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GRADUATE COLLEGE

NAMING THE VIOLENCE
WOMEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NARRATIVES

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Regina J. Bennett
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NAMING THE VIOLENCE
WOMEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NARRATIVES

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

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Lawrence Frank
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ABSTRACT

Long before our twentieth-century, psycho-socio-political understanding of domestic violence, women wrote about this form of oppression in their letters, diaries, journals, essays, novels, poetry, and tracts. These highly personal, yet culturally revealing documents, outline patterns of human aggression, dominance, and violence which have been observed in the case histories of domestic violence survivors today. I have begun to call these works domestic violence narratives. An integral part of women's literary tradition, the domestic violence narrative recounts violations of patriarchal privilege and undue abuses of power which men have exercised over women authors.

This dissertation examines the works of Ann Wall (N.D.), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), and Caroline Norton (1808-1877), three women from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to illuminate the historical as well as the modern representation of domestic violence. I argue that these three women used their experiences as survivors of domestic violence to empower themselves and the public. In addition to providing an income, the domestic violence narrative may have three purposes. First, the narrative has therapeutic merit; the author has an opportunity to tell her own story, in her own words, so that she can control the direction and the message which the narrative/her life takes. The second purpose may be pedagogical; the teller of the narrative uses the story to warn other women away from abusive situations. Third, the narrative fosters social change; some women writers use these degrading and humiliating experiences to effect transformation of the social and legal systems.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NARRATIVES

For thirty years, the study of male violence against women has provided the catalyst for changes in western culture. Now, laws governing sexual assault and violence in marriage are more friendly to women; religious denominations invite equal partnerships between husband and wife; and psychologists no longer view battered women as masochistic. These transformations in the political, legal, social, economic, and family systems were initiated by the countless voices of battered and formerly battered women. In fact, the voices have become so prevalent that they have evolved into a discourse community which speaks the language of women's oppression.

My contention, however, is that the discourse community is not a result of only the past thirty years of listening, theorizing, experiencing, or activism. I argue that the battered women's movement began long before Del Martin, Erin Pizzey, or Betsy Warrior published their ground-breaking works in the 1970s or the first battered women's shelters opened in St. Paul or Boston (Schechter 33-34). Utilizing the techniques employed by contemporary scholars of domestic violence and feminist literary theory, I argue that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries three British women--Ann Wall, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Caroline Norton-- all survivors of domestic violence, document the beginnings of a discourse community by exposing the oppression of women by men. Their works not only confirm much of what we know about domestic violence today, but show the therapeutic effects of naming the violence and how the transformation of life

into art may activate social change. I call these stories domestic violence narratives and assert that they are a vital component of the battered women's movement and its subsequent discourse.

Terminology and semantics are important to any literary project and especially to one which crosses time and cultures. I use the term domestic violence very loosely. Domestic violence in this essay refers to the use of physical or psychological control of another person with whom one is intimately acquainted. To me, domestic violence is child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. It is also spousal abuse. Spousal abuse means to impose one's will on one's partner psychologically, emotionally, economically, sexually, physically, or legally. Domestic violence is a wide range of behaviors which makes the victim feel as if she or he is living within the birdcage of systematic oppressions. The phenomenon works most effectively when the male is the abuser and the female is the victim because the patriarchal institutions have traditionally supported and condoned the abusive husband.

This introduction to the writers is based loosely on the methods posited by Michele Bograd, co-editor of Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse. She writes,

Four major dimensions are common to all feminist perspectives on wife abuse: (1) the explanatory utility of the constructs of gender and power; (2) the analysis of the family as a historically situated social institution; (3) the crucial importance of understanding and validating women's experiences; (4) employing scholarship for women. (14, her emphasis)

With these dimensions in mind, I acknowledge that this project is overtly feminist.

Initially, I will outline the feminist theories which lay the foundation for the subsequent approaches to the early modern women's writings. Secondly, since this study covers

roughly seventy-five years from 1771 to 1850, it is necessary to position the writers in the social, political, and cultural milieu in which they wrote. In this period, prior to the worst of the Victorian's conservative views about sex roles, gender issues were debated and women authors were rewarded for their work in ways unprecedented in previous eras. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the publication of women's works in record numbers. Whether literacy rates, economic shifts, or gender politics contributed to this increase is beyond the scope of this paper. For the first time in British history, middle-class women were able to transform into art and publish a record of the sufferings they had endured. Stranded as they were in a culture that marginalized the domestic violence victim and survivor even more than most women, the narrators of these works publicize a violent familial subculture. Third, in order to "understand and validate women's experiences," I will examine domestic violence in women's literary traditions and suggest ways the domestic violence narrative contributes to these traditions. Last, the theories of the battered women's movement have "employed scholarship for women" (Bograd 14). However, this flood of scholarship and the increasing professionalization of the movement has resulted in controversies about the issues of victimization, advocacy, and research. These issues must be addressed as well.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND GENDER AND POWER

Although he was not the first to attribute a woman's inferior social position to her inferior physical strength, John Stuart Mill understood that the "inequality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest" (The

Subjection of Women 223). Anticipating the "anatomy is destiny" argument, Mill believed this law, or "brute force," has been the basis of oppression throughout time. He reasoned that "all the selfish propensities, the self-worship, the unjust self-preference, which exist among mankind, have their source and root in, and derive their principal nourishment from, the present constitution of the relation of men and women" (296). In the mid-nineteenth century, Mill, from his privileged male perspective, the recipient of the benefits from the "law of the strongest," found himself able to articulate this controversial, yet accurate, analysis. Amid the furor over notions of "natural selection" and the "Struggle for Existence" first articulated in Charles Darwin's The Origin of the Species in 1859, Mill's observations added to the perspectives of the Victorian "Woman Question."

Before the nineteenth century, women's resistance to the "law of the strongest" had been all but ignored by the prevailing patriarchal culture because of the pervasive forces which the patriarchy constructed for itself. Not satisfied with the ability to control women through physical force, patriarchy ingeniously constructed other barriers to restrict women's lives. One contemporary philosopher, Marilyn Frye, has used the bird-in-a-cage symbol to express these monolithic forces: "It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon" (5). Patriarchal religions, social conventions, psychological theories, legal apparatus, educational opportunities and economic systems provide a "network of systematically related barriers" which effectively limited women's

resistance to the "law of the strongest" and confined her to a sometimes violent domestic sphere. We can begin to see the bars on the cage which restricted the women of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England if we map the evolving historical context for domestic violence.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH RELIGION AND LAW

Since social practice is usually based upon the beliefs and values of a culture, the religious doctrines of that culture play a large role in defining gender roles. As heirs of the Judeo-Christian tradition are all too aware, Eve's alleged conspiracy with the serpent inspired centuries of retaliation from the patriarchal church leaders. Rather than granting men the power to control women physically because of Eve's indiscretion, Roman Catholic and subsequent Protestant church leaders sought to enforce the unequal sex roles by attaching a moral sanction: not only were women physically weaker than men, but they were considered spiritually weaker as well and they must be protected from the evils which their foremother Eve brought upon them. Hence, the subjugation of women became more systemic and deeply imbedded in the fabric of the culture for it became the duty of the husband to protect his wife both physically and spiritually. To facilitate his obligation to protect, the husband was granted the right of correction. These rights and responsibilities further enhanced the husband's ability to control his wife. For purposes of this study, it is important to begin by examining domestic violence as it was treated by the embryonic mid-sixteenth century Church of England, which, in all of its guises and

shapes, set the tenor of the culture and perpetuated the very behavior it found so repulsive.

Within a decade after Henry VIII broke with Rome, Thomas Becon was touting what was to be the party line for the next five hundred years: in order for husbands to protect their wives, they must be able to correct them. His Boke of Matrimony (1543) advises married couples to "love each other, to beget children, to live chaste" and instructs the wife to serve the husband who is himself "to provide for, defend and help" his wife as her "guide, philosopher and friend" (qtd. in Pinchbeck, I, 13-14). The new Church of England did not challenge established Roman Catholic notions that women's inferior physical and moral condition must be guided by and provided for by the defense and help of her husband.

Most church leaders did not condone domestic violence in its most virulent forms. In the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Church of England, The Second Tome of Homilies (1563) was designed to augment the Bible and The Book of Common Prayer. Compiled by church leaders, The Second Tome of Homilies included "An Homily of the State of Matrimony" which states that God forbade wife-battering, "for that is the greatest shame that can be, not so much to her that is beaten, as to him that doeth the deed" (Klein 21). Many of the religious writings from this period used guilt and shame to persuade husbands to employ less violence and to persuade wives to obey their husbands.

Henrie Smith reinforced the notion of women's moral depravity and hence their need for spiritual guidance and protection in A Preparative to Mariage, a sermon on the marriage contract published in 1591. In the work, Smith argues that women are weaker

than men because God made woman for man, "so a man must intreat his wife with gentlenes and softness; not expecting that wisdom, nor that faith, nor that patience, nor that strength in the weaker vessell, which should be in the stronger" (68). Since she is weaker physically and spiritually, but (according to Smith) more apt to be stronger verbally, "Husbands must hold their hands and wives their tungs" (69). Correction, it seems, does not mean corporal punishment, for to physically harm a wife is as though a husband were harming himself. In short, Smith cautions husbands to protect their wives as they would protect themselves and correct their wives as they would correct themselves because the two become one under the auspices of the Anglican church. Since men who "beate the[m]selves should be sent to Bedlam til their madnes be gone" (73), those who beat their wives are in part insane.

William Heale echoes this sentiment in An Apology for Women, his written opposition to the assertion of Mr. D. G. of Oxford in 1608 that it was lawful for husbands to beat their wives.¹ Heale argues that beating women is against the laws of nature, morality and society, civil and canon law, as well as the law of God. According to the severity of his wife's faults, a husband is within his rights, legally and spiritually, to withhold her dowry, express reprehension for her actions, or admonish her for her actions. He is not, according to Heale, within his rights if he beats his wife. Like Heale, William Whately's A Bridebush or A Wedding Sermon of 1617 confers the power of

¹ Apparently, Mr. D. G[ager?] had asserted in an Act at Oxford that it was lawful for husbands to beat their wives. Heale responds to this assertion upon the request of Lady M.H., to whom he dedicates his book.

commandments and reproofs upon the husband, but "dare not allow him to proceede so farre as to correct by blowes." Nevertheless, it is the wife's responsibility to behave so she will not invite corporal correction: "Indeed what Christian woman will carry her selfe so, that a man of any indifferent good behavior should need to strike?" (22).

Whately commands the husband to use his powers wisely and reproves the woman who does not carry herself in a Christian way. This subtle strategy reinforces the notion that men are inherently capable of independence while women forever guilty a priori of Eve's first and only independent act. A woman must spend her life demonstrating that she will not again show such defiance, while men should ensure that women do not again become the occasions of sin.

Despite church leaders' advice to the contrary, The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights (1632) suggests that husbands could and did beat their wives as a means of correction. Because there were no actions at law for redress for the battered wife, the abusive husband's assaults upon her were "dispunishable." The author, T.E., assures the reader that this lack of redress for women is "no very great disadvantage" for "the actionless woman beaten by her husband hath retaliation left to beat him again, if she dare" (T.E. 46). Given the nature of the wife's position as feme covert, subsumed under the legal auspices of her husband, it would seem that T.E. is indeed recommending risky behavior for the wife. Her defiance could be construed as petty treason, punishable by death.

The clash of patriarchal ideologies in the middle of the seventeenth century meant a radical transformation of other institutions besides the church. The most notable

institutional transformation redefined the government of the English people and the government of the English family, both of which placed further restrictions on women. Following the Interregnum, the argument over the divine right of kings and the secularization of English law centered on the father's place in the home. It seems odd for political philosophers to use the patriarchal family, a bastion of male supremacy, as a model for a more compassionate government. Nevertheless, debates about the divine right of kings used the family analogy quite shamelessly to prove or disprove the belief that the King had the power of life and death over his subjects. In these debates, the King was likened to a husband and father; the King's subjects were the husband/father's wife and children.

Both critics and proponents of a monarchical form of government equated the King's place with the position of Adam. Robert Filmer argued that God granted the first human father, Adam, rights and responsibilities which subsequent fathers should emulate. Filmer's argument for absolute monarchy is based upon patriarchal precedents that allowed fathers the power of life and death over their children and, by analogy, monarchs the power of life and death over their subjects. This power, he reasoned, is acceptable for "it is the duty of a father to provide as well for the common good of his children as the particular" (266-67). Hence, if the common good is best met by the sacrifice of one of the individuals, the ruler (father or monarch) may, with authority and with impunity, kill or sell his subjects. In Filmer's world view, the right of correction extends to the taking of life.

John Locke, in his Two Treatises of Government (1690) written some fifty years after Filmer's death and ten years after the posthumous publication of the latter's *Patriarcha*, used the "law of reason" to prove that fathers do not have the power of life and death over their wives and children and that such absolute rule would create a situation in which one would find "as many monarchs as there are husbands" (38). Acknowledging that some "parental power" is necessary until children can reason for themselves, Locke claims that the father "has no legislative power of life and death over any of them [his family and slaves], and none, too, but what a mistress of a family may have as well as he" (162-63). In effect, Locke's "nursing fathers" (a term he uses to describe the nurturing protector) have responsibility for their children rather than power over them; their duty is "to take care of their offspring during the imperfect state of childhood" (148). In return for providing "nourishment and education," parents have a "perpetual right to respect, reverence, support, and compliance" (153). This reciprocity and mutual support between the generations mirror the premise of Locke's political societies, societies where the social contract joins differing people for the mutual benefit of all.

Although fathers had the same rights of correction over children and servants as husbands had over their wives, Locke contends that abusive parents are rare because "God hath woven into the principles of human nature such a tenderness for their offspring that there is little fear that parents should use their power with too much rigour" (154). Despite his contention, Locke notes that when the father "quits his care of [his children] he loses his power over them which goes along with their nourishment and education to

which it is inseparably annexed; and it belongs as much to the foster-father of an exposed child as to the natural father of another" (152). In 1716, William Fleetwood, echoing Locke, warned that should parents endanger their children, "their barbarous usage cancell'd the bond of Nature, and left [the children] under no other Obligation to their Parents, than to Strangers" (88). Throughout the prevailing discourse before and after the Civil War, the problem of wife and child abuse was acknowledged, but treated as an incidental occurrence, an aberration. Consequently, "the husband's authority over his wife [and a father's over his children] remained legally and morally ambiguous" (Dolan 33).

This ambiguity was evident even after the passage of the Marriage Act of 1753 which attempted to regulate and institutionalize the customs. A curious combination of Filmer's and Locke's inconsistent notions are found codified into English law in 1769 when Sir William Blackstone published his Commentaries on the Laws of England. Moreover, any survey of family law is further complicated by the differing courts operating within England at this time. Indicative of Filmer's absolute monarch, common law granted the husband the only legal existence: "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything" (Blackstone 83). Nevertheless, British law adopts a Lockean "nursing father" stance since it is "for the most part intended for her protection" (86), for her own good. The "nursing father" is allowed some rights of correction without the power of life and death because his legal

existence rested on his responsibility to the common good. Therefore, if the father/husband felt that his child/wife's behavior would disrupt the common good of society or his patriarchal family, then he had a responsibility to correct that behavior. However, by the "politer reign of Charles II," Blackstone adds, "this power of correction began to be doubted" except that "the lower rank of people, who were always fond of the old common law, still claim and exert their ancient privilege" (85-86).

