. With their grassroots and democratic approach to theorizing the empowerment of women worldwide, they paved the way for feminists in general to frame their human rights approaches to global justice around the voices, stories, and self-interpretations of women beyond the West.<sup>10</sup>

In response to this postcolonial critique, some feminists have advocated a qualitative social scientific approach to surveying and interviewing women of the global South. Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, for example, accept ethnographic research (such as formal or informal personal interviews) within a single case study (such as an event, city, or country) as a valid moral platform for alleging and defending women's human rights. The key to good single-case feminist ethnography is sufficient attention to local detail, cultural sensitivity, and transparency about the researcher's outsider standpoint within the group she is observing. Other feminists, such as Nancy Hirschmann, have simply been transparent about the inescapable interpretive dimension of using the stories of other people as a resource for theorizing issues of justice. Hirschmann insightfully explained the rationale behind this hermeneutical approach in her book *The Subject of Liberty* (2003): "These stories are not the result of systematic interviews in the tradition of qualitative empirical political science. But neither are they fiction, in the hallowed philosopher's tradition of creating hypothetical examples to illustrate philosophical points . . . I do not offer any of them as systematic 'proof' of women's experiences, or of their oppression or freedom; but at the same time, I think it is important to acknowledge that the stories I relate are 'real,' that they are not the fantasies of angry feminists, out to blame men for all the evils of the world, but rather represent the experiences of real, live women." In sharing the stories of a diverse range of female humans—whether in ethnographic or anecdotal form—feminists have responded to the postcolonial demand for recognition of girls' and women's powers of self-representation and self-direction



in the Two-Thirds World. By incorporating these voices, feminists have expanded the reach of human rights arguments, making them worthy of the descriptors “universal” and “international.”<sup>11</sup>

By attending to the epistemological and ethical issues surrounding the use of human stories for human rights advocacy, contemporary feminist theorists have sketched a philosophical justification for a genre with a global history. As we shall see, Wollstonecraft’s and Mill’s (auto)biographical writings have inspired people since the nineteenth century to feel sympathy for the cause of women’s human rights and rethink the principles of justice that govern their societies in light of this feminist commitment. From the United States to Japan, and from Prague to Maharashtra, people retold and sometimes even relived Wollstonecraft’s stories of heroic womanhood and Mill’s stories of spiritual marriage, in new iterations of the old narratives. Wollstonecraft, Mill, and their international followers together forged a literary approach to women’s human rights argumentation that still resonates in twenty-first-century feminist struggles from South Korea to Pakistan.

### *Wollstonecraft’s Stories of Heroic Womanhood*

Wollstonecraft’s novel *Mary, a Fiction* (1788) initiated the (auto)biographical and literary trends in her writing career. She partly based the plot of the novel on her journey to Portugal in 1785. The twenty-six-year-old Wollstonecraft sailed for Lisbon to care for her recently married, pregnant best friend Fanny Blood, who tragically died as a result of childbirth soon after Wollstonecraft’s arrival. The “Heroine of this Fiction,” the eponymous Mary, is a composite of the author Wollstonecraft, her sister Bess, who was recently separated from her husband, and Fanny. Wollstonecraft was unmarried at the time she wrote the novel, yet she imagined her namesake Mary struggling to realize independence within the conventions of patriarchal marriage as she strove to aid her dying friend, Ann. Just prior to her trip to Lisbon, Wollstonecraft had assisted her sister Bess in leaving a loveless and possibly sexually exploitative marriage. The

struggle of her “Heroine” Mary to avoid a similar marriage trap, in which she would be forced to give her body to a man she loathed, was the dominant narrative thread of the novel.<sup>12</sup>

Although the protagonist Mary was married when she arrived in Lisbon, she “never had any particular attachment” to her husband. Tellingly, she had contracted with him to live apart for a year prior to their living together as husband and wife. The unstated implication was that the marriage was unconsummated. Mary’s feelings of “disgust” for her husband suggested that she would have liked to avoid this inevitability as long as possible. Mary’s father had arranged this loveless marriage for the sake of preserving the family estate. As the third-person narrator dryly observed, “While this important matter was settling, Mary was otherwise employed.” The “heroine” was caring for her ailing friend, Ann, and her impoverished family when her father chose to broker this marital deal that cost her her youthful freedom.<sup>13</sup>

While in Lisbon, Mary chastely fell in love with a wan, pious “man of learning,” Henry, with whom she shared passionate conversations about theology, philosophy, and the meaning of life. When Ann’s health took a turn for the worse, guilt overcame Mary as if she had committed a “crime” in letting her relationship with Henry divert even one of her thoughts from Ann’s needs. When Ann died while Mary helped her cross the room, the bereaved friend found herself overwhelmed with anguish. Her grief “disturbed her reasoning faculties; she seemed stunned by it; unable to reflect, or even to feel her misery.” After she recovered her reason and senses after the initial shock of loss, Mary reflected counterfactually: “Had Ann lived, it is probable she would never have loved Henry so fondly; but if she had, she could not have talked of her passion to any human creature.” Emotionally torn between her love for Ann and her love for Henry, Mary understood passion and mutual confidence as the bonds she shared with both. By confiding her passions to each friend, especially her grief for the loss of Ann to her new love, Henry, Mary learned to talk her way through an evolving story of her ongoing self-interpretation as an independent, even rebellious, married woman.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the heroine's deft navigation of her personal tragedies and charting of "strange conduct" in friendship and love, the novel ultimately forces us, the readers, to confront the grim realities of eighteenth-century patriarchal marriage. Three months after Henry's death, social pressure compelled Mary to reunite with her husband. Her "disgust" at seeing him again was so strong that she fainted. She negotiated another year's hiatus from cohabitation, but the time abroad flew by, and soon they were living together: "She gave him her hand—the struggle was almost more than she could endure." Mary sacrificed her sense of bodily integrity to enter into a marriage that disgusted her. Without the motive of love of a living human being, Mary lost her wily determination to evade the marriage she hated. While the laws of entail and coverture set into motion this tragic, forced choice, the devastation of her double loss of Ann and Henry propelled it. Mary could only waste away her last years on earth imagining she was "hastening to that world *where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage.*"<sup>15</sup>

The radical theological message of *Mary, a Fiction* was the same as its feminist message: marriage, as practiced in the eighteenth century, was a profoundly bad deal for women. Even the most heroic and resourceful of them could not escape its insidious spillover effects into personal health, well-being, and, most important, freedom. Looking forward to a heaven without sex or marriage thus emerged as the only complete exit option available to women of her time.

Wollstonecraft's autobiographical *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*—initially published in London, Delaware, Hamburg, and Altona in 1796—had as its implicit topic her tragic romance with Gilbert Imlay. Wollstonecraft had met this American trader in Paris in the spring of 1793, during the radical stage of the Revolution. They quickly fell in love and entered into a "republican" (or unofficial) marriage later that summer. Around this time Wollstonecraft became pregnant with her first child, whom she named after her best friend, Fanny. Imlay's infidelities and other deficiencies as a provider for his family eventually led Wollstonecraft to leave the relationship in the fall of 1795.

Around the time that she ended her first (unofficial) marriage, Wollstonecraft wrote her *Letters*. Based on her journey to Scandinavia to assist Imlay in a business matter in the summer of 1795, her *Letters* reworked her correspondence with her husband into a masterpiece of autobiographical literature. The *Letters* did not mention Imlay by name, but readers in Wollstonecraft's tight-knit intellectual circles in France and Britain would have grasped the domestic premise for this ostensible travel memoir. The resultant text is what the smitten William Godwin called "a book calculated to make a man in love with its author."<sup>16</sup> More important than its inspiration of her second, last, and only official husband to fall in love with her was the book's role in securing Wollstonecraft's fresh sense of self in the process of her unofficial yet brutally painful divorce. Wollstonecraft's authorship of the letters that became her *Letters* was bound between the two bleakest moments in her life: her suicide attempts in May and October 1795. These attempts took place immediately before and following her journey to Scandinavia. Both were occasioned by discoveries of Imlay's ongoing infidelities.