In truth, the husband/father's power of correction was practiced by all castes, classes, and ethnicities among the British and the law failed to protect the battered woman when her husband, himself failing to protect, became the aggressor. Bridget Hill, a twentieth-century historian, indicates that "only in exceptional circumstances . . . wife-beating in the upper classes came to light . . . [for] [a]mong the poor who often lived in very close proximity to neighbours, wife-beating must have been far more difficult to conceal than among the upper classes" (199). Still, this minimalization of the problem of domestic violence in early modern England persisted even though the historical record regularly reveals the severity of the problem. In October of 1700, a blood-covered woman, aptly named Elizabeth Blood, was not allowed to swear a charge of assault against her husband because her husband Holcroft Blood declared to the constable, "I am Justice of the Peace over my own wife." A few days later, a now-bruised Elizabeth Blood went before Justice Thomas Boteler who was unwilling to issue a warrant against her husband until he (Boteler) talked to the husband's brother. Holcroft's brother was able to effectively block Elizabeth's attempts to use the legal system against his battering brother (Stone 43). The Blood brothers show the complicity between the patriarchal lawgiver

and the patriarchal husband, a blood pact stronger than women's words; the legal fiction on which Blackstone and others viewed the system was based upon their shared beliefs that influenced other aspects of eighteenth-century women's lives as well. Throughout the centuries, this paternalistic attitude served to harm women more than help, for it provided the basis on which some of the systematic forces against women were founded. Restrictions about behavior and confinement to safe, limited spheres such as the home over which they supposedly have management have plagued women to the present day: Finally, protecting the weaker means controlling the weaker.

Coverture, under which a woman was literally "covered up" with protection, limited women's economic independence as well as their legal existence and left them vulnerable to the financial situations of the men with whom they were affiliated. At a time when the entire population had very little, women had even less. A very few women had money or property of their own. Those who were fortunate enough to have resources were granted them through special dispensations. Under remnants of the Salic law and the practice of primogeniture, a woman's ability to inherit was severely restricted, more so if she were married. Furthermore, married women who worked for wages were at risk of losing their earnings because "the husband may put an end to his wife's sole trade whenever he pleases, and at the end of it, the profits of it will be his property: his power over her effects, and his property in them, always remain in him though subject to a right of action in her creditors" (Blackstone 172-74). Thus, in the eyes of the court, the feme covert may or may not assert her economic independence based upon the permission of the husband.

Two vestiges of British law which were decidedly not ambiguous about women's status involved petty treason and criminal conversation. Women who killed their husbands and servants who killed their masters were charged with petty treason, a crime against a civil authority. Such a distinction, which was not applied to husbands who killed their wives or their servants, conveys the idea that these murderers are defying the social order and deserve harsher penalties than the common killer who destroys out of passion or greed; likewise, the charge of petty treason indicates that the society and the legal code regarded the relationship of the sexes as a political one. Frances E. Dolan's Dangerous Familiars (1994) probes the public representations of women charged with petty treason in early modern England to argue "that fictions circulating in the courtroom, on the stage, and on the street attempt to restore the order threatened by wife insubordination" (13). By representing these women as "dangerous familiars" (insinuating at least two meanings of the word "familiar") the popular culture reestablished patriarchal authority.

The second unambiguous feature of British law was the concept of criminal conversation (crim. con.). Arising out of coverture, criminal conversation was a legal action under which a husband could sue his wife's alleged lover for damages in civil court. Thus, any husband who sought criminal conversation action against another man was, in effect, claiming that the other man had damaged the husband's property, the wife. The wife became a pawn in such action and was seemingly denied any culpability or responsibility. Furthermore, she was viewed as damaged goods, and often, her

reputation would be ruined. On the contrary, the men--the alleged cuckolded husbands and the defendants in such actions--rarely lost their social standing.

Beyond the spiritual, legal, and economic limitations placed upon women in the eighteenth century, health and social concerns kept them confined as well. Depending upon her marital and class status, a woman found herself enveloped in various other fictions which served to confine her movement and behavior. Married or not, poor or wealthy, if she became pregnant, the society had certain expectations for the mother-to-be; if she wished to walk through the village or the city, limitations were placed on her. If she wished to learn more about herself and the world in which she lived, she usually had few resources outside the family with which she lived. Opportunities for formal education were denied most women in late eighteenth-century England. Despite these barriers, I found that narratives about women's experience as victims and survivors of this "brute force" have seeped into the prevailing culture. If the girl had the good fortune to be taught to read, then it was probable she read a domestic violence narrative, perhaps in the form of a novel or the sensational literature of the day.

Pamphlets and tracts exploited the dramatic nature of domestic violence narratives to entice the increasing literate public. Frances Dolan argues that "in representations of domestic crime, the threat usually lies in the familiar rather than the strange, in the intimate rather than the invader" (4). Quite frankly, family violence is more threatening, more sensational, and more profitable than stranger violence. Dolan supports her argument by reviewing tracts published in the seventeenth century featuring murder (infanticide, wife murder, and petty treason) and witchcraft. Pamphlets such as Two

Horrible and Inhumane Murders Done in Lincolneshire (1607) and Natures Cruell Step-Dames (1637) reported worst-case domestic violence incidents as evidence for the author's ideological and moral beliefs. These beliefs were not sympathetic to the female assailant who was often characterized as a witch or a familiar. The popular press interpreted the battered woman's story of the day as a moral tale from which recalcitrant wives could learn a lesson. It was not until women began to publish their own versions of the domestic violence experiences that we begin to see a more comprehensive view of these incidents.

These narratives recount the methods of abuse aggressors used over their victims; they document the amazing resourcefulness and courage of the survivor. Crossing the genre lines, these narratives may be autobiographical, fictional, political, sociological or any combination of these. Finally, these narratives confirm theories about causes of domestic violence and illuminate the oppression of women. Many domestic violence narratives have been and continue to be told since the battered women's movement coined such phrases as breaking the silence by naming the violence. However, naming the violence is not limited to the latter half of the twentieth century.

Though their theories echo the observations of their predecessors, the current battered women's movement has often failed to use the historical record as evidence. Likewise, historians and cultural critics have failed to consider the findings of the recent disciplines fostered by the battered women's movement as a legitimate ideology about the way oppression works in abusive relationships. For example, Lawrence Stone naively proclaims that the abusive husband in eighteenth-century England has only three weapons

with which to force his wife to surrender her control over her property to him. These weapons--physical abuse, taking the children from her, and incarceration at home or in a madhouse [81]--are not the only weapons at the husband's disposal if one is aware of the nuances and subtleties of domestic violence illuminated by the findings of researchers in the study of victimology. It is with the double vision of present and the past that I wish to explore a theme in women's writing which I call the domestic violence narrative.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN FEMINIST LITERARY TRADITIONS

In 1984, Ruth Nadelhaft published "Domestic Violence in Literature: A Preliminary Study," in which she asks if we can observe

over literary time, any developments or threads of development which indicate that literature treats the subject of domestic violence in changing ways, suggesting not only how it occurs, and what toll [it] takes, but also what women need to learn about themselves in order to put an end to their condition as victims without putting an end to themselves? (244)

With this aim in mind, Nadelhaft deftly surveys short stories and novels that "make the patterns of domestic violence visible but which also suggest, in the end, some ways for women to empower themselves and put an end to the battering cycle" (245). Using late twentieth-century information about domestic violence, she examines women's fiction for examples of the dynamics of battering behavior and the psychology of the battered women.

What Nadelhaft does not consider and what I want to show is that the telling of the domestic violence narrative is as important as the patterns that it exposes. Lately, two anthologies have been published which explore the intersections between women's

lives and art and family violence. These two books, Women in the Trees: U.S. Women's Short Stories About Battering & Resistance (1996), edited by Susan Koppelman, and Nature's Ban: Women's Incest Literature (1996), edited by Karen Jacobsen McLennan, survey the short fiction and poetry of those who have lived with fear and taboo. Besides the literary and feminist value of these books, I found Susan Koppelman's own domestic violence narrative in the introduction characteristic of the way battered women's stories began themselves. Such personal responses and revelations are common in this field. It seems that naming the violence replicates itself; a woman cannot read or tell about other domestic violence narratives without telling her own.

A vital consideration concerning women's domestic violence narratives is the degree to which the writer tells her story for public consumption. Most first personal accounts of abuse remain hidden in diaries, letters, journals, and unpublished manuscripts. Charlotte F. Otten devotes one chapter in her anthology, English Women's Voices 1540-1700 (1992), to women testifying about marital rape, imprisonment, and losses. For example, Lady Margaret Cuninghame's diary, unpublished until 1827, contains an incident in which her husband forced Lady Margaret and her maid out of his house, naked, in the middle of the night in April 1604. In another entry, on April 5, 1631, Mervin Lord Audley was brought to trial for forcing his wife to have sex with male servants. While Otten features the private records of domestic violence in the early modern period, Frances E. Dolan surveys the public record. Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700 (1994) interprets the accounts of domestic crime (court records, legal theory, and popular materials such as tracts,

ballads, and plays) as both evidence and artifacts. She writes: "I value them not as records of particular crimes but as evidence of the processes of cultural formation and transformation in which they participated" (3), from which she concludes that "the fictions circulating in the courtroom, on the stage, and on the street attempt to restore the order threatened by wifely insubordination" (13).

By the eighteenth century, domestic violence became a prevalent theme in published women's writing as several warned others about the dangers of men and marriage in their essays and tracts. In Some Reflections on Marriage (1700), Mary Astell claims that a married woman rather than a married man has "the harder bargain, because she puts herself entirely into her husband's power, and if the matrimonial yoke be grievous, neither law nor custom afford her that redress which a man obtains" (129). Astell's contemporary, Judith Drake, in An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (1696), thinks men fear that women will become their superiors and "therefore began in good time to make use of Force (the Origine of Power) to compell us to a Subjection, Nature never meant." Drake's argument prefigures Mill's work in some respects. She believes that the sexes, nearly equal in ability and intelligence at earlier times, have become less so because "[a]s the World grew more Populous, and Mens Necessities whetted their Inventions, so it increas'd their Jealousy, and sharpen'd their Tyranny over us, till by degrees, it came to that height of Severity, I may say Cruelty." (30).

Warnings against marital dangers were not limited to essays and tracts. Some women enlisted poetry to tell their sisters of possible disasters. Lady Mary Chudleigh's "To The Ladies" (1703) recognizes that "[w]ife and servant are the same, / But only differ

in the name:" (145). At the end of the century, Susanna Blamire's poem "O Jenny Dear" (1794) concludes with the besieged Jenny's observation of married women's plight:

But now they watch their lordie's frowns,
Their sauls they daurna own;
'Tis tyranny that wedlock crowns,
And woman's joys are flown. (294)

Other eighteenth-century women writers chose to fictionalize domestic violence; several novels of the period include brief mention of violence against women. Thady Quirk, Maria Edgeworth's acerbic narrator in Castle Rackrent (1800), shrewdly satirizes aristocratic values by relating Sir Kit Stopgap's imprisonment of his wife; in Eliza Haywood's novel Miss Betsy Thoughtless (1751), Betsy Thoughtless is punished for her thoughtlessness by marriage to an abuser; Mrs. Morgan of Sara Scott's Description of Millenium Hall (1762) is abused by her stepmother and her husband.

While domestic violence is treated only incidentally in these works, Ann Wall (N.D.), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and later, Caroline Norton (1808-1877) were some of the earliest British women authors to emphasize family abuse, using their personal experiences for therapy, art, income, education and activism. In brief, they wrote about domestic violence to save their lives.

Janet Todd calls it the "autobiographical impulse" (Sign of Angellica 164); Adrienne Rich refers to it as "re-naming" or "re-vision" (On Lies, Secrets, and Silence). The fact is that women's writing and the domestic violence narrative, in particular, began with the lived life. Since women's experience was more circumscribed, limited in scope and breadth, their primary source material has been the patriarchal, established

institutions of the home and the church. Each of the authors in this study lived with violence or the threat of violence. The promotional text on the title page of Ann Wall's The Life of Lamenther: A True History (1771) states that the book contains "a just account of the many misfortunes she underwent occasioned by the ill treatment of an unnatural father" (i). Most biographers agree that Mary Wollstonecraft barely fictionalized her personal experiences with domestic violence in The Wrongs of Woman: or Maria. A Fragment (1798), a novel based upon her own adventures and those rescuing her sister Eliza from her abusive husband. Caroline Norton's short story "Leaves of a Life;" or, "The Templar's Tale" (1832), her novel, Stuart of Dunleath (1851), as well as her essay, English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (1854), document the private abuses she suffered from her churlish husband. While the violence in men's lives found expression in the treatment of honor and war, the violence in women's lives found expression in the treatment of domestic battle scenes.

Ironically, these domestic battle scenes not only created raw material to the authors, but they also provided an income. All three women wrote for pecuniary reasons: Ann Wall's book contains a two-page list of subscribers; Mary Wollstonecraft was always one step ahead of her creditors and even published her private letters to her lover and father of her child, Gilbert Imlay, to augment her income; Caroline Norton supported herself and her sons by her literary talents. Of course, none of these authors overtly admitted that her intent was to make a living. All three authors were very aware of their audience and expressed a desire to educate and inform. From direct appeals to the reader to subtle narrative strategies, each emphasized the lessons she wishes the reader to learn.

In general, not only do domestic narratives operate as lessons against the oppressions of patriarchy, but they also provide therapy for the author. By definition, the domestic violence narrative begins in personal experience. It tells the story of living with abuse. Equally important, however, is the way that the author imparts the story after having endured oppression. The narrative provides a way to recapture the power and control survivors lost during their subjugation. Telling the story is a way to contain the abuse in a format that attempts to make "sense" of the "non-sense" of domestic violence. The author configures her narrative in a way that justifies and rationalizes her behavior in the face of the unjust and irrational behaviors of the abuser. She seeks to validate her experience through the process of writing and overseeing it through publication. Consequently, the domestic violence narrative serves the women's literary tradition by making public a portion of the world silenced quite effectively by the most blatant oppressions which can easily still the most ardent victim's voice. A narrative about abusive behavior which arises from the imagination is not the same as the one which emerges from the lived experience.

Often the author tried to explain how and why the violent incidents occurred, as if finding a formula to describe the abuse will give a woman power to avoid the persecutions. Domestic violence narratives may serve as exemplar, a prophylactic warning to unsuspecting women about the horrors of marital terrorism. They may also serve as therapeutic anodyne for the survivor, allowing her to order the narrative in such a way as to analyze the causative elements with the control and shape of the plot. Furthermore, these narratives may serve to consolidate feminist political issues by

conveying the widest range of overt and covert abuses women suffered as feme covert in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England.

Stridently defiant, however, the teller of the domestic violence narrative becomes an icon. Her listeners and readers identify with her plight and many try to emulate her courage by making their own gestures toward liberation from their oppression. Or at least they realize they are not the only ones who exist under the pall of patriarchal oppression. The domestic violence narrative is a source from which an entire discourse community grows to share common values and beliefs with the teller of the tale.

Although they may be giving birth to a genre in some respects, the authors must rely upon the conventions available to them in shaping narrators and narratives. The eighteenth-century's fondness for sentimentalism and Gothicism are two final considerations for my commentary on women's literary tradition. Wall, Wollstonecraft, and Norton found both modes useful in their domestic violence narratives.

Sentimentalism, of course, was used to evoke sympathy for the abuse victim; Gothicism instilled a sense of horror and outrage, but not in the supernatural sense. After Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto (1764) the genre was revised by many women novelists including the premier Gothic novelist, Ann Radcliffe. Where Walpole utilized supernatural aspects into the novel, Radcliffe kept events "well within the realm of possibility" (Spender, Mothers 232) by introducing the horror of domestic violence. We cannot ignore the fact that her villains are fathers or father figures to vulnerable women; Marquis de Montalt (The Romance of the Forest [1791]), Montoni (The Mysteries of Udolpho [1794]), and Schedoni (The Italian [1797]) indicate that the most contemptible

threats of violence are those which may be members of the family. The authors of this study were very aware that tales of family tragedy could be enhanced by the literary conventions of the day.

Choosing the appropriate domestic violence narratives for this sample was not an easy task. Written in every language, in every century, in every way, domestic violence narratives permeate women's literature. I knew I wanted to consider the voices of survivors before the movement of the past thirty years. Ann Wall's child abuse story The Life of Lamenther seemed a fitting way to begin this exploration because her tale is purportedly an autobiography, personal and limited to the experiences of one young woman. She not only recounts her own abuse at the hands of her unnatural father, but she also situates herself as a witness and a teller of her mother's story. In direct contradiction to the patriarchal premise that unnatural fathers are rare, Wall testifies to the violence and passion of a typical Enlightenment gentleman. Yet, her account reads like an exposé of a singular family, not the usual family, for she does not realize the systematic oppression at work in her life. She employs a language, incidents, and a writing persona which are guaranteed to outrage her audience and elicit the eighteenth-century reaction of sentimentality, seemingly to encourage the sympathy of her subscribers. The fact that she published by subscription indicates that she had certain expectations from her patrons. Therefore, her narrative is raw, primitive, a simple story with no pretensions to social commentary or incisive analysis. She represents herself as an innocent victim with no control over her destiny, buffeted by the abuses of a tyrannical

father. Her innocence is reinforced by her youth and her professions of ignorance of worldly matters.

Mary Wollstonecraft approaches the subject matter in a more sophisticated manner. By fictionalizing her domestic violence narrative in the incomplete novel, The Wrongs of Woman, she distances herself from the actual events and, rather than a simple, personal story, weaves multiple narratives to reveal the far-reaching effects of patriarchal oppression. Wollstonecraft also invokes a more analytical, pedagogical reaction from her readers by detailing the emergence of psychology as a model of explanation; her protagonist analyzes and justifies her own life as a lesson for her daughter. This psychological portrait also leaves room for commentary on victims because not all of the battered women in the novel are portrayed as blameless and some appear to have limited control over their lives. Moreover, this novel exemplifies what we call consciousness-raising; some of the characters learn that they are not the only ones victimized and are realizing their autonomy when the fragment ends. Wollstonecraft's treatment of the domestic violence narrative becomes more complex than the highly personal account penned by Wall. As a novel, The Wrongs of Woman was targeted for a wider audience than Wall's subscription autobiography. Since the work is incomplete, Wollstonecraft having died before it was finished, it lacks a clear resolution.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Caroline Norton experimented with the domestic violence narrative. Norton tells the victim's story, the abuser's story, and the survivor's story in works ranging from poetry to fiction to political tracts. Her fictional and nonfictional writings combined features from Wall and Wollstonecraft to construct a

repertoire which eventually activated social change. Norton used the domestic violence narrative to change the laws of England in the mid-nineteenth century.

THE BATTERED WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Although women have named the violence all along, it was not until the late twentieth century that the battered women's movement effectively politicized and positioned domestic violence as a gender issue, a feminist issue, codifying the phenomenon through women's language into social and political discourse. In 1988, Liz Kelly noted that the terms "battered woman" and "sexual harassment" did not exist twenty years ago as evidence that "a major contribution of feminist social action around sexual violence has been to provide and create new words with which to describe and name our experience"(115)². Such terms as "learned helplessness," "battered wife syndrome," and "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" have also entered the movement vocabulary as well. It is this process of naming which connects the historical, the literary, the social science and the feminist discourse communities, for by the late twentieth century, the victims and survivors were renaming and interpreting domestic violence in ways which altered the public's perceptions of the phenomenon. This section surveys the leading trends in domestic violence scholarship for women.

² Kelly herself creates a new term as she denotes "sexual violence . . . to refer to all forms of violence women and girls experience from men and boys" (114, my emphasis). Her term emphasizes the fact that all violence between males and females is gendered.

Contemporary theories about violence against women range from the essentialist to the constructionist, just as various feminisms do. Domestic violence essentialists believe that batterers and their victims are "born that way"; the abuser and/or the abused have innate psychopathological tendencies which cause them to participate in violent episodes. At the other end of the spectrum, the constructionists believe that the abuser and/or the victim are constructed by a society which rewards (or at least tolerates) violent behavior. Obviously, this reductive explanation of theory does not do justice to the complexities and seriousness of the phenomenon. However, I offer these distinctions as a way to begin my overview of the current theories which will feature the feminist/constructionist methods. Until we know more about psychopathology, the essentialist theories lack credibility, although any reasonable person must admit that some combination between the essentialist and the constructionist will ultimately explain the phenomenon of violence against women.

Three books about domestic violence published in Great Britain and in the United States fostered the movement's birth in the mid 1970s. Erin Pizzey's Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear You (1974), Betsy Warrior and Lisa Leghorn's Working on Wife Abuse (1976) and Del Martin's Battered Wives (1976) theorized about domestic violence, power dynamics, and "legitimated the view . . . that violence against women was caused by sexism" (Schechter 79). In feminist circles domestic violence was no longer expressed as individual narratives about individual women's problems. Instead, the explanations of domestic violence became more political and the widespread incidence of domestic violence was recognized as a facet of patriarchal oppression.

Rather than adopt the prevailing accounts of violence, the battered women's movement of the past thirty years sought to reexamine the construction of violence in our society by listening to and theorizing about domestic violence survivors' stories. They have used these stories to suggest ways to heal the victim and reform the current violent climate in our society. Operating out of a feminist "personal is political" ideology, these researchers collected survivors' stories through personal interviews and battered women's support groups. From these narratives, the researchers caught threads of commonality from which they devised the political theories of oppression.

Once the enormity of the domestic violence problem was publicized, local battered women's shelters were founded in many cities and towns across Europe, Britain, and North America. Clearly, domestic violence still affected as many women's lives as it had throughout recorded history. Originally, these shelters offered refuge, counseling, and referrals to victims and their families. Before long, it became evident that treating the victims was not going to eradicate the problem, so legal reform and social change became part of the comprehensive agenda of battered women's shelters. Solving the problem became a matter of explaining what caused it. Consequently, many ideas about domestic violence evolved in the feminist, psychological, legal, and sociological communities.

Besides sheltering, most battered women's refuges offered counseling. Counselors practiced a form of feminist therapy adapted to the domestic violence situation, often based upon Lenore Walker's research with battered wives. In The Battered Woman (1979), Walker posits a cycle of violence to inform her theories about

power imbalances between heterosexual couples. Composed of three stages, the cycle theory of violence suggests that these couples spin in a never-ending, violent dance characterized by the tension-building phase which culminates in the acute battering incident followed by the honeymoon phase. Walker claimed that a woman's continued involvement in such a relationship will result in learned helplessness, a psychologically paralyzing state in which she feels she has no control over her situation. In 1984, Walker included the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, characterized by the victim's inability to return to her/his normal life after experiencing a traumatic incident, to describe the battered woman syndrome (The Battered Woman Syndrome 124-25).

Walker's cycle of violence evolved into a generational or intergenerational cycle of violence, also called social learning theory. True constructionists, these domestic violence theorists claim that people learn about gender terrorism from their family of origin and are doomed to repeat these patterns. Thus, if a woman sees her father beat her mother, or women in general, she will learn that she, too, must submit to male domination or be beaten. Consequently, to eradicate violence, one must unlearn violent methods and relearn nonviolent conflict resolution methods.

The battered women's movement quickly adopted these notions and began to teach the patterns of domestic violence outlined by Walker. Still, Walker's theory did little to explain the other nonphysical forms of abuse which many battered women described as more crippling than the physical abuse. Walker's theories led to interpretations which featured classic cases, emphasizing the physical and psychological aspects of domestic violence. Yet the classic cycle of violence does not account for the

experience of the abused woman who had never been hit by her partner. Nor did it entirely explain other forms of domestic violence such as incest, child abuse, and sexual oppression. Furthermore, it did little to identify the other forces which contribute to patriarchal oppression of women. Nevertheless, Walker's paradigm ushered in a new understanding of domestic violence by contributing a social science language, a vocabulary, from which her followers were able to analyze battered women's lives. Her work generalized the diverse experiences of hundreds of women into neat formulas, punctuated by case histories which support her claims. Domestic violence researchers use these stories to inform their theories. Case histories are compiled, interviews are conducted, and generalizations are made. The flaw of this social science approach based upon inductive reasoning is that it does not accommodate the art and the passion of the battered women's stories, nor recognize the particular experience and expression of individual battered women.

Other researchers of the 1970s attributed the problem of domestic violence to the patriarchy. The preface to R. Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash's Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy (1979) concedes that "physical violence against women in their position as wives is not the only means by which they are controlled and oppressed but is one of the most brutal and explicit expressions of patriarchal domination" (ix). Again, the researchers focus on actual battering, although they do acknowledge that women are controlled in ways other than physical violence. The Dobashes, like Walker, based their conclusions upon interviews with thousands of individual women, but they believed, as I do, that "in order to understand and explain

violence between husbands and wives we must go beyond the interacting couple, the isolated and abstracted social relationship, and place the violent behavior in its proper historical and contemporary setting” (27). Consequently, their analysis includes a historical survey which recognizes the subordination of women in other spheres besides the family. Even though their analysis expanded the understanding of domestic violence to include information which Walker does not consider, the relationship between nonphysical and physical forms of oppression is not clear. Finally, the Dobashes failed to articulate a clear and comprehensive treatment program to help battered women rid themselves of the effects of living with an abuser.

Out of discomfort with these limitations, Ellen Pence and the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota, articulated new visions about domestic violence in the mid-1980s. This particularly effective battered women's program has transformed contemporary survivor stories into a theory about power and control in our society. They employed Paulo Friere's Method for Education and Action to devise the Power and Control Wheel which emphasizes nonphysical forms of abuse and indicates that domestic violence is positioned on at least two levels, physical and nonphysical. The threat of physical violence reinforces the nonphysical methods of controlling another's behavior with mental, psychological, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse. The dominant patriarchal culture condones both forms of abuse. The Wheel shows how the threat of physical or sexual abuse (reinforced periodically, but not predictably, with actual physical or sexual abuse) holds the less overt forms of oppression (mental, emotional, and economic abuse) in force. Characterized by eight spokes of oppressive forces like the

bars in a cage, the Power and Control Wheel systematically outlines the confluence of mental, emotional, and psychological abuse upon a victim. By exercising any one or a combination of forces--intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, exploitation of children, male privilege, economic abuse, coercion, and threats, as well as controlling the interpretation of the violence--an abuser is literally able to paralyze any person who is regularly subjected to these forms of abuse. Since one of the Project's goals is to turn theory into praxis, it utilizes this successful model to empower survivors in support groups and educate batterers in treatment programs.

While the Minnesota Domestic Abuse Intervention Project model illustrates the abuser's arsenal in order to empower survivors after the fact, their theories do not consider the survival tactics and limited power of the woman still living in an abusive environment. The Project portrays battered women trapped in the Wheel as quite helpless and hopeless, passive rather than active. Yet, from the earliest of the early modern writing about domestic violence until today, there has been a tendency to ascribe agency to the battered woman, to make her at least partially responsible for the battering behavior. These two representations of the battered woman have proved to be a conundrum for feminists because we want to acknowledge that women have limited power in this culture, and, on the contrary, we want to empower women in this culture. It is through this process of naming the violence that gives women power. The controversy usually revolves around a woman's way to power, whether she achieves it through direct or indirect means and how she uses it once attained.

One controversy surrounding the power of a battered woman concerns her role as a provocateur who intentionally or unintentionally incites her abuser to violence. Often, the abuser perceives the victim's verbal responses as "fighting words." A commonly held belief that seems to be confirmed by communications theory is that males and females differ in their perceptions of verbal aggression. Teresa Chandler Sabourin reports "many examples in which the wife's verbal aggression was punctuated by the husband as a cause of his physical aggression . . . [and that] males perceive their spouses as instigating them to physical violence with their verbal behavior" (212). Paramount among the verbal abuse studies, however, is the belief that both men and women participate in the behavior equally, whereas physical, sexual, economic abuses are often practiced more unilaterally.

Another form of battered women's develops from the battered woman's identification with the abuser. Feminist researchers have co-opted theories from the study of terrorism and victimology to explain a woman's identification with her abuser. For example a phenomenon, known as the Stockholm Syndrome, was developed

to account for the paradoxical psychological responses of hostages to their captors. In particular, when threatened with death by a captor who is also kind in some ways, hostages develop a fondness for the captor and an antipathy toward authorities working for their release. The captor may also develop a fondness for the hostages. (Graham, Rawlings, and Rimini 218)

Domestic violence researchers recognized that this identification with the aggressor is certainly more easily understood in the case of battered women than hostages who are strangers to their captors. The affection between the captor and the hostage is assumed for a domestic couple. Consequently, battered women are more apt to identify with their

abusers than the "authorities" (family members or law enforcement officials, for example) and subvert the legal system which purports to protect them from the abusive behavior. In "Survivors of Terror: Battered Women, Hostages and the Stockholm Syndrome," Graham, Rawlings and Rimini identified six ways in which the Stockholm Syndrome may be applied to battered women. First, the victimizer of both scenarios is usually male; second, victimizers and domestic abusers employ the same domination strategies such as isolation, threats of violence including death, and sexual abuse; third, terrorists/hostage-takers and batterers use their victims as symbolic targets and hope to send a message to "all members of a group that no one in the group is safe, that any member of the group could become such a target at any time"; fourth, hostages' and battered women's concentration on survival denies them an opportunity to have an honest reaction to the situation and they must adjust their reasoning to please the victimizer at whatever cost; fifth, often, the victims' coping strategies include such counterproductive measures as denial, high anxiety functions, and psychophysical stress; and sixth, the measure of success for both hostages and battered women is survival (222-26).