Wollstonecraft's reworking of the letters into the *Letters* in the aftermath of her second suicide attempt meant that the autobiographical composition served as a midwife to the rebirthing of her selfhood. Within the literature of human rights, we might describe the *Letters* as a literary exercise in personal agency and its necessary assertion of a basic human right to life itself. Wollstonecraft's Shakespearean rendering of a meditative experience in a Norwegian church, as she took in the startling view of mummified corpses, provided a case in point: "Life, what art thou? Where goes this breath? this *I*, so much alive? In what element will it mix, giving or receiving fresh energy?—What will break the enchantment of animation?—For worlds, I would not see a form I loved—enbalm'd in my heart—thus sacrilegiously handled!—Pugh! my stomach turns.—Is this all the distinction of the rich in the grave?—They had better quietly allow the scythe of equality to mow them down with the common mass, than struggle to become a monument of the instability of human progress." Like her literary alter ego Hamlet speaking to the

skull of the jester Yorick, Wollstonecraft reflected on human life and mortality, first reveling in the wonder of the “*I, so much alive,*” then recoiling from the mummies before her. The corpses bothered her not so much because of their exotic appearance but because of what they symbolized politically: the childish attempts of the rich and privileged to steal a kind of immortality for themselves at the expense of other, poorer humans.<sup>17</sup>

Just a few lines later, Wollstonecraft assured her correspondent (the implied Imlay) that “with more than usual tenderness, I therefore assure you that I am yours.” Ironically, she reworked this letter for publication *after* she had left her first love. She embedded this meditation on the fragility of the good of human love within a larger and more pressing moral and psychological narrative: her retrospective forging of a new identity out of the crucible of her near self-destruction. She presented her past affirmation of her devotion to Imlay alongside a melancholic refrain on the passing shadows of earthly human experience. Akin to Mill in his *Autobiography*, she countered this dark observation on impermanence with the assertion of the permanent happiness of discovering the intrinsic value of one’s own self: “God bless you! I feel a conviction that we have some perfectible principle in our present vestment, which will not be destroyed just as we begin to be sensible of improvement; and I care not what habit it next puts on, sure that it will be wisely formed to suit a higher state of existence.” On a metaphysical/ethical level, the author of the *Letters* thought of the development of her self (and other human selves) as a perfectionistic process, guided by the (perhaps inscrutable) providence of the divine Creator.<sup>18</sup>

On a psychological and empirically grounded level, Wollstonecraft thought of the process of self-development in Humean terms. As David Hume argued in his 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature*, personal identity was not static but dynamic. It was best understood as a process by which our minds took a set of snapshots of our historically contingent selves, each shaped in a different way by time and place. One looked back on the set of snapshots and endowed them with an overarching sense of selfhood. In this Humean spirit, Wollstonecraft

cared not “what habit” her self “next puts on.” Identity formation was a process of trying on new clothes that were suited for the time and place, but also for the ongoing, retrospective struggle of self-understanding and self-development.<sup>19</sup>

The *Letters* saw a surge of reprinting and translations after Godwin’s 1798 *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, probably because of the rise of public interest in Wollstonecraft’s unconventional life story. Swedish, Dutch, and Portuguese translations of the *Letters*, a new German translation in Leipzig, and another printing in London were produced between 1798 and 1806. No new editions of Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman* appeared between the Danish translation of 1801 and a New York printing in 1833; yet Wollstonecraft remained well known among literary elites in Britain, Europe, and the Americas through the reception of the *Memoirs*, *Letters*, and *Maria* during this period.<sup>20</sup>

Making her even more famous as an (auto)biographical author and subject at the turn of the nineteenth century, her incomplete novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*—initially published by Godwin in London in 1798—was soon translated into French, Swedish, and German and published again in English in Philadelphia. The novel was widely read as a semiautobiographical defense of women’s right to sexual freedom and divorce. The public salience of her scandalous life story in the first decades after her death shifted the wider public’s focus from her ideas on women’s rights to her biography.<sup>21</sup>

Wollstonecraft partly based *Maria* on her sister Bess’s dramatic exit from what was likely an abusive marriage in 1784. Wollstonecraft and her sister Everina orchestrated the escape of Bess, because their recently married sibling had fallen into a terrible depression. The price of flight was leaving behind Bess’s baby, over whom she had no parental rights under the rules of coverture. The child died of illness soon thereafter, making the sisters’ decision to liberate Bess even more morally complex in unanticipated consequences.<sup>22</sup>

Yet *Maria* was as much political as it was personal. Through the narration of the life stories of Jemima (a lower-class woman) and

Maria (a middle-class woman), the novel illustrated how class differentiates and stratifies women's experiences of patriarchal, gender-based inequality and oppression. Wollstonecraft drew the fictional characters of Jemima and Maria from the bleak lives of women she observed in London (even at the Bedlam insane asylum) as part of the process of writing this work of Gothic realism. Her anthropological and ethnographic approach, drawing from the real world of English women's experiences of oppression, let the novel express contemporary political criticism.<sup>23</sup>

In one of the narrative frames of this many-layered tale, Jemima worked as a lowly servant at the Bedlam-like insane asylum in which Maria's husband had unjustly imprisoned her. Trapped in the asylum—a Gothic symbol for the corrupt, arbitrary, hierarchical social and political order—Jemima and Maria shared their life stories with one another. Through the comparison and contrast of their stories, the reader discerns that Jemima's struggles as a woman have been even more severe than Maria's.

The double burden of being poor and female made Jemima subject to a devastating array of social prejudices, economic obstacles, and physical violations. While Maria had a basic but not formal education, Jemima had no opportunity to better herself through education of any kind. While the middle-class Maria first experienced economic insecurity as a result of the law of coverture, Jemima faced extreme poverty from birth. While Maria never worked outside the home, Jemima spent her entire life working in demeaning, physically demanding, slave-like jobs, mainly as a servant. While Maria endured a marriage to a repulsive, alcoholic, verbally abusive husband, Jemima was subject to regular physical and sexual abuse, including rape, from adolescence onward. While Maria suffered marriage as a form of legal prostitution when she was married with a dowry of five thousand pounds to a man she did not love, the young Jemima was forced into literal prostitution as her only means of economic survival. While Maria struggled to regain custody of her infant daughter from her husband, Jemima had to abort a baby because she could not support it.

One of the moral objectives of the novel was to show how such intersectional comparisons of women's experiences across classes might inspire a kind of sensitive solidarity among them for their distinct but related struggles. Through the process of telling their life stories to one another, Jemima and Maria developed a potent sympathy for each other's plights as women precisely because they recognized the salient differences between their experiences of oppression. Encountering Jemima's "unmerited sufferings" prompted Maria to promise her jailor "a better fate . . . and I will procure it for you." While moved by Maria's personal narrative to assist her in escaping the asylum, Jemima still understood her own oppression as more severe. She felt displaced from humanity altogether, since others had treated her, from childhood, "like a creature of another species."<sup>24</sup>

As the more privileged woman, Maria returned the favor of liberation by accepting Jemima's poignant plea to "reconcile me with the human race." These two women—despite their radically different backgrounds—became friends, escaped the asylum together, and, in the only optimistic ending drafted for the unfinished novel, created what some scholars have called an all-female family. Jemima reunited Maria with her infant daughter, who was, unlike Bess's baby, rescued despite the lack of maternal child custody rights. Although Wollstonecraft had argued that poor women were among the worst victims of the patriarchal social and political order, she used the unexpected friendship of Jemima and Maria to show that women's mutual recognition of how class stratified their experiences of gender-based oppression can spark a common quest for the realization of women's human rights, such as to care for their own children. As Maria joyously cried before Jemima when reunited with her infant daughter, "I will live for my child!"<sup>25</sup>

Well before writing her last novel, Wollstonecraft had developed a distinctive first-person feminist voice across several genres. As Janet Todd has argued, the frequency of Wollstonecraft's use of "I" can seem egocentric even to a twenty-first century reader familiar with the conceits of postmodernism. But set in its literary context, her



pounding, insistent return to the first-person standpoint is reminiscent of the repetition found in Biblical poetry. In both cases, repetitive word choice drives home the moral teaching of the text. The assertion, and reassertion, of the value of her or any woman's voice—"this *I*, so much alive"—is a necessary step toward the development of a general human morality that recognizes the intrinsic worth of each person.<sup>26</sup>

Wollstonecraft also regularly used the first-person plural to locate herself as part of the broader group of women who face patriarchal injustice. "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," she pointed out with dark humor in her *Rights of Woman*. This first-person plural formulation anticipated what has been called the "radical feminist" turn of Wollstonecraft's final novel, in which the middle-class Maria learned to identify with the suffering of the working-class Jemima by listening to her personal story of lifelong patriarchal oppression: "Thinking of Jemima's peculiar fate and her own, she was led to consider the oppressed state of women, and to lament that she had given birth to a daughter." This sense of solidarity—specifically, the identification of the individual with group oppression—is a psychological precondition for the formation of any social movement to alleviate collective injustice. For this reason, we may read *Maria* as a founding text for modern organized feminism.<sup>27</sup>

Wollstonecraft's innovative use of first-person voices, singular and plural, allowed her to develop a rich personal basis for the literature of human rights. While her *Rights of Woman* provided a universalistic metaphysical foundation for human rights claims on behalf of women, her (auto)biographical works such as *Mary*, *Letters*, and *Maria* erected another, more practical grounding for human rights advocacy: testimony and witness of women's heroic struggles to navigate the tragic choices set by patriarchy. This literary approach to human rights advocacy built on the personal stories of women, drawn from Wollstonecraft's life, including her own loves and losses.

The literature of human rights confronts us with these difficult histories in order to move us, emotionally and physically, to speak up for a better way for each and all.

*Voices in the Wilderness: The “Spiritual Daughters” of Wollstonecraft*

In 1891, the U.S. historian Annie Meyer wrote in her book *Women’s Work in America* that the pioneering women in the field of medicine, such as Elizabeth Blackwell, were the “spiritual daughters of Mary Wollstonecraft.” Meyer hailed Wollstonecraft as a “voice crying in the wilderness,” who had the courage to speak up for women’s rights to professions, including law, politics, and medicine, long before governments had even made equal provision for primary education. In the generous humanistic spirit of Wollstonecraft, Blackwell and her nineteenth-century American peers “did not seek wider opportunities in order to study medicine, but they studied medicine in order to secure wider opportunities for all women.” Blackwell followed Wollstonecraft in leaving “the Record of a Heroic Life,” which “has since carried hundreds of women over impossibilities.”<sup>28</sup>

Meyer was neither the first nor the last women’s rights advocate to hail Wollstonecraft as a new kind of political prophet. Many people read Wollstonecraft as a female Isaiah or a feminist John the Baptist—a lone voice crying out for humanity to clear a new way for its liberation. A “legion of Wollstonecrafts” followed her path-breaking example, especially among the Quakers and other dissenting Christians in North America during the nineteenth century. Lucretia Mott, a Quaker preacher who helped to organize the first women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, was not only an avid reader of the *Rights of Woman* but also shared the book among her friends—including the controversial feminist theologian Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Quaker abolitionist Sarah Grimké.<sup>29</sup>

As part of the Anglo-American Quaker tradition of female preaching that dated to the seventeenth century, Mott saw herself as channeling the “indwelling Spirit of God” in feeling moved to speak on matters of religion and public morality. A 1906 speech at a Quaker

conference in Maryland equated Mott's legendary talents for public speaking, on issues ranging from abolition to women's rights, with "the voice of the prophet, 'crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" Within her religion, Mott was represented as an authentic prophet, who relied only "upon the Word of God, found not in manuscript or book, but written large in souls that are in touch with the spirit of Jesus Christ."<sup>30</sup>

Mott's own preaching recalled Wollstonecraft as a Christ-like figure who modeled the life of selfless sacrifice necessary for clearing the way for women's rights. Her 1866 speech at the National Woman's Rights Convention borrowed the conventions of a sermon in its religious representation of Wollstonecraft: "Young women of America, I want you to make yourselves acquainted with the history of the Woman's Rights movement from the days of Mary Wollstonecraft. All honor to Mary Wollstonecraft. Her name was cast out as evil, even as that of Jesus was cast out as evil, and those of the apostles were cast out as evil; but her name shall yet go forth and stand as the pioneer of this movement." In a kind of feminist eschatology, Mott resurrected Wollstonecraft, turning her from an Eve-like fallen woman who was "cast out as evil" into a female Jesus who had come to lead the American women's rights cause.<sup>31</sup>

It was a close friend and political colleague of Mott, Stanton, who made Wollstonecraft's philosophy of women's human rights into the basis for an American feminist civil religion. In 1840, she had met Mott at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London. There they discussed how Wollstonecraft and other dissenting Christian political thinkers had been "tabooed by orthodox teachers." In the *History of Woman Suffrage*, Stanton recalled how she encountered Quaker families in England who "warned against [Mott's] influence" because "in a recent speech in London she quoted sentiments from Mary Wollstonecraft [*sic*]."<sup>32</sup>

Stanton responded pragmatically to the taboo status of Wollstonecraft even within the dissenting Christian tradition. In her own writings and speeches, she invoked Wollstonecraft and her ideas not so much in terms of any particular religious faith as in terms of a new

civil religion. This American civil religion was based on rational principles of morality (such as, each person's desert of equal respect due to each person's dignity as a human being). Around the same time, during the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln similarly resorted to familiar biblical images and phrases to shore up his secular principles and politics. In defining the secular use of religious language in Lincoln's antislavery statesmanship, Steven B. Smith has argued that a "civil religion" is any "non-denominational profession of faith based upon certain symbols, rituals, and public practices that bind citizens of a polity by virtue of their common membership."<sup>33</sup>

Stanton used Wollstonecraft to articulate the feminist principles latent within postrevolutionary America's civil religion, particularly its doctrines of popular sovereignty and equal rights. She and Mott rewrote Jefferson's 1776 *Declaration of Independence* to include women in their 1848 *Declaration of Sentiments*, to show that American civil and political rights ought to apply to all adult persons, regardless of sex. Stanton distinguished her reading of Wollstonecraft from Mott's by making Wollstonecraft a wholly secular icon of women's right to civic equality and nondiscrimination. In an 1871 letter to Mott, Stanton turned Wollstonecraft into a feminist martyr: "We have had women enough sacrificed to this sentimental, hypocritical, prating about purity. This is one of man's most effective engines, for our division, & subjugation. He creates the public sentiment, builds the gallows, & then makes us hangman for our sex. Women have crucified the Mary Wolsencrafts, the Fanny Wrights, the George Sand's, the Fanny Kemble's, the Lucretia Mott's of all ages, & now men mock us with the fact, & say, we are ever cruel to each other. Let us end this ignoble record, & henceforth stand by womanhood." Stanton's mastery of rhetorical amplification transformed Wollstonecraft from a "sacrificed" Christ into a martyr for a wholly secular cause—the cause of "womanhood" itself. While Wollstonecraft was a righteous prophet for Mott, for Stanton she was a noble and willing political victim who embodied a new kind of female heroism. In Stanton's biting analysis, the tragic history of women persecuting other women and thereby perpetuating patriarchy would be the "ignoble record"

of the female sex, if they do not finally band together “& henceforth stand by womanhood.” This personal letter to Mott was thereby a political demand for women to “stand” against patriarchal domination, yet for civil not revealed religious reasons.<sup>34</sup>

Another leading Quaker feminist, Susan B. Anthony, was Stanton’s political partner in establishing the first freestanding national women’s rights organization in the United States in 1869. Stanton and Anthony’s formation of the National Woman’s Suffrage Association (NWSA) effectively split their more radical branch of the women’s rights movement from both the civil rights movement for African American men and the mainstream women’s suffrage movement. With the founding of NWSA, Stanton and Anthony drew a firm line between their ultimate commitment to women’s rights such as suffrage, divorce, and voluntary motherhood, and the limited victory of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that activists such as Frederick Douglass and Lucy Stone had embraced for its extension of suffrage to black men and former male slaves. The political cleavages of 1869 over the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment became the crucible for the consolidation of the American women’s rights cause into a freestanding social movement explicitly focused on feminist issues—sometimes, disappointingly, in opposition to the rights of blacks and other minority groups. As it faced forward, toward the realization of Wollstonecraft’s abstract vision of social justice, American feminism ironically distanced itself from its iconic philosopher’s commitment to universal human rights in the quest to realize the civil and political rights of women.<sup>35</sup>

Anthony, like Stanton, revered Wollstonecraft as a philosophical source for the women’s rights cause. It was widely reported that they prominently displayed portraits of Wollstonecraft and Mott in the offices of their feminist newspaper, the *Revolution*, around the time of the founding of NWSA. No longer heard as religious prophets for women’s rights, Wollstonecraft and Mott were instead the secular and pioneering voices for the “great cause” of full and formal female citizenship. In 1904, Anthony donated her copy of the *Rights of Woman* to the Library of Congress with the symbolic inscription:

“To the Library of Congress from a great admirer of this earliest work for woman’s right to Equality of rights ever penned by a woman. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, ‘A wholesome dissenter is the first step towards progress.’ And here we have the first step.” In the iconography of the late nineteenth-century American women’s rights movement, Wollstonecraft had transmogrified from a female Jesus, to a feminist martyr, to a “wholesome dissenter,” even among the dissenting Christians who had popularized her views across the United States. What remained the same across these mimetic iterations of Wollstonecraft was the focus on the clarity, originality, and urgency of her voice as an advocate of women’s rights.<sup>36</sup>

As organized feminism grew in popularity at the turn of the twentieth century, there was an international shift toward representing Wollstonecraft as a secular voice of reason and advocate of human rights. In her 1884 biography of Wollstonecraft, the American expatriate and European intellectual Elizabeth Robins Pennell wrote of Wollstonecraft as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, to prepare the way. What she had to do was awaken mankind to the knowledge that women are human beings, and then be given the opportunity to assert themselves as such.” In 1899, the Jewish German feminist Bertha Pappenheim contended in her introduction to the second German edition of the *Rights of Woman* that Wollstonecraft was “the first woman who with overwhelming clarity awoke the consciousness in women—and also had the courage to voice—that women have rights, not assumed through raw force or custom, but rather human rights whose basis lies in irrefutable duties.”<sup>37</sup>