As Graham and her colleagues note, Jean Baker Miller's ideas (Toward a New Psychology of Women [1976]) about permanent inequality between dominants and subordinates in society undergird their argument and seems to offer the most comprehensive understanding of gender and power survival strategies. While Baker's observations apply to many ascriptive human relationships, she uses sex differences where the dominants are usually men and the subordinates are typically women as the basis for her commentary. In effect, Miller's argument is that the "subordinates are

described in terms of, and encouraged to develop, personal psychological characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant group" (7). The dominants ascribe roles that they do not wish to perform to the subordinate group and then perpetuate the myth that the subordinates are incapable of executing any but those roles. To maintain these beliefs, subordinates are discouraged from achieving freedom and autonomy for they are at the mercy of the dominants. Since the attributes of the dominant group are considered normal and good, any attempts by the subordinates to mimic dominant attributes are considered abnormal and dangerous. "It is perhaps unnecessary to add," Miller reasons, "that the dominant group usually holds all of the open power and authority and determines the ways in which power may be acceptably used" (9). Consequently, the dominants do not like to be reminded of the inequality in their existence and their hegemony over the cultural world view for it reminds them of the limits of their human experience.

According to Miller, the subordinates' basic function is survival, one facet of which requires that they practice "disguised and indirect ways of acting and reacting" (10) to the dominants. In practice, this means that subordinates learn more about the dominants than the dominants know about themselves. Often, Miller notes, "tragic confusion arises because subordinates absorb a large part of the untruths created by the dominants" (11), a condition we now call internalization.

Throughout my discussions of the individual authors and their works, I will entertain the other feminist theories of domestic violence when they seem appropriate. The key to my vision is that Miller, as well as most of the other social scientists

mentioned here, relied on case studies, the personal experience of survivors naming the violence to guide their interpretations. Likewise, I think Wall, Wollstonecraft, and Norton's lives serve as historical case studies which document the battered woman's experience in early modern England; their writing serves as examples of how women shape that experience into art, pedagogy, and politics. These author's lives and works approximate the process of empowerment by demonstrating how naming the violence can lead one to find a community of survivors who use their collective experiences to construct theories and arguments to activate social change. As each author moves toward social change her voice becomes more confident and she becomes more visible in the public landscape of her time. Furthermore, the process of writing a domestic violence narrative for publication--the therapeutic mental health and financial effects of such an endeavor--contributes to the empowerment of the survivor.

The first step in empowerment, naming the violence and exposing the secrets behind closed doors begins with The Life of Lamenther (1771). The author A. W. (believed to be Ann Wall) writes under a pseudonym for fear of retaliation from her father and the public for exposing him. In early or raw narratives of this type, the revelation of personal information is, in and of itself, a remarkable step. Wall announces her intentions to faithfully record the circumstances of her victimization so she selects her material and presents it in such a manner that it reads as a litany of abusive behavior. The nature and extent of the beatings and treatment she endured, her survival methods, and her reactions to the abuse all bear a striking resemblance to other battered women's accounts. Yet, Wall refuses to notice any similarities. As a consequence, her narrative

treats her experience as the exception rather than the rule and implies that domestic violence is an aberration rather than typical. Since her individual story lacks any consciousness of others, her vision of domestic violence and how it functions is limited by her own interpretation. In this respect, her interpretation of domestic violence appeals to patriarchy and does not endanger its ideology for she seems to be an isolated, helpless victim. Yet, she is creating one of the first works of a genre that will have a subversive effect on male-dominated institutions and taking one of the first steps towards empowerment.

Mary Wollstonecraft's Maria or The Wrongs of Woman (1798) extends the possibilities for the domestic violence narrative by looking beyond the boundaries of her own life and targeting a wider female audience. Like Wall, Mary Wollstonecraft survived a violent home and later used those experiences as the basis for her writings. On an intellectual level, the abuse she endured triggered her feminism. William Godwin claimed that Wollstonecraft learned to hate injustice from witnessing her father's treatment of her mother. On a utilitarian level, domestic violence became the most dramatic vehicle to illustrate the wrongs of women. She refined the raw narrative with grander literary adornments designed to appeal to her novel-reading audience. Moreover, the novel pushes an empowerment agenda for the abuse survivor based on an analysis of personal and collective experiences and bonding with other battered women which approximates what we call consciousness-raising. Wollstonecraft's work exemplifies the patterns from collective stories of which the analytical mind may conceive theories to

explain the phenomenon. However, her unfinished work leaves many issues unanswered and the effect her novel had on the readers and society was negligible.

Caroline Norton's life and work exemplify the domestic violence survivor turned activist. Besides employing her experiences as a battered woman in her fiction and poetry, Norton eventually used the facts of her life to change the laws of England. In her short story, "The Templar's Tale" (1832) and her novel, Stuart of Dunleath (1851), she exploited the dramatic possibilities of the domestic violence story to explore the psychology of the batterer and the battered woman. Like Wollstonecraft, she uses her fiction to reach a wider female audience, but does not use the genre to suggest a model for resistance. The ambiguities in her fictional accounts of family violence leave the reader wondering if women are to resist or to submit to the vagaries of the abuser. Her most effective activism, however, resulted from her lobbying government leaders and the publication of her tracts in which she exposed her life, under her own name, to the eyes of the English public. English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (1854) and A Letter to the Queen on Lord Cransworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill (1855) did not earn any public adulation for these brave revelations. Instead, she was castigated, by feminists and patriarchs alike, for appearing too self-serving and ruthless. Nevertheless, these testimonials, argued in a language appropriate to a parliamentary hearing, bear witness to the plight of the battered woman in nineteenth-century England.

I believe that the proper environment for reading these women's lives and works requires the multiple disciplines of politics, history, literature, and sociology to perceive ways Wall, Wollstonecraft, and Norton constructed their visions of domestic violence.

These constructions indicate that long before our time, women recognized the oppression of the patriarchy is most virulent in the home and they named it. They also show that surviving the violence demands empowerment techniques and they advocated those techniques. Finally, the three prove that social reform evolves from transforming the personal into the political.

CHAPTER TWO ANN WALL THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE

While the seventeenth and eighteenth-century patriarchs based their evolving government on the Lockean construction of the ideal family, headed by a "nursing father," a family whose reciprocity and mutual support between the generations encourage "respect, reverence, support and compliance" (Locke 153), the writings of their female counterparts frequently depict a family like that of the late twentieth century, a family marked by conflict and violence, struggling within the mandates of a sexist culture to provide a "nursery" for its progeny; we have only to look at the lives and works of Eliza Haywood (1693-1756), Sarah Scott (1723-95), Fanny Burney (1752-1840), or Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) to know that women's views of the reality of the family were not indicative of Locke's theories. In short, all families did not practice Locke's prescriptions for the model.

One published account of family life, Ann Wall's The Life of Lamenther: A True History Written by Herself (1771) shows that some fathers did not relinquish their power of life and death over their children, nor were they naturally disposed to nourish and educate as Locke would have them. Anonymously published by subscription, registered at Stationer's Hall as the property of Ann Wall, this autobiography recounts a father's abusive treatment of his wife and children from the child's point of view and reveals, I argue, some considerations for the origination of domestic violence narratives and subsequently the domestic violence discourse community.

For my purposes, The Life of Lamenther symbolizes the beginning of the awareness of women's domestic oppression because it describes the overwhelming effects of family violence on girls when they are the most vulnerable, physically and emotionally. Like all children, Wall is a tabula rasa on whom her father writes her legacy. If she had been like most youngsters in her position, she would have learned that violence is normal. Yet, Wall was not like most child abuse victims; she knew something was wrong with her family. Therefore, in addition to representing the first awareness of oppression, Wall's autobiography represents the first step away from the oppression--the realization that one has been treated unjustly and the renaming of that experience to an outside world. She patterns her narrative on the religious confessionals, a genre which also entails a realization and a renaming. However, Wall's narrative is not confined to the conventions of the confessional for she does not recount her sins; instead, she enumerates the sins of her father. So, even though Wall's narrative is simple and elementary, it contains some of the complexities of later domestic violence narratives.

Of Ann Wall, I know nothing but what the text and its subtext reveal. An older Ann Wall, who purports to tell her life story, writes under the pseudonym Lamenther. In all probability, this autobiography was her first, and, perhaps, her only published work, although she alludes to a sequel and the last page of the book advertises a forthcoming collection of miscellaneous poems for the benefit of the author. One hundred forty-six persons are listed as subscribers to The Life of Lamenther, two of whom are Duchesses (Queensberry and Marlborough). An advertisement page registers Ann Wall's ownership of the work on the thirteenth of November 1771 at Stationer's Hall, folio 356. Plotted

along the lines of Lamenther's life, the violent beatings, neglect, and threat of death suggest a classic domestic violence case history; the elaborate prose, exaggerated sentimentality, and exotic, Gothic qualities suggest an moralistic eighteenth-century novel; the work reads like a twentieth-century social science case history penned by a late eighteenth-century novelist.

Within the first twenty pages of The Life of Lamenther, the narrator outlines a classic wife abuse story. Episode by episode, incident by incident, Lamenther recounts a domestic violence case history, a narrative uncannily similar to the patterns of abuse which we find in the current sociological literature, yet cast in an eighteenth-century setting. While no single sociological or psychological theory informs the entire narrative, Lamenther's story illustrates many prominent features of battering behavior.

Lamenther's mother (the fatherless, middle-class, innocent, impetuous Miss G--) married the worldly cad, Mr. W— (presumed to be Mr. Wall), after the failure of a previous engagement. Although warned that Mr. Wall is a rogue, the headstrong Miss G— has vowed to "marry the first Man that offered himself, should his Occupation descend as low as a Chimney-Sweeper" (5) after the unexplained rupture of her engagement to a childhood sweetheart. In the wake of her mother's death, deprived of her lifelong dreams, Miss G— defiantly marries the obviously corrupt Mr. Wall.

The abuses begin immediately. "[S]carce three Months were elapsed when [Mrs. Wall, nee Miss G—] was obliged to make Application to her Sister for Cloaths to screen her from the Cold" (9) and "within six Months after Marriage he [Mr. Wall] not only stripped her of every Necessary of Wearing-Apparel, but also of every Conveniency of

Life, excepting a House, which afforded very little besides a Protection from the Weather” (9-10). To add insult to injury, Lamenther claims that her father kept a mistress, a “Roxana,” and furnished “his Dulcinea's” apartments with the loot from Mrs. Wall's father's adventures. This exploitation of Mrs. Wall's resources leaves her without any means to survive, let alone make an escape. She is economically deprived, a situation that is sanctioned by English law and exacerbated by the double standard; Mrs. Wall's possessions become Mr. Wall's goods with which he can furnish his paramour's dwelling without fear of retribution from the powerless feme covert, Mrs. Wall.

Even more distressing and insidious psychological abuse follows. Mrs. Wall's things which Mr. Wall “did not take [to his Roxana's] he would dash to Pieces before his Wife's Face, meerly because he knew she valued them for her Father's sake” (10). Mr. Wall extends his rights to his wife's possessions with a malicious flourish when he destroys these sentimental attachments to her dead father. By destroying his wife's inheritance from her father, Mr. Wall is essentially destroying her ties to her family and her past and insinuating that Mrs. Wall's identity and heritage must be subsumed into his life.

Mr. Wall's physical brutality, at first limited to his wife, further incapacitates Mrs. Wall and reinforces the nonphysical abuses he practices. One of Lamenther's most compelling episodes describes events when she was two. Lamenther's father “went to strike [her] Mother when she had [Lamenther] in her Arms, with some Part of a Bedstead.” Missing Mrs. Wall, Mr. Wall's bedpost hit the two-year-old who “received a Hurt that can never end but with [her] Life” (12). Mr. Wall's inadvertently striking

Lamenther when she is in her mother's arms is not an uncommon feature of child abuse. In their uncontrolled rage, abusers often blindly strike their target with very little concern for accuracy or danger to others.

As if the blow were not bad enough, Mr. Wall denies medical treatment for his daughter although she "languish[ed] in extreme Misery many Months" (12). Anticipating readers' denunciation of her mother for not insisting on medical attention, Lamenther adds, "Let no Person here condemn my Mother for not seeking advice, as I will take upon me to say she was not here culpable, it being entirely out of her Power to get out without his Knowledge, and what is more, her Life was in danger if she attempted it" (12). Mr. Wall's physical abuse keeps his wife in such a state of fear that she was unable to care for her daughter, a situation modern law would describe as failure to protect.

Scarred, literally and psychologically, Lamenther recounts periodic beatings which reinforce the ongoing psychological abuse, faithfully recording the manner in which her father systematically eroded her mother's fortune, self-esteem, and resources. Thus, in a few paragraphs encompassing a period of only three or four years, Lamenther has transformed the once willful, self-centered Miss G— into the poverty-stricken, dependent, mother of three daughters. Despite her life of misery and sorrow, Mrs. Wall does not complain nor seek assistance from any but her sisters for her "great Spirit would never let her make her Distress known, to those Friends whose Counsel she had formerly rejected, and she used every Art to screen herself from their Upbraidings" (11).

Characteristic of many battered women's stories, she hides her true situation from those

who may be able to help. Even though her pride isolates her from most family and friends, this “great spirit” eventually saves her and her daughters.

Mrs. Wall escapes Mr. Wall's brutality after he promises “to be her Butcher,” an incident reported to Lamenther, she informs us, by an uncle years later. Mr. Wall's method is particularly intimidating and threatening, graphically illustrative of the power he thinks he wields. Only a few months after he permanently injured Lamenther, he

came Home one Night at near Eleven o'Clock, much out of Humour as was usual, he immediately whetted a Knife, and Laid it on a table before his Wife, with a strict Charge not to move it before his Return, which was to be at an Hour he then mentioned, and said he then purposed to be her Butcher; that was the very word, and I have since too often heard him use it. (13)

Many details in this incident reflect patterns which have been identified in twentieth-century domestic violence literature. For one thing, Mr. Wall returns home and initiates these unprovoked, unexpected, and unpredictable threats of violence (Walker 73).

Secondly, Mr. Wall's display of his weapon and threatening manner are compelling. More perplexing than the obvious phallic symbolism is the manner in which Mr. Wall assumes that his wife will await her torture. For him to expect his wife grimly to go about her duties in the household guarded by a knife and a threat suggests that he thinks his power indisputable. Yet this seemingly senseless behavior is not at all rare in the domestic violence literature. Like the hostage-taker, Mr. Wall counts on his wife not being able to respond reasonably to his threat. He believes that she will not challenge his authority and that she will follow his instructions to please him at whatever cost; he assumes that she is unable to resist, has learned to be helpless, and will remain at home to

submit to his wishes (Graham et. al. 224). Jean Baker Miller might argue that Mr. Wall knows less about his wife than she knows about him because Lamenther's mother chooses "rather to forfeit her Charge than her Life" (13) and takes her three children to live with a sister.

Lamenther's release from the tyranny of her father is temporary. Within eighteen months, Lamenther's younger sister, aunt, and mother die, leaving four-year-old Lamenther and her older sister, Charlotte, in the custody of the "Monster" as she sometimes calls him. In the dead of the night, Mr. Wall secretly moves the girls into his second home which consists of the mistress and his two sons from a previous alliance.