Anna Holmová was the Czech translator of Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman* in 1904. Her introduction to this edition, published in Prague, captured another trend in the reception of Wollstonecraft at the turn of the twentieth century. As biographies of Wollstonecraft’s life and editions of her letters became popular across Europe, Britain, and the United States, the author of the *Rights of Woman* became more important than the contents of her groundbreaking treatise. Wollstonecraft’s arguments were now philosophically quaint and politically irrelevant because they fully reflected the “rationalistic reli-

gion and rationalistic philosophy of her time.” Holmová concluded that the lasting power of Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman* lay not in its “philosophical system” but rather in its emotional sway over the “sensibility” of its contemporary feminist readers: “With almost an elementary force stands out the sense that a change, a renewal, is necessary,—and in this immediacy, in this desire, lies the significance of this book, which makes up for its logical and stylistic imperfections. It isolates the author from her [female] contemporaries, but connects her with the striving and longing woman of today, who disagrees with the old ways and who demands freedom to try and to look for new ways.” Like an electric charge, the fin de siècle Wollstonecraft jolted the “woman of today” to leave behind the “old ways” in order to seek “new ways” in the wilderness.<sup>38</sup>

In 1907, the British conservative Mrs. Humphrey Ward felt compelled to satirize this tendency of modern feminists to see Wollstonecraft and themselves as secular prophets. In her widely read novel *The Testing of Diana Mallory*, an idealistic young feminist advised the heroine to split up with her fiancé in order to commit herself to the selfless mission of women’s rights. Belying her sense of self-importance, the feminist confided: “I fear I may seem to you a voice crying in the wilderness.” With this confession aside, she proceeded to matter-of-factly invite her friend to join the “Mary Wollstonecraft Club,” devoted to suffrage and pacifism, once she overcame her mere “personal grief” over losing her beloved. Showing Mrs. Ward’s fearful satire to be prophetic itself, the British militant suffragette newspaper *Votes for Women* ran an article in 1912 entitled “The Voice in the Wilderness.” Citing Pennell, the article praised Wollstonecraft as a “remarkable pioneer” whose views pointed “so unmistakably in that direction” of the “Woman’s Movement of the present day.”<sup>39</sup>

In his influential 1922 book on the international history of female emancipation, the Dutch historian Jacob Bouten located Wollstonecraft as the ideological source of the globally successful women’s rights cause. Using words that have been repeated to the present day in scholarship on Wollstonecraft and feminism, Bouten referred to her as a “lonely voice in the wilderness of British conventionality”

who “heralded the great and successful movement of a later century.” In 1929, Virginia Woolf canonized within literature this first-wave feminist trend of hearing Wollstonecraft as a secular, rational, yet emotionally captivating voice. For her *Second Common Reader*, Woolf wrote of Wollstonecraft: “One form of immortality is hers undoubtedly: she is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living.”<sup>40</sup>

After modeling a new style of first-person voice and narration in her contributions to the literature of human rights, Wollstonecraft herself came to symbolically represent women’s power to speak prophetically, and thus critically, about women’s social status. In the rhetorical and oratorical works of her early followers within organized feminism, Wollstonecraft was heard as a “voice in the wilderness,” whether she was seen as a religious prophet, a political sacrifice, or a secular suffragist. Even as the mainstream feminist movement lost touch with its explicitly religious foundations, it retained its spiritual motivations in secularized form. Driven by a quixotic desire to help the whole of humanity, the “spiritual daughters of Wollstonecraft” developed a narrative framework by which they could understand their work as answering a political prophet’s call to action. Like other forms of politics, nonreligious forms of feminism are still a kind of secularized theology, with Wollstonecraft and her fellow rational Christian dissenters situated at their philosophical and literary base. James Darsey has argued that “Considered as biography, the prophetic *ethos* is a kind of legend.” The early American and European feminists built such a prophetic ethos on the legend of Wollstonecraft’s visionary life and ideas.<sup>41</sup>

The Wollstonecraft legend and its prophetic ethos were generated by, and continue to generate, a variety of Wollstonecraft memes. Memes—or widely recognizable yet variously replicated symbols of ideas—have become a staple of modern popular culture. Recent feminist theory and scholarship have begun to grapple with the powerful concept of the meme, with satirical yet intellectual web sites such as “Feminist Ryan Gosling” spurring a global Internet discourse on “feminist memes.” Richard Dawkins is credited with inventing the



term “meme” to describe the nonteleological, evolutionary cultural process by which social symbols are formed, cross-fertilized, and reproduced in new and diverse iterations of an original (or “genetic”) idea. Richard Rorty argued in turn, “Memes are things like turns of speech, terms of aesthetic or moral praise, political slogans, proverbs, musical phrases, stereotypical icons, and the like.” Upholding the political relevance of Dawkins’s concept for a pragmatic conception of feminism, Rorty explained that “different batches of . . . memes are carried by different human social groups, and so the triumph of one such group amounts to the triumph of those . . . memes.” Feminist memes can be understood as dominant clusters of public symbols that embody the political ideas and influence of the movement for women’s liberation as a group from conditions of patriarchal oppression.<sup>42</sup>

The comparative analysis of her international reception at the turn of the twentieth century shows how Wollstonecraft came to be such a feminist meme. Sidney Tarrow has argued that political symbols are a vital part of any social movement. I build on his theory in conceptualizing memes as a highly visible type of political symbol, around which a social movement such as feminism can be organized. People latch onto the meme in their responses to the cause at hand, and thereby associate the cause with the meme. Such a potent symbol becomes shorthand for the movement at large and the ideas that drive it. Both negative and positive uses of the meme promote the growth of the movement by instigating debates, attracting attention to the cause, inspiring recruits to join, and endowing the group with an overarching sense of history and purpose.<sup>43</sup>

Wollstonecraft helped to fulfill these roles for the formation of modern feminism, by serving as a mimetic marker of the movement’s philosophical origins, its social consequences, and its radical political aspirations. In their capacity as prominent feminist intellectuals, thinkers from Mott to Woolf utilized Wollstonecraft and her ideas as symbols in order to foster the authority, public appeal, and internal solidarity of their women’s movements. The turn of the twentieth century was the pivotal juncture at which the term “feminism” began

to be commonly used to describe women's movements around the globe. It is also the historical moment at which women's movements had evolved into highly sophisticated national and international-level organizations. In the early decades of the twentieth century, women's movements worldwide gained momentum toward realizing their reform agendas pertaining to women's rights to education, voluntary motherhood, property ownership, divorce, suffrage, and safe labor conditions.<sup>44</sup>

In this crucible of the development of what have retrospectively been labeled "first-wave" feminist movements, many intellectuals looked back to Wollstonecraft and her ideas to help ignite and unite each of their causes. There was a pattern of feminist interest in Wollstonecraft as a prescient model for independent womanhood, female sexual freedom, and egalitarian marriage as part of the broader culture of the women's movement from 1900 to 1930, as shown in famous essays by the Russian émigré anarchist Emma Goldman, the American anthropologist Ruth Benedict, and the British modernist novelist Woolf. Although they made multiple memes of their common icon to fit their particular national and political contexts, feminist intellectuals deployed their respective images of Wollstonecraft in similar ways for similar reasons. In using Wollstonecraft's persona and philosophy to both ground their movements in a historical starting point and orient them toward common political goals, they gave these movements an overarching structure—a beginning, a middle, and an end. Just as Wollstonecraft used literature as a sympathetic mode for human rights advocacy, her first-wave feminist followers appealed to her as a prophet, martyr, and dissenting voice of reason to craft an emotionally compelling narrative structure, or practical grounding and purpose, for their burgeoning reform movements.<sup>45</sup>

*"My strongest incitement": The Millian Marital Model*

Mill also wrote a kind of feminist narrative that could serve as a practical and emotional grounding, or motivation, for women's human rights advocacy. Like Wollstonecraft's, his feminist narrative

was an (auto)biography about his self-development through the experience of charting a new path in love, outside the bounds of patriarchal marriage. This (auto)biography was as much about him as it was about his spiritual marriage with Taylor. She played the role of Diotima to his Socrates, by guiding him, he professed, to “enlarge and exalt my conceptions of the highest worth of a human being.” As he put it in the 1859 dedication to *On Liberty*, his (extra)marital relationship with Harriet was “my strongest incitement” to write not only this great work of political philosophy, but to write his own life down, to make his own life worth reading. She provided the necessary reason for writing at all. As he shared in an early draft of his *Autobiography*: “The poetic elements of her character, which were at the time the most ripened, were naturally those which impressed me first, and those years were, in respect of my own development, mainly years of poetic culture.” His immersion in her “poetic culture” gave him the chance to achieve in his later years a “purely literary life . . . which continued to be occupied in a preeminent degree with politics.” With his posthumously published *Autobiography*, Mill fully merged the literary life of the writer with the political life of the public servant. Most significantly for his women’s human rights advocacy, he used the *Autobiography* and the dedication to *On Liberty* to champion the example of his “friend and wife,” who steered him to see the importance of “giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions.”<sup>46</sup>