Ensnared in this household as an errand-girl, Charlotte is instructed by her father: "That if ever she heard any Person assert her to be his Child, she was to deny the same, and contradict the assertion, be the Asserter who it might" (31). In this situation and in several others throughout the narrative, Lamenther exhibits a perspicuous understanding of the legal situation. As the girls' legal and biological father, he is responsible for them. Yet, Mr. Wall adamantly demands that Charlotte renounce his paternity, perhaps, in an effort to relinquish the responsibility of fatherhood. Lamenther implies that if Mr. Wall can obliterate any signs of his fathering the girls, he can erase their existence and his obligations to them. It appears that Mr. Wall, too, thinks his violent behavior has "cancell'd the bonds of Nature" (Fleetwood 88) and absolved him of the custody of Lamenther and Charlotte.

While Charlotte is running errands for the family, Lamenther herself is confined to a dark closet. She writes:

My Sister, as before observed, was raised to the Dignity of an Errand-Girl to the Family, and I debased many Degrees lower than his [Mr. Wall's] Dogs, for they were permitted to feed from his Hands, while I was--must I reveal it to the World?--Yes--I was starved! but not to Death. No, Providence preserved me to testify against him and to disclose his secret Villainies to the World. (33)

Mr. Wall's boundless dominion over his daughters shows that he thinks the law of the father permits him the power of life and death over his children. Clearly, he believes he has the right to deny his daughters their names and their lives. In Mr. Wall's household dogs and illegitimate sons are treated with more respect than little girls, for the dogs are called "Cloe, or Dutchess, or Phillis, or any other pleasing Name, but the coarse Appellation of 'Here, you Bitch'" are reserved for Lamenther (38). These comparisons are Lamenther's obvious commentary on the life of a gentleman, the life of dissipation, in which sons and dogs are more worthy than daughters.

Male privilege, rather than mere survival, extends to first born sons and Lamenther paints a clear picture of the preference of boys over girls by comparing the relationship between Mr. Wall and his sons to that of Mr. Wall and his daughters. Although illegitimate, the boys are publicly acknowledged while the girls are treated as servants, concealed under the stairs, or beaten unmercifully. A vivid example of the privileges of the boys occurs when Lamenther steals into their room seeking comfort from the nightmares of her mother's death.

By Degrees I crawled out of my Den into the Boys' Room; I sat myself down on the Floor, and leaned my wearied Head on the Side of the Bed, until Sleep, that Lethe of Care, obliterated my Woe for a Season. I believe I had slept some Time, when Mr. W----[Wall] returned Home and awaked me; In a very great Fright I hurried away towards my Dungeon, thinking to escape his Fury; but, unfortunately for me, I met him coming into the

Room as I was going out of it; He swore that I had been lying on the Boys bed; I answered, "Indeed, Sir, I have not," and was about to ask Forgiveness for going into the room, when he prevented me by a blow, which laid me along. His remorseless Soul was not satisfied for so doing, but he kicked me before him through every room, until he came to the passage, and from thence he kicked me down one Pair of Stairs. (63)

Despite the countless beatings, Lamenther retains a sense of injustice and rebels against her favored half brothers. Outraged, she reports Mr. Wall's illegitimate sons are treated like legitimate sons while his legitimate daughters are made to feel illegitimate. In one particular incident, Lamenther overhears the older son recite his Greek, observing "though it appeared Greek indeed to my Understanding; however, I was all Attention and secretly deploring the vast Disproportion between myself and him, and own I thought it rather hard that so liberal a Share of Learning should be bestowed on him, who was illegitimate, while a lawful Heir should be deprived of the Benefit of a common Education" (129-130). Mortified, Lamenther fights back, calling him a "base-born Brat . . . a filthy Locust, poisoning and devouring those precious Fruits which a kind Providence had liberally bestowed to be the Support of injured Innocence" (130). Advocating a sense of justice that privileges legitimacy over illegitimacy no matter what the sex, Lamenther further exposes the injustices inherent in the patriarchal system. She seeks to legitimate her claims to existence, to validation, and to honor by emphasizing the patriarchal claim of legitimacy. However, the overt sexism of primogeniture disallows this claim.

Lamenther's neglect and her isolation in the closet are compounded by the abuses Mr. Wall inflicts on his three youngest in a remote manor house. After a maternal aunt's

aborted attempt to rescue Lamenther and Charlotte from their father (he convinces the porter that the aunt is insane), Mr. Wall removes the two girls and the younger son under the cover of darkness. Without food, water, clothing, or adult supervision, the children are left alone at the vacant manor to survive on tree leaves. Periodically, every three weeks or so, Lamenther's father and his mistress unexpectedly call on the children "according to Custom, in the Dead of the Night," to find them "almost perishing, and every visit was productive of some new-invented Piece of Torment, and poor Lament-Her generally proved the unfortunate Victim of their Malice" (56). Fortunately, Charlotte discovers she can wriggle through the bars on a window to beg food and water from kindly neighbors for her sister and half-brother. If not for Charlotte's connection with the outside world, Lamenther is convinced her father would have starved them to death: "then in case we should be found and examined, there would be no Marks of Violence seen on our Bodies" (48). Obviously, Lamenther believes that Mr. Wall could exercise the patriarchal father's power of life and death over his children.

Fortunately, the kindly neighbors intervene, confronting Mr. Wall and forcing him to move the children. Back in London, after more beatings and more neighborly intervention, Charlotte manages to make contact with the maternal aunt and her husband who carefully orchestrate the removal of the girls from their father's house. One of their fears is that Mr. Wall will not allow Lamenther to be removed, a valid consideration because he could retaliate and make Lamenther's life more miserable than it already is.

Given the conditions under which she lives, Lamenther begins to exhibit abnormal mental health. Modern studies have shown that living in abusive situations will

alter the victim's consciousness, coping mechanisms, and understanding of reality. When Lamenther is allowed to go live with her maternal aunt, her natural coping mechanisms, derived from living in her unnatural situation, conflict with the values of the aunt's household. Initially, she is frightened of her uncle: "I had imbibed a Notion that the Form of every Gentleman must certainly inherit the same cruel Principles as those I had been so long used to" (83-84). Her phobia of men makes perfect sense to anyone who knows her history, but to those unaware of her past, the fear seems ludicrous. As her anxieties about her new situation mount, she begins to cry and plead with her relatives to send her back to her father, "for [she] ignorantly feared [she] was only left there to suffer afresh, and brought from one Sorrow only to know others unknown before" (84).

Lamenther, steeped in a hostage mentality, prefers the danger of the life she knows to the unknown dangers before her. When informed that she is to go live with an aunt in the country, the "Sound [of the country home] bearing great Affinity with that terrible Place of [her] late Punishments, [she] ignorantly understood it was there [she] was to go, where [she] must be again doomed to Sorrow" (86). Instead of being returned to what she understands to be the manor house where she was imprisoned by her father, Lamenther begs her cousin to let her stay in London, content to live on bread and water rather than reside in that "Place of Horror" (86). All reactions to her situation are plausible responses to the life she has lived. To Lamenther and her relatives' credit, she enjoys six years with Aunt and Uncle S— in the country, a respite from her father's which ends with the deaths of these relations. At the time, she is approximately twelve .

Besides abnormal responses to their environment, depression frequently affects those living in an abusive environment and Lamenther is no exception. Often, life seems hopeless and unjust to her. During one of her periods of anxiety and worry, she writes, "I fancied I saw myself plunging again into an Abyss of Misery from whence nothing could save me; I in vain deplored my wretched Situation, and was ready to call on the Rocks to screen my mournful Head" (112). It appears she constantly battles suicidal tendencies. Another reference to suicide occurs near the end of her narrative around the time she is fifteen. Taking refuge at one kind stranger's house after another, always on the brink of death from starvation, neglect or violence, she eventually ends up in a workhouse where Mr. Wall sends his emissary to fetch her to save himself the ignominy of having a daughter in such a place. Anticipating a return to his volatile home, Lamenther "fl[ies] to a Window, and throw[s] it open, . . . determined to put a total Period to all [her] Sorrow, and destroy a Life which had long been a Burthen to [her]" (194). These confessions are akin to many emotions felt by children and women witnessing and experiencing abuse, a condition documented by Jeffrey Edelson's 1997 survey of more than eighty research papers which reveals that girls who live with battering show "evidence of more internalized problems such as depression and somatic complaints" (9).

After Lamenther is released from the workhouse to the custody of her father's emissary, she is sent to a flophouse or as Lamenther states, "I was come to board with their Betty" (198). She spends a sleepless night and escapes the next day. From her comments, Mr. Wall obviously arranges for Lamenther to live in this den of iniquity rather than trouble him with her existence. Mr. Wall prefers that Lamenther live among

thieves and prostitutes, unknown and undetected. Lamenther reasons that she must have been fifteen at this time. Soon after, she is befriended by an older cousin under whose care she ends her narrative.

Without the paradigms established by the domestic violence movement of the past thirty years, we might read The Life of Lamenther as Wall, the author, instructs in her apologia, "a Series of unparalleled Misfortunes." However, to those who are familiar with the revelations named by the domestic violence movement, these misfortunes take on a decided pattern, anticipating or replicating the behaviors described in domestic violence research. This anticipation or replication of what we know to be established patterns in abusive behavior echoes the case histories which are often found in the sociological literature. But, the elements of a case history are only one necessary ingredient for what I consider domestic violence narrative. Women who participate in this activity of recounting their lives with abusers seem to do so with such creativity that I must assume that they relive those moments as a way of purging themselves of the memories and validating their perceptions of the experience. It is this creativity, both therapeutic and literary, which I now wish to examine in Ann Wall's work.

Wall introduces her work with a brief apologia and the verse, "A Short Epistle to the Curious," which teases the reader with the author's disguise. In the epistle, Wall justifies her anonymity by comparing her meager work with those writers of greater fame who also write under the veil of anonymity. Besides, she reasons, her revelations are so "daring" that "Critics might sneer, and Friends might blame" (vi). Finally, the reader is cautioned that "My Name, unknown, you may Lament," alluding, of course, to her nom

de plume. This careful cover-up of her identity reinforces the notion that domestic violence is a secret subject. Furthermore, her desire for anonymity illustrates the survivor's fear for her safety years after the abuse has ended. The young Ann Wall had been ingrained with a long-lasting fear of exposing her father's behavior and the consequences of such an action.

The obligatory apologia "To the Reader" illustrates the complexity of Wall's narrative stance:

As the Occasion of this short Work is read, and that the Sequel will evidence, I need not therefore adorn it with the Flowers of Rhetoric, which serve to illustrate fabulous Histories. I only mean to shew to the World a Series of unparallelled Misfortunes, adorned only with the naked Beauty of Truth in as clear a Light as my weak Capacity will permit.--Know then--The cruel Author of all my Distress in Life--O hard to say!--was my Father--and, therefore, Ah Lament Her-- (v)

This witty, melodramatic introduction serves her and confuses her readers in several ways. Immediately, she advises us to view her work as an unadorned account, a case study in modern jargon, objective, unembellished by the "Flowers of Rhetoric" which "illustrate fabulous Histories." As she pleads for the reader's indulgences and acceptance of the truth on one hand, she subverts her position as an accurate reporter by refusing to name herself and renaming herself with a pun on the words "lament" and "her," hence the pseudonym, "Lamenther." Equally important, she denies her agency in the autobiography by claiming that her father--"the cruel Author of all my Distress in Life"--wrote her story. These curious twists in Wall's reasoning soon have the reader effectively positioned as an uncritical observer of the poor woman's story.

Obviously, Wall's use of the apologia, her "ritual claim[s] to authenticity," as Janet Todd (51) referred to these introductions, does more than conform to convention. Women authors' insistence on verisimilitude underscored "the need for understanding the female predicament" (Todd 51). If ever there was a woman in a predicament, Lamenther is. By revealing the abusive treatment practiced by her gentleman father, she is swimming against the current of patriarchal thought. Or as a critic of women's autobiography, Sidonie Smith, reasons, the female autobiographer's "very assumption of the power of public self-promotion challenges the ideals and norms of the phallic order and represents a form of disorder, a kind of heresy exposing a transgressive female desire" (42-43). In order to counteract the reaction to her transgressions, Lamenther positions herself as a reporter rather than a storyteller and promises a faithful account of her life, unembellished and clear. Since she is not telling a "fabulous History," she insinuates that she chooses the material for the narrative based on reality, not the shock or entertainment value, insisting the narrative is a "Series of unparalleled Misfortunes, adorned only with the naked Beauty of Truth." This insistence on the veracity of her material suggests that she fears the reader will find her work less than honest.

Her fears were founded, for one of her contemporary critics wrote:

Poor Lamenther tells us, indeed, such a tale as in some of its circumstances of cruelty, seems beyond credibility; and yet we fear there is but too much truth in it. We hope, however, for the credit of human nature, that the suffering writer's resentment of the irreparable injuries she has received, may have hurried her on to represent her wicked and worse than brutal parent, in colours somewhat blacker than his natural hue; though there seems but little room to doubt that his complexion is Dark enough.
(Monthly Review)

As the critic notes, the content of her material makes her work seem more like a “fabulous History” for each incident emphasizes a brutality and inhumanity which seem exaggerated. Yet, Lamenther's earlier denial of authorship (“Know then--The cruel Author of all my Distresses in Life”) anticipates this critic's response. In effect, Lamenther claims it is her father who has authored her story, and she is not imagining or exaggerating, only recording the truth; indeed, at one point, Lamenther claims to omit the most shocking part of her narrative (36). By disclaiming authorship, Lamenther denies responsibility and remains an uncommitted observer who is only reporting the narrative her father wrote. In this way she can absolve herself of any responsibility for her victimization as well as absolving herself of guilt for exposing her father to public humiliation. Usually, when one denies authorship, one denies authority. However, Lamenther effectively regains authority over her text by her claims of veracity and innocence.

This ambiguity about authorship and authority invites other twentieth-century responses to Lamenther's domestic violence narrative. Sidonie Smith asserts that women writing their stories manifest a “doubled subjectivity,” a site in which the autobiographer is both protagonist and narrator of her story (17). Wall herself calls this “doubled subjectivity” a “two-edged sword” (37) because on one hand she is trying to forget the horror and on the other she must relive the experiences in order to control them. As protagonist, a participant in her own domestic violence narrative, the battered child questions her own sense of reality because of the perversity of her father. Since she has a need, a desire, to have her reality validated by the public, she must relive those horrifying

experiences which caused and still cause her so much pain. The most painful memories become touchstones for the structure of her narrative.

Breaking the silence or the act of telling one's own story has therapeutic qualities for the survivor of domestic violence. As narrator, the teller of the story, Lamenther has a responsibility to "wrest . . . significance and, with it, autobiographical authority out of cultural silence" (Smith 42). She tries to make the irrationality of domestic violence make sense by configuring her story into a narrative, a generic construction that frames or encloses the horror of her life. This exercise has therapeutic qualities as well for in this manner she is able to signify for the battered child.

One way to signify is to name and the theme of naming takes on special significance in Wall's narrative. Initially, naming becomes an issue because of her father's behavior. In their father's house Lamenther and her sister become nonexistent and nameless. Secreted in and out of the house at night, hidden under stairs, commanded to deny their names, Mr. Wall's daughters are erased so effectively that the porter of Mr. Wall's lodging one night turns away one the girls' maternal aunts because he thought she was mad for insisting that two girls rather than two boys lived in the household. Mr. Wall literally obliterates the girls from face of the earth by unnameing them. He believes he can absolve himself of responsibility for their care by denying their existence, as evidenced by the lack of his providing for even their basic needs.

Therefore, it is easy to understand why Lamenther, the name Wall choses for herself, has reservations about naming her father, for she is her father's child and like William Fleetwood half a century earlier, believes the bonds of Nature have been

canceled. She writes, "I shall now give Mr. W— the Name of the Father, as he was the Author of my Existence; but I appeal to the World, if I can with any Propriety give him the more noble Name of Parent" (12). By naming Mr. W— as the author of her existence and her distress, Lamenther, in effect, attempts to write herself out of the script, to deny accountability for her existence and her distress. Instead, she proclaims Mr. W— has written her life. In this way she portrays herself as the perfect victim, innocent of any complicity in her abuse, a pure, passive, unstained child. By virtue of the fact that she is such a perfect victim (even to the point where one could "see" her victimization by the scar on her face), she argues that worldly "Propriety" gives her permission to unname him as "Parent." In short, Lamenther can speak with confidence for the child abuse survivor because she wears the battle scars of a domestic war over which she has absolutely no control.

But it is difficult to deny authorship when one is in actuality authorizing one's life through writing. Realizing that she cannot dodge her agency, Lamenther then attempts to sever the bonds between father and daughter by renaming herself as Lamenther and refusing to call her father by the more auspicious title of Parent. Lamenther reaffirms the limits of the father's power for her audience and herself. Since her male progenitor does not conform to the dictates of the "nursing father," she is hoping that public opinion will find her guiltless for exposing the barbarities of the "unnatural" (191, 221) father.

I want to assume that Ann Wall ended her life in comparative ease, comfort, and security because her authorship brought her some degree of financial security, personal satisfaction, and public validation. Unfortunately, I may never know how she lived after

the autobiography. Her narrative concludes with a reiteration of her apologia leaving me to suspect that she continued to live with fear and guilt. Wall reminds readers who may mock that

it was Fate and an unnatural Father that obliged me to act contrary to the dictates of my Soul, and laid me under the churl Power of their malevolent Tongues; and it is from this Father I may date the whole of every Sorrow I have yet endured. I could add much more to this Narrative, but hope it will suffice for every Friend to know, that this cruel Author of all my Inconviencies is yet in Being. (221)

Wall wants her readers to know that she acted only in response to a situation beyond her control. Since she was subject to an unnatural father, she learned to act unnaturally, “contrary to the dictates of [her] soul.” She even looks unnatural with her scarred face. She wisely notes that Mr. Wall's dereliction of duty forced her to become dependent on others and “under the churl Power of their malevolent Tongues.” To vindicate herself, Wall has to expose her father to the “malevolent Tongues” which positions her as an ungrateful, spiteful, and deceptive daughter who could be perceived as disloyal and unfaithful to her father. Her actions suggest that she was untrustworthy, flighty, unreliable. Guilt and shame burden her even though she knows that to survive she must escape her father's control and tell the world about it.

Given that Wall was beaten, caged, starved, scarred, hunted, denigrated, and discounted, it is amazing that she could function in society at all. Yet, it appears that once she was free of the abuses rained upon her, she managed well enough to find sympathetic subscribers and wrote her book in a style not unlike the prevailing literary works of the day as Samuel Richardson's Pamela (1740-41), Henry Fielding's Tom Jones

(1749), and Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764). Her narrative contains elements of the eighteenth-century literary conventions, a few of which enhance the domestic violence narrative.

One of the most noticeable eighteenth century influences in Wall's work is her elaborate prose. Elevated, highly sentimental phrases express Wall's despair at the wickedness surrounding her. Such phrases as "The cruel Author of all my distress in Life--O hard to say!--was my Father--and, therefore, Ah Lament Her--" (iv) exemplify her style. She employs a vast vocabulary to elicit the readers' most melodramatic emotions. A particularly hyperbolic spectacle occurs at her mother's deathbed where Lamenther kisses and shakes the "lifeless clay" (23) trying to awaken her. In case her reader is not sufficiently moved by the sight, Wall declares "Never surely did the Death of a Parent produce a more dismal scene, nor ever was a Child so young so susceptible of Grief" (24). She begs the adults to bury her alive with her mother; this at the approximate age of five. Although it appears that Wall's elaborate, high-flown prose is exaggerated, her tendency to elicit excessive emotions from the reader may not be unwarranted. The severity of her abuses justifies the sentimentalism. Furthermore, she lived in a culture of sentimentality where people expressed themselves this way as a ritualized custom, so it does not seem amiss for her autobiography to wed the case history to the sentimental novel. Given the fiery life she lived, fiery language seems appropriate.

In 1771, the Gothic novel had not peaked as it would in twenty or thirty years, but Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) had attracted the attention of the literate. Wall seems to have been influenced by these Gothic conventions when writing her

autobiography. The manor house where she and her siblings are incarcerated in the dead of night “stood a tolerable Distance from any other” (48) and was described as having a large courtyard enclosed with “great Iron Gates well secured, so there was not the least Possibility of our making an Escape even had we attempted it” (50). The isolated, gloomy, neglected manor house predates many of the isolated, gloomy, neglected castles which populate so much of the Gothic novel.

A Dantesque description colors her recital of the journey to “board with Betty” and her introductions to her new roommates:

My Guide led me by many Houses, or rather Shells, which were ready to fall on our Heads. The sight of such Fabricks were of themselves sufficient to terrify a Soul less timid than mine; but judge how my Terror must be enhanced, when she entered one of those ruinous Dwellings and bid me follow her: I accordingly did, with trembling Knees and aking Heart, and in a Moment found myself--Heavens! I can scarce give a description of the horrid Scene which presented itself before my astonished Eyes.--In an Instant I was surrounded with a numerous Crowd of Wretches whose Countenances were the Residence of Guilt, Prostitution, and every hellish Principle: They stood some Time gazing on me, and giving their Verdict on my Case. The Oaths and Execrations they intermingled with their Orations, were shocking to hear; an Assembly of Infernals might have equalled, but surely not exceeded this Clang of Creatures, and with such was I doomed to dwell. (196-97)

Wall's reference to the “Assembly of Infernals” sounds too much like Dante and his imitators for me to doubt that she was aware of the powerful images from her literary predecessors; there is also something picaresque about this episode as well as several others in the narrative, suggesting that Wall was not unaware of that literary convention, too. Furthermore, a religious fervor like a sixteenth-century repentance tale or John Bunyan Pilgrim's Progress (1684) can be detected here. The alliteration of some lines

resonates in the same manner as a fire and brimstone sermon. Apparently her moral impulses are aroused by the way she personifies the "Crowd of Wretches," whose faces mark their sins as "Guilt" and "Prostitution." Remarkably, these Gothic, picaresque, hellish images are aptly suited to battered women's and children's narratives because these literary styles are so akin to the actual experiences of the oppressed. Fear, vulnerability, isolation, and living at the mercy of uncontrollable powers are just a few of the characteristics that the battered share with the protagonist of the Gothic or morality tale.

The supernatural was an attraction in Walpole's Castle of Otranto. Dale Spender reports that a later Gothic novelist, Clara Reeve, thought Walpole

had gone to ridiculous extremes in Castle of Otranto and his readers, far from being impressed, were invariable amused. For her, it was important that the play on the imagination be real, and for this reason she kept events well within the realm of possibility. What was frightening, mysterious, unknown, could (later) be plausibly explained. A device which has since become widely used but one which Clara Reeve consciously explored and experimented with. (Mothers of the Novel 231-32)

Ann Radcliffe also stressed realism in her Gothic novels, a feature that is all the more convincing when the villains take on the role of a "fatherly male menacing a weak but virtuous female who in the end triumphs over him or neutralizes his power" (Todd, The Sign of Angellica 255-56). As we know in the twentieth century, the danger from strangers is not as threatening to a young girl as those who know her best such as fathers, uncles, or schoolteachers. Therefore, Reeve and Radcliffe exploit the real threats to young women--not the far-fetched unrealistic, supernatural evil forces present in Walpole. In Wall, too, the greatest threat to Lamenther's life is not the stranger in the

street, but the father under whose roof she is forced to live by the laws of the land. At the same time, when she describes her father as “unnatural” she hints at the supernatural, the paranormal. Without a political agenda, Wall ascribed her father’s behavior to the abnormal, thereby seeming to exonerate Mr. Wall of any responsibility for his actions; she failed to see the connections, the patterns, between her life and those of her sisters where all are trying to survive the torment of the patriarch.

Identifying the patterns in women's writing about domestic violence requires an examination of the material the author selected to include. From Wall’s apologia, the reader learns to expect an emphasis on the cruelty of Lamenther’s father. Consequently, the six relatively happy years that Lamenther spends at her aunt's country home are synopsized in a few pages, while the few months and years that she lives with her father are replete with description and analysis. Ann Wall was supremely aware of the effect of certain selections on her audience and employs rhetorical features which tease the reader's expectations. At one point, Lamenther exclaims, “But O let me omit the most shocking Part of my Narrative” (36) indicating an awareness of her audience for whom she selected palatable material. These gaps are spaces that my twentieth-century sensibility attributes to sexual abuse. For how much more shocking could her tale be than incidents she has already admitted--scarred by a bedpost, starved like an animal in the closet, beaten with nettles, kicked down staircases--unless the tale included the unspeakable, unmentionable incidents for which she has no words? Although the narratives in this project rarely mention incidents of sexual abuse, Wall’s aversion to

shocking her audience combined with a mysterious reference in Wollstonecraft's writings lead me to believe that these allusions are a code to the reader.

"More emphatically than fiction, eighteenth-century autobiographies reveal the claims women wish to make" writes Patricia Meyer Spacks in Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England (1976). Women's autobiographies of the time

display a tendency to stress what had been done to the protagonist more intensely than what she herself has done--even when she has done a great deal. The fact that the enlargements of self-depicting fantasy assume this form in women means not simply that the female of the species has traditionally been victimized; it indicates that she makes a mythology of her victimization, verbally converting it into the badge of her freedom. Letters, diaries, memoirs sketch a drama of self-defense: women writing about themselves defend integrity both by the declaration of the self implicit in the writing process and by the retelling of what they have endured, individually and generically. (73)

While Spack's analysis of the autobiography applies to major portions of The Life of Lamenther, I do not think of Wall's work as a "self-depicting fantasy" or a "mythology of her victimization." These terms imply that the autobiographer is constructing a fiction. Ann Wall's life needs to be interpreted as fact, for to deny her the reality she constructs in her autobiography would be akin to saying that children lie about their victimization. My training is to believe the victim; if Ann Wall said she would show the "naked Beauty of Truth," I will not subvert her position. This is not to say that she did not enhance her narrative with passion and art, but she was not fictionalizing her experience. That task was left to Mary Wollstonecraft.

CHAPTER THREE MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT THE FICTIONAL NARRATIVE

Although Patricia Meyer Spacks confines her “mythology of . . . victimization” (73) to autobiographies, I think the description may apply to other forms of writing as well. It seems to me that fiction is the better way to create a mythology; the truth does not interfere with the aim of telling a memorable story. Mary Wollstonecraft had the aim of telling a memorable story in mind for her last novel, The Wrongs of Woman or Maria A Fragment (1798), left incomplete at her death. Wollstonecraft was creating a “mythology of . . . victimization,” not just her victimization, but the victimization of a whole cast of women representing all levels of society. She expands the range of the domestic violence narrative from one voice to many and from autobiography to fiction. Since most myths have some basis in truth, so does Wollstonecraft’s last work.

Among the women’s voices in the late eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft’s writings represented the most well-known, comprehensive, and incisive critical commentary on the legal status of women within the family. While many feminists know Wollstonecraft for her reflections on women’s educational and political status in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), few know that she contributed to the domestic violence discourse community through her fragmentary The Wrongs of Woman, posthumously published by William Godwin. Essentially, this novel layers incidental domestic violence narratives within the protagonist’s own tale to create a constellation of stories with the same theme: men oppress women.

Of this oppression, Mary Wollstonecraft knew from personal experience. In some ways, she and Ann Wall lived parallel lives. Both were daughters of eighteenth-century gentlemen and women, both lost their mothers before their fathers, both wrote for the public, and both exposed and resisted the patriarchal forces their fathers represented. The factual similarities end here, for the only truths we know about Wall's life are from her autobiography. Since Wollstonecraft constructed a public persona and her life was well documented for a woman of the time, we can examine the fiction against the fact and vice versa. The comparison of the raw material, the facts of her life, to the art of her fiction leads to new complexities about how women survive and write about domestic violence.

Basically, I believe Wollstonecraft's improvements upon the raw narrative can be attributed to at least two causes, her genius and the genre. Her genius resides in the power to analyze human behavior. Even Wollstonecraft's' harshest critics must admit that she possessed the uncanny ability to observe, to interpret, to make connections, to see patterns, to theorize about causation, and to suggest remedies to the injustices of the period. Wollstonecraft's novel, a genre which is admittedly fictional rather than allegedly factual demands that she recreate her analyses in a form that would entertain the public. Her imagination was not fettered by the need for accuracy nor by the shame of the confessional. That she chose to write a novel reinforces the notion that she wanted to reach a wide female audience, "different classes of women" (Author's Preface, The Wrongs of Woman 74). With a novel-reading audience in mind, Wollstonecraft incorporates Gothic elements to increase the tension and layers each battered woman's

story within another's to reinforce her message. In effect, the genre gave voice to her genius.

Wollstonecraft was twelve, the oldest daughter in her own abusive family, when Ann Wall published her autobiography in 1771. Three years before, Wollstonecraft's father, Edward, after repeated failures in business and farming, had moved his family to yet another farming endeavor in Beverly, an isolated, rural community in Yorkshire. Here Mary Wollstonecraft experienced both the best and the worst of her childhood. The best, her intimate acquaintance with Jane Arden, her appreciation of village life, and her reverence for nature remained with her throughout her life. The worst, her father's drunkenness, his increasingly brutal behavior to his wife and children, and his failing financial situation also remained with her throughout her life. During these years in Beverly, Wollstonecraft realized the devastating effects of domestic violence. In 1779, she wrote to Jane Arden: "It is almost needless to tell you that my father's violent temper and extravagant turn of mind, was the principal cause of my unhappiness and that of the rest of the family" (Collected Letters 66).

Years later, Wollstonecraft's earliest biographer, her husband William Godwin, confirmed her childhood confessions to her confidant. In Godwin's Memoirs, Edward Wollstonecraft is called a "despot," an appellation that was subsequently removed in later editions of the Memoirs. Godwin recounts instances in which Edward abused Mary, her mother Elizabeth, and animals. For Mary, Godwin assures us, "the blows of her father . . . were the mere ebullitions of a passionate temper, instead of humbling her roused her indignation" (Godwin 206) and forced her to stand up for Elizabeth when she was

threatened. Ralph Wardle, one of Wollstonecraft's twentieth-century biographers, characterizes her early years as the "Education of a Rebel." Assuredly, the vituperative reaction to domestic violence in The Wrongs of Woman must have been conceived as Mary lay on the landing outside her mother's door on the nights she feared the worst from her father. As a teenager, Wollstonecraft had already earned the "high-handed and hot-blooded" (163) distinction which Virginia Woolf conferred upon her a century and a half later.