Mill’s *Autobiography* and Taylor’s few remaining private letters to him recalled how they became acquainted, at a dinner party in her home, in the winter of 1830–31. The two intellectuals faced a moral crisis soon thereafter. Because they unexpectedly fell in love, the question arose: What were their obligations to Harriet’s husband, John Taylor, and the three children she had borne in that still youthful marriage? In 1833, Harriet followed John Taylor’s advice and took a retreat from both relationships. During this separation, she corresponded with Mill, imploring him to share more of his feelings, and his deeper sense of self, with her. On 6 September 1833, she sent a letter to him at the India House, where he worked: “The most

horrible feeling I ever know is when for moments the fear comes over me that nothing which you say of yourself [is to be] absolutely relied on. That you are not sure even of your strongest feelings. Tell me again this is not." This emotional imperative, for Mill to both know himself and share himself, found its philosophical parallel in the *Autobiography's* portrait of her character at this critical juncture: "Her unselfishness was not that of a taught system of ethics, but of a heart which thoroughly identified itself with the feelings of others, and often went to excess in consideration for them, by imaginatively investing their feelings with the intensity of its own." In the moral allegory of the *Autobiography*, Taylor represented the virtues of love and sympathy, and their power to inspire "a lovingness ever ready to pour itself forth upon any or all human beings who were capable of giving the smallest feeling in return." Mill offered himself as a model of the latter, emotionally meager, kind of human being, whose capability for expressing feeling was enriched over time by reflecting on the virtues of the woman he called, in an early draft of the *Autobiography*, his "main instructor."<sup>47</sup>

The complex outcome of the twenty-six-year-old Harriet's meditation on the state of her marriage was to choose Mill with her heart but to remain Taylor's devoted wife, with all the propriety of a married woman in Victorian Britain. She established a residence separate from her husband, where she met privately with Mill on evenings and weekends. She and Mill also took long vacations together. She never let her extended family beyond her husband know of the details of this arrangement. She continued to raise her children with Taylor at their home. Yet she involved Mill in educating her daughter Helen, who often resided and traveled with her mother. After her mother's death in 1858, Helen took on Harriet's role as intellectual collaborator by substantially assisting Mill with the production of his *Autobiography* and *Subjection of Women* for publication.<sup>48</sup>

In this highly irregular familial arrangement, Harriet had her share of difficult choices. But each choice illuminated the moral primacy of love and sympathy for others within her practical and caring, not abstract and taught, "system of ethics." In March 1849,

Harriet wrote to her husband, John, to say that “nothing but a feeling of right would prevent my returning at once” to care for him in his terminal cancer. Yet it was precisely such a “feeling of right” that led her to choose to nurse her partner Mill, who was rendered blind by illness, for three weeks that winter. In a letter to Mill later that year, she confided how her hospice care for her husband was a salve to her conscience. This intensive and giving practice of marital love allowed Harriet to “set against extreme sadness & the constant acute sense of being in an utterly false position.” The act of loving both men helped her to interpret her fidelity as both capacious and unquestionable: she could love Mill enough to nurse him in his time of need, while choosing to care for John when he and their family needed her most.<sup>49</sup>

Harriet Taylor took the time to instruct Mill in the sympathetic basis for ethics while at John’s sickbed. After Mill made the blunt and thoughtless suggestion that she should think of someone other than her patient, she wrote back with force: “Good God sh[ould] you think it a relief to think of somebody else some acquaintance or what not while I was dying?” A modern and feminist Diotima, Harriet sought to teach Mill that real love (including their relationship) ought not to be selfishly focused on any particular person or set of people but rather be generously dispersed toward those who needed it. To cement this moral fact in Mill’s mind, she wrote of her dying husband, John: “There is nothing on earth I would not do for him & there is nothing in earth which can be done / do not write.” This last imperative—“do not write”—marked the sacredness of her bond with John alongside her loving commitment to Mill and the learning process of his self-development as a sympathetic human being.<sup>50</sup>

Taylor’s encouragement of Mill to know, share, and critically interpret himself in the context of his relationships shaped both the content and the direction of his *Autobiography*. It became as much the story of his self-development as a biography of a large and complicated family. In 1854, Harriet wrote to Mill regarding his writing of “the Life”: “Should there not be a summary of our relationship from its commencement in 1830—I mean given in a dozen lines—so

as to preclude other and different versions of our lives.” While she thought this (auto)biographical exercise would be an “edifying picture for those poor wretches who cannot conceive friendship but in sex,” her ultimate “reason for wishing it done” was their right as a couple to tell their “own” story. Vindicating a basic human right to self-interpretation and self-expression, especially in matters of the heart, she argued that “every ground should be occupied by ourselves on our own subject.” The subject of their own lives was the practical and emotional “ground” they ought to occupy as authors of “the Life” they wished to share as a moral example with others.<sup>51</sup>

Paying tribute to his wife’s intersubjective methods, Mill wrote in his *Autobiography* that he “settled” into a “purely literary,” yet nonetheless “practical” and robustly political, life after Harriet died of illness in 1858. With his 1859 dedication to *On Liberty*, he represented his magnum opus to the world as the philosophical product of their spiritual marriage and intellectual collaboration. In the *Autobiography* he reinforced his interpretation of the book’s expected longevity and value for humanity by describing its origins in his complex and conflicted marriage: “The conjunction of her mind with mine has rendered it a kind of philosophic text-book of a single truth, which the changes progressively taking place in modern society tend to bring out into ever stronger relief: the importance, to man and society, of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions.” Just as the “conjunction” of their minds led to their “fusion” into the material form of the book *On Liberty*, their nearly thirty-year (extra)marital relationship was the rich ethical site for the treatise’s mandate of free, full, and “conflicting” directions for human self-development.<sup>52</sup>

In the *Autobiography*, Mill connected his grief for the “irreparable loss” of Harriet with his growing hunger for writing and other kinds of political action in his remaining years. One of his (or rather, “my”) “earliest cares” in life without Harriet was to “print and publish” *On Liberty*, in order to “consecrate it to her memory.” He credited Harriet with inspiring his “literary life” and, most important, his self-

development into a human being who thought himself capable of independent, creative, caring, yet capaciously ethical thought. Their relationship(s) had taught him that he was much more than “an interpreter of original thinkers, and mediator between them and the public.” He was in fact an original thinker, in ethical realms well beyond the comforting certainties of logic and science, whose writings had tremendous moral import for humanity’s present and future. The posthumously published *Autobiography* became his literary tribute to Harriet and their relationships’ shaping of his self-understanding as an author of a political kind of literature. As with Wollstonecraft’s, the influence of Mill’s political literature was vast. The *Autobiography*, but perhaps even more effectively his world-renowned dedication to *On Liberty*, pointed to the deep familial roots of the global problem of patriarchy. The power of these texts lay in their proposal of a practical yet imaginative and intensely empathetic solution to patriarchy: a new model of marriage, based on “the Life” itself.<sup>53</sup>

### *Millian Marriage Goes Global*

Mill’s dedication to *On Liberty* begins: “To the beloved and deplored memory of her who was the inspirer, and in part the author, of all that is best in my writings.” The instant global success of *On Liberty* made this tribute matter almost everywhere. By Mill’s death in 1873, the book had appeared in multiple English editions plus German, Polish, French, Dutch, Russian, and Japanese translations. The treatise’s strikingly personal inscription consequently became Mill’s most important (auto)biographical tribute to Harriet and their marriage to be published during his lifetime.<sup>54</sup>

According to the dedication, it was in Harriet’s roles as Mill’s “friend and wife” that she modeled to him an “exalted sense of truth.” The author marked the absolute loss of her death alongside the enduring meaning of her life with a triumphant triple negative: he was left bereft yet grateful, as he found himself alone, “unprompted and unassisted” by her “all but unrivalled wisdom.” *On Liberty* thus had to be the best political work he could have hoped to write, because its

muse was “buried in her grave.” This paratext to *On Liberty* claimed Taylor to be its author as much as Mill.<sup>55</sup>

By legitimating Taylor as the true and complete partner of Mill, the dedication resurrected her and their collaborative marriage as feminist political symbols for a broad and gender-inclusive audience. By emphasizing his debt to his “friend and wife,” Mill challenged his fellow male intellectuals to sympathetically reflect on this marital model as clearing a path in the wilderness for personal and public liberty and happiness. His female readers, on the other hand, could find in his depiction of Taylor the promise of a new kind of marriage in which women would be first moral and intellectual equals alongside men and secondly wives and mothers.<sup>56</sup>

Around the same time as writers from New York to Buenos Aires to Prague made Wollstonecraft into an international feminist meme, Mill (and his marriage) became a widespread literary model for a practical kind of feminist political philosophy. He built his 1873 *Autobiography* around his conception of himself as ethically and intellectually transformed by his relationship with Taylor. His (or their) “Life” was translated into at least seven languages before 1900. While the dedication of *On Liberty* strongly alluded to their marriage, the *Autobiography* fleshed out Harriet and John Taylor’s “Life” in much of its messy complexity. The near-global issuing of *The Subjection of Women*, often with substantial biographical and philosophical introductions by indigenous intellectuals, also contributed to the internationalization of the Taylor-Mill marital model. Together, these three texts provided their readers and commentators further reason and inspiration to follow Mill in the symbolic appropriation of his relationship with Taylor for their own feminist philosophical and political projects.

The non-Western European reception of the Millian marital model shows how such symbolic representations of human relationships can pass a practical and emotional test of cultural translation. The rootedness of such ideas in a particular time, place, culture, and set of personal circumstances is not an intractable obstacle to their cross-cultural meanings. A comparison of more than a century’s



worth of Indian, Czech, Japanese, and Korean responses to the Millian marital model illustrates its value as a morally responsible motivation for women's human rights advocacy, then and now.

As we saw in chapter 4, Govind Vasudev Kanitkar was the colonial subjudge and Brahmin liberal reformer who translated *The Subjection of Women* into his native Marathi in 1902. His poorly educated child bride, Kashibai, was only nine, and he only sixteen, when they were betrothed according to the customs of their Hindu community in 1870. Although they were devoted to one another and a joint set of moral and political values, Kashibai and Govind's marriage was always clouded and troubled by its origins in the patriarchal power structures of their families. As one of the first women to publically advocate for reform of child marriage via the Age of Consent Bill in 1891, Kashibai became one of the most famous indigenous feminists in Indian history. Her *Autobiography* and other life writings are in one sense the mirror image of Mill's: they charted the complicated practice of a new model of companionate marriage, similarly hindered by patriarchal traditions, yet spoke from a woman's perspective of irrevocable personal loss as a result of such unjust social structures.<sup>57</sup>

In an undated essay on her early education, Kashibai wrote of how Govind pushed her to learn English by introducing the recently published ideas of Mill's *Subjection of Women* to her: "As far as English was concerned 'he' had explained to me John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women*. Although I became acquainted with the book, I had not studied it systematically. I could not even read it. Sometimes 'he' explained it to me and said, 'You are not destined to read this book. You will not learn enough English to read it in this lifetime.' At this time I made a vow that, in this very life, I would translate one page of this book without help." Kashibai impersonally, even coldly, used the third person to refer to her husband's role in her attainment of English literacy. Her even colder use of quotation marks ("he") belied the emotional difficulties that arose from the practical asymmetries in their arranged marriage. Yet she still credited him with teaching her how to write biographies in English, and with providing editorial and translation assistance as her literary career moved

forward: “He is the sole reason I have acquired the ability to write a book now. Even if I shod him in shoes made of my own skin, and did so for the next seven lives, this debt would not be repaid.” The high price of her education was dutiful domestic service and childrearing, or, as she gruesomely imagined: making shoes for her husband out of her own skin. The self-abnegation implicit in this dehumanizing metaphor suggests that Kashibai felt their relationship, however progressive by current Brahmin standards, never fully escaped the patterns of domination and disrespect that characterized patriarchal marriages of their time.<sup>58</sup>

Kashibai was painfully aware of her husband’s preference for fair-skinned women, which her darker coloring never fitted. She was also beset by his projection of (white and British) Taylor as an ideal spouse. Govind framed his 1902 foreword to *The Subjection of Women* with praise of Mill and his collaboration with his “superb” wife. It promoted a Romantic-liberal vision of Indian women educated in the style of Taylor to become the intellectual companions of their husbands. Govind’s conciliatory liberal approach to colonial reform allowed for Indian women to become chaste and domesticated Harriet Taylors, but not fully independent women with strong identities beyond their marital roles.<sup>59</sup>

Much like Govind, Kashibai perceived the value of life writing for political reform, especially among those colonized peoples who had reason to be cautious in their claims for change. Composing a biography of the first female Maharashtran medical doctor, Anandibai Joshee, led her to consider the practical limitations of using histories of exemplary women to promote the cause of women’s human rights. Kashibai instead pragmatically theorized the value of flattering men in the process of celebrating great women for the sake of feminist reform: “Instead of lauding women who have been thus improved we should praise men who have improved the condition of such women. Women, just like men, possess capability and rationality. But their capability finds no outlet.” Even as Kashibai insisted “a woman’s biography be written by a woman,” she realistically assessed the need for women to gain favor of the men in power who controlled ac-

cess to education, literacy, and the press itself. At stake in this set of trade-offs was the future realization of women's "capability and rationality" via the granting and exercise of human rights to education and political participation. Her feminist utopian fantasy novel, *The Palanquin Tassel* (written between 1897 and 1928), envisioned such a future, in which an Indian female political leader established equal economic rights for the sexes in quasi-Millian fashion. The novel moved even further beyond Mill in proposing the justice of equal descriptive (gender-based) parliamentary representation.<sup>60</sup>

In the lived reality of their marriage, the practice of the principle of equal respect remained elusive for Kashibai and Govind. They were separated during the last few years before he died in 1918. Deep disputes and disturbing emotions drove them apart: her religious turn to Theosophy against his wishes, and their mutual yet alienating grief over the devastating loss of a child. As the surviving spouse, Kashibai took a Millian path in serving as a leader in postcolonial Indian feminist-democratic politics. Also like Mill in his later "literary" and "political" years, Kashibai Kanitkar wrote her own posthumously published autobiography as a testament to the enduring meaning of her (and her husband's) own imperfect personal struggles toward realization of the "capability and rationality" of humankind.

Another prominent pair of married intellectuals, in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Prague, fared better than the Kanitkars in practicing the Millian marital model in their personal lives. Charlotte Garrigue Masaryk was the American wife of the Czech philosophy professor Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. She translated and also likely penned the anonymous introduction to the 1890 Czech edition of Mill's *Subjection of Women*. The Masaryks had courted by reading *The Subjection of Women* together, so the introduction likely represented a collaborative synthesis of their feminist views, just as Mill's book was the product of decades of intellectual collaboration with his wife, Harriet. Tomáš became a noted Millian feminist lecturer in turn-of-the-century Prague. As the first president of Czechoslovakia in 1920, he proudly oversaw the political incorporation of women as equal citizens in the new republic.<sup>61</sup>

The Masaryks' appropriation of the Millian marital model appears to have been both privately happy for them and eventually publicly beneficial insofar as they led the battle for the enfranchisement of Czech women. As highly privileged, Western-educated members of the elite, however, they did not face the same obstacles to these goals as their contemporaries on another continent, the Kanitkars. Colonization and patriarchy were forces felt more in theory than in practice by the Masaryks. The Masaryks' international yet egalitarian marriage combined with Tomáš's Eastern European background likely aided their rooted cosmopolitan appropriation of Mill and Taylor for themselves and their national politics.

Charlotte's 1890 foreword emphasized the political relevance of Mill's book on women's rights for "Czech literature" and culture: "The translation of *Subjection of Women* is the introduction of Mill into our literature. With great joy we hope that this man's ideas, which so greatly influenced his contemporaries, will have the same beneficial effect also on us." Charlotte thus presented Mill as a highly salient philosophical source for rethinking and reforming women's status along egalitarian lines in the contemporary Czech context. Her foreword alluded to the significance of Mill's *Autobiography* for understanding the impact of his marriage for the writing of the arguments in *The Subjection of Women*. Taylor was more than a wife but rather someone with whom Mill had cultivated a lifelong "genuine friendship." "Mrs. Taylor" was a "great influence on his work" but especially "for the conception of the immense practical implications of the subjection of women." It was on the latter issue that Mill "drew upon his wife's guidance" in crafting his pivotal treatise on the topic.<sup>62</sup>

Charlotte Masaryk brought Mill into "Czech literature" via her translation of and biographical introduction to *The Subjection of Women* with the aim of "refreshing, relaxing, and uplifting" the "spirit" of the Czech people. Of all the texts by Mill she could have been the first to give to the Czechs, she chose the book that had most deeply shaped her as an individual and as a married woman. Mill's feminist liberalism, for the Masaryks, was a kind of practical

philosophy to be lived out in love and politics, much as Harriet and John once had done.<sup>63</sup>