One of Wollstonecraft's current biographers, Claire Tomalin, suggests that another form of abuse from her childhood haunted Wollstonecraft. In the same letter to Jane Arden cited above, Tomalin notes some "mysterious references to something that had happened to shock her" (17) when Wollstonecraft writes about her relationship with the Clares, the eccentric, educated neighbors who befriended her and furthered her studies. The Clares were neighbors when the Wollstonecrafts lived in Hoxton and Mary was fifteen. It was in their house that Wollstonecraft met Fanny Blood, their protégé, and the woman to whom Wollstonecraft devoted herself until Fanny's death in 1785. In addition to falling in love with Fanny at the Clares, Wollstonecraft fell in love with learning. The Clares were "both fond of the companionship of girls . . . and encouraged Mary to spend her time with them and gave her books to read" (Tomalin 13).

Of the Clares, Wollstonecraft wrote, "I should have lived very happily with them [the Clares] if it had not been for my domestic troubles, and some other painful circumstances, that I wish to bury in oblivion" (Collected Letters 66-67). Careful review of the letter and the Wollstonecraft's other biographers does not reveal what these

“painful circumstances” might have been, but Tomalin concludes that they may be explained by an anecdote from The Wrongs of Woman in which the protagonist Maria intercedes for a poor woman with the attorney/agent who is responsible for collecting her late rent. Maria writes in her memoirs to her daughter,

This man of the world, with rosy face and simpering features, received me politely, nay kindly; listened with complacency to my remonstrances . . . I did not then suspect, that my eloquence was in my complexion, the blush of seventeen, or that, in a world where humanity to women is the characteristic [sic] of advancing civilization, the beauty of a young girl was so much more interesting than the distress of an old one. Pressing my hand, he promised to let Peggy remain in the house as long as I wished.--I more than returned the pressure--I was so grateful and so happy. Emboldened by my innocent warmth, he then kissed me--and I did not draw back--I took it for a kiss of charity. (134)

Tomalin suggests this incident points to childhood molestation, for she contends that "if something of the sort had happened to Mary it doubtless took on a disproportionate importance in her imagination for a while, and confirmed her suspicion that men were more likely to be predators than supports" (17). An innocent, enraptured girl, strengthened by her desire to improve the conditions of life for others, braves the unwanted familiarities of a lecherous attorney in the belief that her kiss is for charity. The older more mature Wollstonecraft/Maria, narrator/character has a clearer understanding of the significance of that "kiss of charity." Since Maria's observation is retrospective, the passage says much about her earlier innocence both of lechery and the way women are valued.

Whether Wollstonecraft experienced what her protagonist, Maria, describes is beyond my limits of speculation. Tomalin had no concrete proof for her claims.

However, I think she underrates the experience for any immature woman, especially Wollstonecraft. Lessons about relationships with the opposite sex do not take on a "disproportionate importance" for a woman who has lived with domestic violence; they are of supreme importance and should not be underrated. The significance of the "painful circumstance" or the lecherous attorney to an inexperienced girl is that a trust has been violated, one of the many lessons oppressed women learn and this is all we really need to know about the incident. The fact that Wollstonecraft cannot name that violation is proof of how shattering the experience must have been. From this, the enlightened Wollstonecraft learned the truth about sexism.

Wollstonecraft's direct involvement with her family's episodes of domestic violence did not end once she left her father's home at age nineteen in 1778. Her sister Eliza, Bess as Wollstonecraft called her, married in 1782 and gave birth to her first child in 1783. After the birth of the child, Eliza suffered such a severe breakdown that Wollstonecraft went to stay with her. Of the exact nature of the relationship between Eliza and her husband Meredith Bishop, we know very little except that Wollstonecraft believed Eliza had been "ill used" (Collected Letters 80). Bishop, Wollstonecraft notes, is either "lion or a spannial" who "cannot behave properly" with "misery . . . his portion . . . until he alters himself." Based on her own family history, Wollstonecraft knew by late fall of 1783 that she "would do anything to rescue her [Eliza] from her present situation" (Collected Letters 81). Hence, in January of 1784, Wollstonecraft and Eliza escaped from Meredith Bishop's house in a dramatic scene immortalized by Wollstonecraft's

epistolary report that Eliza bit her wedding ring to pieces as they flew away in the coach (Collected Letters 80-85).

In an era when women were not allowed parental rights, Eliza had to leave her baby with Bishop, a circumstance which haunted Eliza, afforded Bishop bargaining power over his wife, and later plagued Wollstonecraft's reputation. Sadly, the deprivation of her child was the fate in store for Eliza, since she never returned to Bishop's household and he never returned her daughter. Some of Wollstonecraft's biographers refer to this episode as one of the "most controversial in her life," citing Godwin's failure to include it in the Memoirs (Sunstein 89), Eliza's long-lasting, "deep-seated resentment against Mary" (Flexner 44), and ostracism from her siblings (Wardle 29) as evidence that Wollstonecraft acted too hastily to effectively help Eliza. Nevertheless, all three agree that Wollstonecraft rescued Eliza as a way to compensate for Wollstonecraft's inability to rescue her mother from her father years earlier.

This incident coincides with many battered women's stories, for the actual or threatened loss of her children is a recurrent theme in the fictional and factual domestic violence narrative; batterers, notorious for their threats to the health and well-being of the children, use them to control the battered woman. Being deprived of their children is one of the greater fears which keeps women in abusive relationships and one of the greater punishments they endure if they leave the fathers of their children. In fiction, Wollstonecraft transformed Eliza's experience into Maria's experience in The Wrongs of Woman. In fact, Caroline Norton lost her children when she had the audacity to leave her husband.

Another ordeal from Wollstonecraft's life informed her knowledge of the feelings of battered women. From first-hand experience with Gilbert Imlay, Wollstonecraft learned the abused woman's feelings of isolation, neglect, and alienation. Wollstonecraft met Imlay in Paris when she, like a handful of English progressives, went there in 1793 to see how the revolution was evolving. Imlay was an American who professed to be a revolutionary in his own country and apparently was in Paris conspiring with the French to win back part of their American colonies from the Spanish. Most of Wollstonecraft's biographers characterize him as itinerate, elusive, and deceptive. After their first meeting it appears that Wollstonecraft, too, disliked him and "for some time, she shunned all occasions of meeting him. This sentiment however speedily gave place to one of greater kindness" (Godwin 239). They became lovers in a relationship she regarded as "of the most sacred nature" (qtd. in Tomalin 147), unbound by the formal ties of religion or law. Their child, Fanny, was born in May of 1794. By the time Fanny was a few months old, Imlay had moved on and would never live with the two of them again. Although there is no indication of physical or sexual abuse, I would characterize Wollstonecraft's common-law husband as an abuser, for he certainly exploited, humiliated, and controlled Wollstonecraft with his emotional abuse.

Imlay's roguish behavior kept Wollstonecraft in a constant state of "inquietude" as she called it in the countless letters to him during his numerous absences. Unpredictable and fickle, he led her to worry about their affiliation for months at a time, at one moment giving her hope that they would be together and then in the next, avoiding and ignoring her constant pleas for the continuation of the relationship.

Unlike a conventional marriage in which the couple have certain legal duties to one another, the unconventional union of Wollstonecraft and Imlay leaves many questions unanswered about their expectations of and commitment to one another. However, from her letters, one can conclude that the disastrous marriages of her parents and of Eliza shaped Wollstonecraft's vision for her own relationships. She wrote to Imlay that "the little girl and I will live without your assistance, unless you are with us" (Collected Letters 273) signalling that she knew an illegitimate Fanny was exclusively her own, whereas a legitimate child would be Imlay's. As a consequence, Wollstonecraft did not expect Imlay to support her and Fanny to insure that she would not end up childless like Eliza.

She did, however, expect fidelity, constancy, and cohabitation and told him so in her letter on December 30, 1794, a time when Imlay had left her in Paris while he traveled to London on business:

The common run of men have such an ignoble way of thinking, that, if they debauch their hearts, and prostitute their persons, following perhaps a gust of inebriation, they suppose the wife, the slave rather, whom they maintain, has no right to complain, and ought to receive the sultan, whenever he deigns to return, with open arms, though his have been polluted by half an hundred promiscuous amours during his absence.

I consider fidelity and constancy as two distinct things; yet the former is necessary, to give life to the other--and such a degree of respect do I think due to myself, that, if only probity, which is a good thing in its place, brings you back, never return!--for, if a sandering of the heart, or even a caprice of the imagination detains you--there is an end of all my hopes of happiness-- I could not forgive it, if I would.

I have gotten into a melancholy mood, you perceive. You know my opinion of men in general; you know that I think them systematic tyrants, and that it is the rarest thing in the world, to meet with a man with sufficient delicacy of feeling to govern desire. When I am thus sad, I

lament that my little darling, fondly as I doat on her, is a girl.--I am sorry to have a tie to a world that for me is ever sown with thorns.

You will call this an ill-humoured letter, when, in fact, it is the strongest proof of affection I can give, to dread to lose you. . . . You have always known my opinion--I have ever declared, that two people, who mean to live together, ought not to be long separated.--If certain things are more necessary to you than me--search for them--Say but one word, and you shall never hear of me more.--If not--for God's sake, let us struggle with poverty--with any evil, but these continual inquietudes of business, which I have been told were to last but a few months, though every day the end appears more distant! (Collected Letters 273).

I am struck by the dichotomy of emotions revealed in the letter; she is at once full of bravado and full of vulnerability. Bravely, she ridicules “the common run of men,” “the systematic tyrants,” through whom she thinks she can see so clearly. Yet, she does not recognize that Imlay himself might be such a character and that she is as vulnerable as Fanny to such a tyrant. Imlay’s inability to live up to Wollstonecraft’s expectations of fidelity, constancy, and cohabitation suggests that she was terribly mistaken about his character because he encouraged her affections without planning to return them. She found his conduct unjust:

All is not right somewhere!--When you first knew me, I was not thus lost. I could still confide--for I opened my heart to you--of this only comfort you have deprived me, whilst my happiness, you tell me, was your first object. Strange want of judgment!

I will not complain; but, from the soundness of your understanding, I am convinced, if you give yourself leave to reflect, you will also feel, that your conduct to me, so far from being generous, has not been just. (Collected Letters 305)

The end of the relationship came when Wollstonecraft followed Imlay to London in 1795 where she found he was living with another woman. Godwin reports that the night following this discovery she was so wretched that “she would sooner suffer a thousand

deaths, than pass another [night] of equal misery” (250). Depressed, beaten down by Imlay's inconstancy, she found herself unable to withstand the incessant emotional swings occasioned by his lingering desertion. On two separate nights she attempted suicide, a sure sign of the despair very like that of the battered woman's. According to today's researchers the rate of suicide attempts is up to five times greater for battered women than nonbattered women (Kurz and Stark 253). There is no doubt that Wollstonecraft's distress was caused by this relationship.

By 1797, the last year of her life, Wollstonecraft had accumulated a treasure trove of wrongs done to women. In her fragmentary preface and a letter about The Wrongs of Woman, she comments upon her intent, her political and critical stance. Wollstonecraft's “main object, the desire of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society” (73) is to be achieved by portraying passion rather than manners, heightening the drama, and featuring “woman,” rather than the individual. In essence, Wollstonecraft claims that by dramatizing the individual's experience she approaches the universal and she can “show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various” (74).

Wollstonecraft's purpose, unlike that of Wall who wished to “shew the World a Series of unparalleled Misfortunes,” is to show the collective wrongs of women, to show that unnatural fathers are quite common, to show that the exploitation and abuse of women and children are frequent events. She believed that the “systematic tyrant” she mentioned in her letter to Imlay is not an aberration, but part of a system of tyranny

sanctioned by law. A single story could not achieve this purpose, so Wollstonecraft exploits the flexibility of the genre to supplement the meager possibilities of autobiography. Distanced by time and objectivity from the personal impact of violence, Wollstonecraft steps back from the oppression to characterize its components. Yet, this characterization is revealed only through the individual stories, each woven into the whole to create a pattern of systematic oppression. Wisely, she realized that the novel also offered an opportunity to heighten the drama, to control the direction and message of her social commentary.

While The Wrongs of Woman is incomplete, the form of the novel would have required that Wollstonecraft resolve her protagonist's situation one way or another. A conventional autobiography would not allow a resolution, for its teller would still be alive when the narration ended. We would not know what finally happened, as in Ann Wall's case, where so many questions are left unanswered. Since Wall claims to show the truth, she can only tell her reality; she cannot connect her life to the network of oppression for she does not see, therefore cannot report, other lives. On the other hand, a novel contains all we need to know to find meaning, for the author's selective control of the work rounds out the tangents and dead-ends, making everything contribute to the whole. We do not know the whole meaning of Lamenther's life, but we do know what Maria's life was supposed to represent. She was to represent the typical, gentlewoman whose story, along with tales from the women of the lower orders, creates this "mythology of her victimization."

Wollstonecraft, like most novelists, could not help but draw upon the experiences of her own life to create her fiction. Dale Spender observes that she “made abundant use of autobiography in [her] fiction” (249). Anne K. Mellor’s 1994 introduction to the novel discusses the parallels between Wollstonecraft’s own life and that of her protagonist, Maria. Moira Ferguson has noted that “Maria’s family for example, is an exact fictional equivalent of Wollstonecraft’s, consisting of a father-tyrant, a submissive mother, and four siblings” (13). Indeed, Ralph M. Wardle admits in his 1951 critical biography of Wollstonecraft that he uses The Wrongs of Woman to “supplement the limited information available about Mary’s early life.” He admits the works “cannot be accepted as reliable accounts of the events of her life,” but they do “suggest reactions which a biographer cannot ignore” (342-43). Even Godwin in his Memoirs cites The Wrongs of Woman as the source for his understanding of Mary’s early education. The similarities between Wollstonecraft’s life and The Wrongs of Woman are well documented and illuminate the tendency of the domestic violence narrative to conflate the personal and the political. However, The Wrongs of Woman is not merely a question of art imitating life. Wollstonecraft’s domestic violence narrative uses life and art to proselytize, to heal, to educate, to politicize, and to publicize the wrongs inflicted upon women.

In Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft (1992), Gary Kelly argues that Wollstonecraft used such “apparently autobiographical signs in . . . [The Wrongs of Woman as] a rhetorical device, authenticating the fiction for the reader, in terms of the order of discourse at that time, and giving the impression that personal experience has been shaped into a fictional structure, thus generalizing it” (208).