The 1921 Japanese introduction to *The Subjection of Women*, published in Tokyo in 1923, shows the growing non-Western salience of Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Taylor as personally compelling symbols for an international feminism. Ōuchi Hyōe (1888–1980) was the German-educated Japanese translator of this edition. Mill's political philosophy, especially his *On Liberty* but also his feminist ideas, had been robustly debated in Japan since the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the transition to the Meiji regime in 1867. Ōuchi provided the first complete and literal translation of *The Subjection of Women* into his native language. His 1921 introduction underscored the emotional impact of the book on the rise of feminism worldwide: "Since its publication, it has been widely read in all the Western countries, and for a long time has been called 'the Bible of the Women's Suffrage Movement,' and it has served as source of spirit and power for those who have participated in the movement." Ōuchi mentioned Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* as an important precursor to *The Subjection of Women*, then drew the conclusion that Mill's work "cannot hold the honor of being the origin of women's rights discourse, nor does it hold the special privilege of cornering the market on a perfect women's discourse." In 1957, he put the point more strongly in a new edition of *The Subjection of Women*: it was "because of people like Condorcet and Wollstonecraft" that other people, particularly in France and England, began to advocate "for women's equality." As important as Mill became for international feminism, the groundwork for Japanese and other non-Western feminisms had been laid down by the French revolutionary generation.<sup>64</sup>

Ōuchi's 1921 introduction dwelled on the significance of Mill's relationship with Taylor for cultivating the emotional power and persuasiveness of his feminist arguments. Indirectly referencing the *Autobiography*, Ōuchi described how Mill "expressed his sorrow at being separated from his wife, the object of his great passion; in death, she became the powerful motivating force that turned his lonely final years into prolific ones." Although he was skeptical of Mill's hagiographic

treatment of his wife, Ōuchi conceded the psychological force of this rhetorical and narrative move. As an intellectual historian, he understood the subsequent intense concern with Taylor's impact on Mill as integral to the global spread of Millian feminism itself: "Thus, to return to his wife in the establishment of this work is not unreasonable, but in fact, is part of Mill's own exaggerated feeling that his wife was a greater thinker than himself—and at times even greater a poet than Carlyle or Shelley." The Taylor-Mill relationship was crucial for the "establishment" of *The Subjection of Women* as a canonical text for international feminism. The (auto)biographical depiction of this unusual marriage gave a Victorian British man's abstract work of political philosophy a compelling personal history and origin story that could both cross borders and bridge generations.<sup>65</sup>

Soon thereafter, Takahashi Hisanori took exactly this personal approach to writing his (auto)biographical introduction to the selected political writings of Mill in Japanese. Published in Tokyo in 1928, this edition contained translations of *On Liberty*, *Utilitarianism*, and *The Subjection of Women*, alongside some of Jeremy Bentham's works. Takahashi's translator's introduction to *On Liberty* was inserted between Mill's dedication to Taylor and chapter 1 of the book itself. Takahashi's introduction, like Mill's dedication, functioned as a paratext that dictated the authority and authorship of *On Liberty*. Takahashi understood his authority as a translator as stemming from his rescuing of Mill's meaning from loose and inaccurate Meiji-era translations in Japan after 1867. He represented this experience of literal translation as philosophically meaningful for himself as an empirically oriented and logical thinker: "Mill bestowed on this translator a manner of inquiry for his everyday life." Takahashi reinforced the parallel between Mill's conception of himself as the translator of Taylor's ideas for the world and his own historic role as a literal translator of Mill's major political writings for modern Japanese culture, by treating the dedication to *On Liberty* as strong empirical evidence of Mill's intellectual debt to his wife: "The extent of her influence on Mill is evident in his dedication page to her in *On Liberty*." Takahashi's introduction revealed his attentive reading of Mill's *Autobiog-*

raphy. Much like both Ōuchi in his 1921 foreword to *The Subjection of Women* and Mill in the *Autobiography* itself, he portrayed the death of Taylor as a traumatic yet transformative psychological linchpin in Mill's development as a political writer and activist: "Mill's despair need not even be mentioned."<sup>66</sup>

Forty years after he began his own translation of *The Subjection of Women*, Ōuchi wrote a new introduction for a corrected version of his 1921 edition undertaken by his thirty-three-year-old daughter-in-law, the Tokyo University-educated economist Ōuchi Setsuko. In his 1957 introduction Ōuchi Hyōe was at once more biographical and more autobiographical. On the autobiographical side, he revealed his intellectual partnership with his daughter-in-law Setsuko—a relationship much like that of Mill and his stepdaughter Helen Taylor, who together had produced *The Subjection of Women* in the 1860s after Harriet's death. He also provided a personal context for their re-issuing of *The Subjection of Women* in Japanese: the devastating Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 had destroyed most of the copies of his original edition. This national and personal tragedy gave them reason to publish a revised edition several decades later.

Ōuchi also discussed the broader intellectual context of his initial reception of *The Subjection of Women* into Japanese after World War I: "At the time, I was a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Finance and being in such a position I could not but feel the waves of the democratic movements that were taking place in Japan in response to shifts in international intellectual circles. Thus, I joined those young economics students who had gathered under the tutelage of Takano Iwasaburō at Tokyo University and discussed such matters with them." Each member of this group of young male intellectuals decided to "translate a classic work of the West." Preoccupied with the growth of capitalism, the group focused on economic texts. Ōuchi had been trained in Millian classical economics but chose to translate *The Subjection of Women* because of the emergence of a formal Japanese women's movement for suffrage after World War I. Also, he was interested in Mill as an immanent and progressive critic of "global capitalist economics," because "he had at times questioned . . . the

limits of capitalism,” especially for social justice for women and the poor.<sup>67</sup>

On the biographical side, the 1957 introduction placed even greater emphasis on the nearly mythological story of the Mill-Taylor marriage and its cross-cultural meaning for Japanese feminism: “From long ago, there are many tales of the meeting of the genius and the beauty. Even when the women’s movement occurred in Japan, a number of such stories were told. Above all, however, this tale was about the nineteenth century’s greatest economist on the one hand, and on the other an exceptional woman of London high society. That is why their romance remains a topic of interest among intellectual historians.” After citing F. A. Hayek’s 1951 book on Taylor and Mill, Ōuchi mentioned his own essay on their “romance” that he had published long ago in the January 1920 issue of the Japanese journal *Warewa* (Us). He then implored his current readers to go back to neither of these commentaries but rather to Mill’s *Autobiography* itself, in order to understand the marriage’s literary significance for Mill’s political thought.<sup>68</sup>

As with his 1921 foreword and Takahashi’s 1928 translator’s introduction, Ōuchi in 1957 foregrounded the emotional impact of Taylor’s death on Mill’s later years as a writer: “Needless to say, Mill’s grief was great. He bought a small home in Avignon, in the south of France, where Mrs. Taylor died while traveling, and spent most of his remaining life there honoring her memory. *The Liberation of Women* came to fruition in this place, at such a time, and was organized into its present form and sent out into the world.” Ōuchi’s optimistic, forward-looking translation of the title of Mill’s 1869 treatise (*The Liberation of Women*) fitted into his biographical thesis that the loss of Taylor was not total for Mill but rather a tipping point toward the reconstruction of himself and the emergent international feminist movement. As Ōuchi theorized in the spirit of chapter 4 of *The Subjection of Women*, “The liberation of women is the liberation of humanity. Human beings will be liberated as the great obstacle that thwarts the character development of half of their members is removed.” Writing eleven years after the formal grant-



ing of equal rights to the sexes in the 1946 Japanese constitution, Ōuchi pushed his recently independent democracy to fully implement in culture the egalitarian principles implicit in its post-World War II (and postoccupation) legal and political order.<sup>69</sup>

In another Asian country shaken by decades of war and Western occupation, a Korean edition of *The Subjection of Women* did not appear until 1986 in Seoul. As with several non-Western European readings of the text before it, the translator Ye-suk Kim's introduction used the relationship of Mill and Taylor as a concrete basis for cultivating cross-cultural understanding of the treatise. Mill not only philosophically defended but also practiced in his personal life a "unisex mindset" or "harmonious mind" that incorporated "intellect, which was viewed as men's virtue, and emotion, which was viewed as women's virtue." Building on Alice Rossi's classic biography of Mill and Taylor, Kim judged this androgynous style of thought to "probably" arise from "his equal and productive relationship with Taylor, which was ahead of its time."<sup>70</sup>

Pyöng-hun Sö's introduction to the 2006 Seoul edition of *The Subjection of Women* shored up the translation's relevance for contemporary Korean feminist activism by way of a political reading of Mill's *Autobiography*. After discussing Mill's life and especially his relationship with Taylor, Sö upheld Mill as a model of personal authenticity. This authenticity, moreover, served as an affective basis for effective social and political reform: "The reader of this book will easily sympathize with Mill's authenticity. It is impressive how Mill stood against the society which regarded subjugation of women natural, and demonstrated his belief bravely and with confidence." Speaking to contemporary readers in South Korea, the translator encouraged them to "sympathize" with Mill on the grounds that he challenged entrenched gender norms in his traditionalistic society. His late-life activism, propelled by his enduring love of his dead wife, was all the more courageous for its refusal to accept his society's limiting, patriarchal views of propriety and the public-private distinction. Writing from within a twenty-first-century South Korean society with persistent patriarchal norms, Sö annotated *The Subjection*

of *Women* in order to encourage contemporary Korean feminists to take inspiration from Mill's "authentic" approach to women's human rights advocacy as much as to urge a broader Korean readership to recognize this book as "the authoritative classic of feminism" worldwide. Perhaps with a silent nod to Mill's collaboration with his stepdaughter, Helen Taylor, on the composition of *The Subjection of Women*, Sö's analysis of the treatise concluded with a personal disclosure: "I am glad that my daughter Ji-Eun, who just started an undergraduate degree in her university, read this book."<sup>71</sup>

*In the School of Wollstonecraft and Mill*

As one of the most prominent intellectuals to face death threats, persecution, and exile for his writing on human rights issues, the British Indian novelist and memoirist Salman Rushdie has defended a political conception of literary traditions. As he puts it in his recent third-person memoir of his years in hiding under the alias Joseph Anton: literature "encouraged understanding, sympathy, and identification with people not like oneself" when "the world was pushing everyone in the opposite direction." For Rushdie, as for Wollstonecraft and Mill before him, literature and especially (auto)biographical writing had the power to elicit a sense of solidarity among people. This solidarity could serve as an emotional motive for a rooted yet responsible human rights ethic.<sup>72</sup>

Wollstonecraft's rational theology and Mill's secular liberal utilitarianism represent two, if not the two most influential, philosophical foundations for justifying women's human rights. Yet Wollstonecraft, Mill, and their international followers saw the practical insufficiency of such abstract rational justifications for persuading people to join their moral and political cause. An affective basis for women's human rights claims was necessary if people were to be moved to carry the claims forward into their cultures and laws. Rational justifications for women's human rights may productively work in tandem with emotional motivations for the same cause. Through their international reception, Wollstonecraft's and Mill's (auto)biographical writ-

ings gave diverse readers the right motives to write themselves and their peoples into the literature of human rights. Learning from this history, as well as from contemporary feminist theory, philosophers and other writers may find further ways to reconcile “rational” and “sentimental” approaches to defending and alleging the rights of humans.<sup>73</sup>

In his 1993 Oxford Amnesty lectures, Rorty made a plea for “long, sad, sentimental” stories to be seen as the most effective tools for teaching the powerful that the powerless also deserve human rights. His primary example was Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which persuaded many white Americans to care about the antislavery cause in the antebellum United States. I offer two addendums to this important point, one historical and the other philosophical. First, Wollstonecraft, Mill, and other feminist thinkers to the present day have successfully used both rational philosophical justifications and sentimental literary narratives to argue for the recognition of universal human rights. Second, feminist philosophers are rightly sensitive to the fact that women have often been denied status as human beings because of their supposed lack of reason. To dismiss rational approaches to justifying women’s human rights in favor of purely “sentimental” modes of persuasion may perniciously reinforce the gender prejudices that feminist philosophy seeks to undercut in the first place. Finding ways of balancing appeals to reason and emotion in women’s human rights advocacy is thus a defining practical task and tradition of feminist philosophy.<sup>74</sup>

Feeling passionate deliveries of arguments for human rights, audiences gain the power to use their imaginations to draw, from these wrongs of the past, a set of reasons for establishing rights for women and other humans in the present and future. The relationship between speaker and audience generates a dialogical and narrative framework for women’s human rights advocacy. In the beginning, there are the wrongs done to women. In the middle, there is the allegation of a human right not to suffer such wrongs, and the hearing of and response to that voice in the wilderness. In the end, there is the psychological, cultural, and legal realization of a universal human

rights ethic that recognizes the equalities as much as the differences between the sexes.<sup>75</sup>

Spivak argued that such a communal rewrite of the conditions for social justice depends on a “transaction between the speaker and the listener.” Otherwise, the subaltern cannot speak (in voice or any other action), because they have not yet been heard. Spivak made an ethical distinction between speaking and talking. Speaking requires a dialogical relationship in which one is heard; talking may be mere utterance. Speaking need not be vocal but may be any kind of action (writing, leadership) that elicits a hearing or response from others. In her stirring reflection on the ancient religious practice of *sati* (the self-immolation of grieving widows) in her native India, Spivak used the example of these self-sacrificing women to illustrate the complexity of the problem of oppression. She did not aim to speak for these widows but rather to convey the difficulty of their struggle within colonial and patriarchal social structures. In so doing she rewrote the story of her fellow Indian women’s suffering in a new postcolonial frame, which has since inspired others to better hear and respond to the voices of the subaltern in general.<sup>76</sup>

To make ethical claims for women’s human rights requires a serious concern with the context for the claims themselves. The feminist advocate must train her eye like a good novelist, getting a sense of the social setting for patterns of injustice toward women. With this setting described in detail, the feminist advocate may endow even the most radical and risible claims for the rights of women with an inner, and richly literary, logic: as allegations based on the past, made in the present, and oriented toward the future, they at least can be understood as having a beginning, a middle, and an end. This narrative structure also endows these claims with the rhetorical potential to pose what Amartya Sen calls “wrathful” and “rational” arguments. From Wollstonecraft to MacKinnon, we hear moral outrage that emotionally reinforces what is rationally graspable as right for all humans. Wollstonecraft cried out against the sexual exploitation of women in the patriarchal marriages of her time as destructive to humanity as such. MacKinnon begs us to confront the atrocity of the

genocidal rape of women as a crime against humanity itself. In each case, their wrathful reasoning pushed others in power, often men like Mill, to reform domestic and international laws and other cultural norms as a step toward institutionalizing women's human rights to not be raped in marriage and to not be raped in war.<sup>77</sup>

Given that many people do not respect others, and have been socialized not to respect those who are different or less powerful than them, feminist ethicists such as Nussbaum have hypothesized the moral preferences that human beings would have if they lived in respect-enhancing social conditions. With these ideal moral preferences in mind—such as appreciation of the equal dignity of human beings—theorists in the “women's rights are human rights” movement have articulated the ethical conditions for developing the sense of solidarity necessary to support and grow the cause. This idea of a global feminist solidarity challenges the binaries and barriers between North and South, East and West while encouraging attention to the differences that give rise to internationally recognized women's human rights. Hirschmann has put it simply and clearly: the differences between women are the occasion for the theoretical argumentation of their rights. Listening, narration, questioning, and free discussion are a set of discursive practices that push people toward mutual respect of both their moral equality and their bodily/social differences.<sup>78</sup>

Joining the chorus of those interested in proceeding from the fact of difference and inequality, social scientists have demonstrated that there are many practical asymmetries between the sexes that are verifiably bad for women. Sen's landmark economic studies of the systematic malnutrition of girls and women and the widespread practice of female-selective abortion have given grave examples of objectively bad practices of sexual discrimination. Although economics and political science have done much to identify these issues and propose effective strategies for “removing manifest causes of injustice,” part of the task of addressing unjust inequalities is not scientific but moral.<sup>79</sup>

The moral virtue of courage is often demanded of those who confront, in social and political reality, injustice toward girls and women.

In the same year as the 220th anniversary of the *Rights of Woman*, the Taliban shot fourteen-year-old Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan in the head for her public advocacy of the right of girls to education. Malala bravely chose to symbolically situate herself, via Internet videos and blogging, as a living example of the right of girls to primary and secondary schooling despite the dominant views of a violent and patriarchal religious group. UNESCO has reported that in her home country “over three million girls” are “out of school” and “nearly half of all rural females have never attended school.” As she has recovered and recommitted herself to her political activism, Malala is a highly visible reminder of the fact that girls and women continue to need the institutionalization of the rights that their arguments seek to allege, defend, and extend. Before the United Nations in July 2013, she beseeched children around the world, “Let us pick up our books and our pens, they are our most powerful weapons” in the ongoing fight for the universal right to “free, mandatory” basic education. Her heroism in fighting for the right to education for all children was recognized in 2014, when she became the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>80</sup>

Malala’s courage is extraordinary, but she is also just another girl, with flaws like any other person. Her strong positioning of her politics against the Taliban introduced a strain of antifundamentalist rhetoric to her speeches and writings, which angered her enemies. She risked losing her hard-won image as a peacemaker who seeks to reconcile her Muslim faith with feminism, especially among fundamentalist followers of Islam. Even as it is read around the world, her autobiography has been banned in private girls’ and boys’ schools in Pakistan. Malala’s personal yet political predicament shows both the enduring promise and the real difficulties of women’s human rights advocacy. In the school of Wollstonecraft and Mill, one learns by personal trial as much as by human error, but ultimately one learns to better defend the human rights of women.<sup>81</sup>