Generalizing is important because theory-building is based upon the cumulative effects of individual stories; once domestic violence narratives become public, individual survivors' accounts establish patterns, patterns between partners and survivors, patterns of oppression, patterns of survival skills. These patterns, of course, become the principles which inform one's vision of the problem. Since The Wrongs of Woman "embodie[s] a whole series of case histories illustrating the iniquities of the legal position of women, defending their right to sexual freedom and bitterly attacking society's refusal to allow them proper employment" (Tomalin 201-02), Wollstonecraft presents the cumulative effects of domestic violence and offers an ideology to generalize about the conditions of women. She knows that this oppressive environment is shared by many women of differing classes and "embodie[s]" the case histories of the upper-middle and lower classes. Thus, Wollstonecraft's layers of domestic violence narratives "authenticated the personal and placed it firmly within the realm of the political" writes Dale Spender (262). In this way, Wollstonecraft is able to construct the "woman," furthering the boundaries of domestic violence discourse by removing it from the purely personal realm such as Ann Wall's and forcing it into the prevailing socio-political and literary arenas of the day. Equally important are the educational aspects of the novel; the layers of narratives function as a learning device, repeating the same lesson over and over, like rote pedagogy. The Wrongs of Woman is a genre-bender; the work is part fiction, part autobiography, part case history, part tract--all genres informed by the politics of the oppression of women. The work is so political that many critics claim The Wrongs of Woman is a "fictionalised version" of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (Spender

257). “Maria,” Gary Kelly observes, “includes much factual material appropriate for a continuation of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (211). Martha George speculates that Wollstonecraft wanted to write a sequel to The Rights of Woman and Syndy Conger suggests “Maria transforms implausible polemic into a plausible and moving narrative” (176). It seems to me that Wollstonecraft’s utilization of domestic violence narratives as a way to exemplify the systematic oppression of women suggests that she believed, as do many today, that ending violence against women is essential to correcting the problems of male domination. However, if she were to address all the wrongs she had unearthed in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, the effort would require an epic novel transcending generations of women's oppression. Unfortunately, all we have of this “epic novel” is a fragment.

The story of Maria Venables, the protagonist of The Wrongs of Woman, begins in medias res with a third person limited-omniscient narrator who describes Maria's first consciousness after being abducted and imprisoned by her husband:

Abodes of horror have frequently been described, and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras, conjured up by the magic spell of genius to harrow the soul, and absorb the wondering mind. But, formed of such stuff as dreams are made of, what were they to the mansion of despair, in one corner of which Maria sat, endeavouring to recal [sic] her scattered thoughts!

Surprise, astonishment, that bordered on distraction, seemed to have suspended her faculties, till, waking by degrees to a keen sense of anguish, a whirlwind of rage and indignation roused her torpid pulse. One recollection with frightful velocity following another, threatened to fire her brain, and make her a fit companion for the terrific inhabitants, whose groans and shrieks were no unsubstantial sounds of whistling winds, or startled birds, modulated by a romantic fancy, which amuse while they affright; but such tones of misery as carry a dreadful certainty directly to

the heart. What effect must they then have produced on one, true to the touch of sympathy, and tortured by material apprehension!

Her infant's image was continually floating on Maria's sight, and the first smile of intelligence remembered, as none but a mother, an unhappy mother can conceive. (75)

Confined in what must be the modern-day equivalent of a private psychiatric hospital, separated from her daughter about whom she has no news, Maria is allowed only to see a servant, Jemima, and a physician. Her isolation from the outside world is exacerbated by the skillful Gothic description which invites comparisons between the “abodes of horror” in the fictional conventional castles of literature to the “mansion of despair” which imprisons Maria. What are “the spectres and chimeras” of literature to the “terrific inhabitants, whose groans and shrieks were no unsubstantial sounds of whistling winds, or startled birds, modulated by a romantic fancy, which amuse while they affright” and who abide under the same the roof as Maria? The loss of her child, which she awakens to remember with a “keen sense of anguish,” threatens to make her “a fit companion” to her co-prisoners. Reminiscent of the imprisonment of Wall and her siblings in a remote manor house, Wollstonecraft's asylum illustrates the ease with which the Gothic element may be used to enhance domestic violence.

Wollstonecraft invokes the Gothic to elicit a visceral response from her novel-reading audience. Whereas Ann Wall's audience in 1771 may not have read Walpole, Wollstonecraft's audience in 1798 was well aware of the “abodes of horror” described by her contemporary, Ann Radcliffe. It is likely that Wollstonecraft's readers would have crept through bone-chilling castles with previous Gothic heroines, such as Adeline de St. Pierre in The Romance of the Forest (1791). Yet, Wollstonecraft implies that the

fictional heroine's fate is nothing compared to the realities of the abused woman's life. And what is more disconcerting, Maria's reality is the reality of all women at the time. Although the eighteenth-century English female novel reader might not ever visit Europe and certainly would never experience the medieval settings of the Gothic novel, she will usually be allied to a man or men. If these men should turn out to be as vicious as the Marquis de Montalt, Wollstonecraft would have her female readers know that the unfortunate alliance is a circumstance common to many women. Maria, as Wollstonecraft in her letter to Imlay mentioned earlier, "mourn[s] for her child, lament[s] she was a daughter, and anticipate[s] the aggravated ills of her life that her sex rendered almost inevitable, even while dreading she was no more"(75-76). Undoubtedly, to be separated from one's child by the child's father, one's own husband, is certainly a fate worse than most Gothic heroines endured. As Anne Mellor observes, the "true horror of Wollstonecraft's story is that the terrors previously identified with the supernatural manifestations of the gothic romance or the 'astonishment' of the romantic sublime literally exist with the average domestic household in England. British women can endure all the terrors of solitary confinement and physical, even sexual, abuse, right at home, tortured by their own husbands, fathers, and brothers" (xvi). Maria's history, which Wollstonecraft does not reveal until the seventh chapter, reveals that she suffers the same kinds of fates that most battered women do in their narratives. Born into family of gentlefolk, Maria is the daughter of a despotic father, a former military officer who has commanded his family as he had commanded his troops, and a weak mother, who instantly obeyed her husband, hardly daring to question his authority. Maria's older

brother, Robert, the “deputy-tyrant of the house,” “the representative of [her] father, a being privileged by nature--a boy, and the darling of [her] mother, . . . [does] not fail to act like an heir apparent”(125). The “idol of his parents, and the torment of the rest of the family,” Robert exhibits “spirit and wit,” traits which were “cruelly repressed as forwardness” in Maria. Male privilege and the double standard were more confining in the days of primogeniture and Wollstonecraft is quick to point this out. It is a “force of prejudice,” Maria exclaims (126).

After Maria's mother dies, a servant in the household becomes her father's mistress, another fictionalized version of the facts of Wollstonecraft's own life: Edward Wollstonecraft married a servant from the Wollstonecraft household soon after his wife's death. Just as Wall castigates her own father's behavior to his mistress in The Life of Lamenther, Wollstonecraft disliked her father's public display of his dissipations. She writes Jane Arden in 1779 that “[t]he good folks of Beverley (like those of most Country towns) were very ready to find out their Neighbours' faults, and to animadvert on them;-- Many people did not scruple to prognosticate the ruin of the whole family, and the way he [Edward Wollstonecraft] went on, justified them for so doing.” (Collected Letters 66).

The “good folks of Beverly” might well have been the literal equivalent of Maria's neighbors who “[make] many remarks on the finery, not honestly got, exhibited at evening service” by “an artful kind of upper servant [who] attracted [her] father's attention” (136). This description of the alliance between her father and his servant/mistress suggests that Maria ascribes the agency in the affair to the woman. Maria implies that the artful servant is not complying with her role as a subordinate

woman who remains passive or “acted upon” particularly if she is of the lower class. Instead, the artful servant appears to be acting criminally. Maria implies that she and her father, both middle class and privileged, appear to be more victimized than the lower-class woman with limited resources who is undoubtedly a victim of economic and class oppression. Since the “mythology of victimization,” as Spacks notes, “stress[es] what had been done to the protagonist more intensely than what she herself has done” (73), Maria positions herself and her father as “acted upon” by the servant. The woman who has attracted her father’s attention is not sufficiently passive to earn the name of victim.

Yet, Maria was not blind to the double oppressions of gender and class. Maria notes that “by allowing women but one way of rising in the world, the fostering the libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as a proof of inferiority of intellect” (137). Instead of blaming the mistress, Wollstonecraft attempts to hold society responsible for the less than satisfactory manner in which women can survive in “disguised and indirect ways of acting and reacting” (Miller 10). In a culture in which a woman has to affiliate with a man in order to survive, and men are taught that women are only necessary for sexual gratification and procreation of the species, then the culture should not be surprised when illicit connections are made. Almost 200 years later, Lenore Walker, one of many who echo these notions, writes, “Women are systematically taught that their personal worth, survival, and autonomy do not depend on effective and creative responses to life situations, but rather on their physical beauty and appeal to men. They learn that they have no direct control over the circumstances of their lives” (51). The lower-class

woman who attracts the older, middle-class man has few choices other than to adopt the prevailing cultural view of women's way to power.

Wollstonecraft only complicates the intersections between economics and gender when Maria provides the details about her own marriage. Given the sorry state of her home life after her mother's death, Maria marries the most available suitor, the irascible George Venables. The son of a merchant, he is characterized as a libertine who masks his immoral activities from his family and marries Maria for the money her kind uncle awarded him, money awarded without Maria's knowledge. Early in the marriage she remarks that she has been "caught in a trap, and caged for life" (144) in the dehumanizing climate of economic dependence, emotional abuse, male privilege, and ultimately, separation from her daughter and imprisonment.

The emotional abuse takes its cumulative effect within five years of the Venables' marriage. Humiliated by her husband's boastful prevarications in public and beaten down by his "sullen taciturnity" in private, Maria finds that "to such a degree, in fact, [does] his cold, reserved manner affect me, that, after spending some days with him alone, I have imagined myself the most stupid creature in the world, till the abilities of some casual visitor convinced me that I had some dormant animation, and sentiments above the dust in which I had been groveling" (145). Her husband not only bores her to tears but makes her question her version of reality, an insidious feature of emotional abuse. When closeted with him, she discovers his reality supplants hers; the victim of emotional abuse is denied access to her own feelings, interests, and concerns. Close-mouthed to his wife and in control of his world, George Venables creates an atmosphere

in which Maria learns of his affairs, of the reality of his situation, only by accident. In turn, she must curb her responses to his manmade cage for his “sullen taciturnity . . . soon silenced” her (145).

In concert with the emotional abuse, Maria also contends with her husband's economic situation. Maria's uncle has surreptitiously awarded Venables five thousand pounds for marrying his niece. When Maria learns of her uncle's bargain, she is shocked, ostensibly because no money is settled on her sisters. This information arouses her suspicions about Venables' real character. Eventually, Maria comes to believe that her years of grief could have been avoided if she had known of this clandestine transaction between the men that has radically affected her future. Had she been told of the arrangement, she observes, “I should have insisted on a thousand pounds being settled on each of my sisters; George would have contested; I should have seen his selfish soul; and-gracious God! have been spared the misery of discovering, when too late, that I was united to a heartless, unprincipled wretch” (138). If her uncle had consulted with her, Maria is convinced that she could have reasoned her way out of the marriage. Instead, by smoothing the road to her marriage, Maria's uncle unwittingly condemned her to persecution.

Once she is married, the uncle, through Maria's intervention, becomes Venables' financial security. Since Venables is regularly one step ahead of his creditors, he constantly begs Maria to intervene with her wealthy uncle. She complies and, for years, she supports him through the continuing generous donations from her uncle. The squabbles over money contribute to the tension in the marriage and make Maria feel used

by Venables; "pillaged" is the word Maria employs to describe her economic relationship with her husband. "But a wife being as much a man's property as his horse, or his ass, she has nothing she can call her own" (158), reasons Maria. Furthermore, she observes that male privilege allows him to use "any means to get at what the law considers as his, the moment his wife is in possession of it, even to the forcing of a lock, as Mr. Venables did, to search for notes in my writing-desk--and all this is done with a show of equity, because, forsooth, he is responsible for her maintenance" (158-59). Unprotected by law, the wife of an abuser must submit to any intrusions, her right to privacy violated; a "perpetual minor" (159).

Male privilege threatens Maria's body as well. One consequence of the double standard is that a man has the right to dispose of his and his wife's body as he wishes, but she is not permitted the same. Maria is not so appalled by Venables' extramarital affairs as she is by the conditions under which these affairs take place which are ripe for the transmission of sexual diseases. After discovering that her husband's promiscuous behavior extends to "women . . . of the grossest kind," "profligate women," Maria finds Venables' sexual appetite particularly odious. She avoids his "sullied arms" for they have embraced "wantons of the lowest class, who could by their vulgar, indecent mirth, which he called nature, rouse his sluggish spirits" (146). Having witnessed her father's attraction to lower-class women, Maria knows that her "heart [is] entirely estranged by the loathsome information": "For personal intimacy without affection, seemed, to me the most degrading, as well as the most painful state in which a woman of any taste, not to speak of the peculiar delicacy of fostered sensibility, could be placed" (146).

But the matter is more complicated than a “personal intimacy” with or without affection. The matter is about power and control, and Maria detests both the women who use their bodies and their femininity to control men and the men who are attracted to the “meretricious ornaments and manners” (146) of the ultra-feminine. Yet, she understands that such enticements are necessary for some women to survive. She condemns the society which perpetuates this double standard in which women's way to power is through the indirect, pandering affiliation with the opposite sex and men's way to power is through a seemingly healthier interchange of direct, rational, intellectual thought with their own sex.

Maria's reasoning expands to the double standard based on appearance. “Women who have lost their husband's affection,” she writes, “are justly reprov'd for neglecting their persons, and not taking the same pains to keep, as to gain a heart; but who thinks of giving the same advice to men, though women are continually stigmatized for being attached to fops; and from the nature of their education, are more susceptible of disgust” (147). Thus, according to Maria, women are unjustly blamed for paying too much attention to appearances or for failing to keep up appearances. Women should not be held responsible for the appearance of their husbands. Her disgust enlivens her description of the husband whose morning presence destroyed her appetite: “I think I now see him lolling in an arm-chair, in a dirty powdering gown, soiled linen, ungartered stockings, and tangled hair, yawning and stretching himself” (147).

Venables' interpretation of male privilege entitles him to attempt to prostitute Maria to a friend, miscalculation which precipitates her symbolic divorce and escape

from him. Now-pregnant, Maria discovers another clandestine letter between two men about her future. In this letter, Venables encourages a friendly admirer of Maria, Mr. S—, to make love to her because “every woman had her price” (161). In Maria’s case the price is her empathetic spirit; she is to be had rather cheap when compared with Venables’ request for five hundred pounds from Mr.S— to “have the duty of husband taken off his hands” (161). Mr. S— will succeed, Venables assures him, if he attacks Maria’s “credulous generosity, and weak pity” (161).

Clearly, Venables underestimates Maria’s price. When she learns of her husband’s subterfuge, she confronts Venables in the presence of Mr. S—:

Then, turning to Mr. S—, I added, “I call on you, Sir, to witness,” and I lifted my hands and eyes to heaven, “that, as solemnly as I took his name, I now abjure it,” I pulled off my ring, and put it on the table; “and that I mean immediately to quit his house, never to enter it more. I will provide for myself and child, I leave him as free as I am determined to be myself—he shall be answerable for no debts of mine.” (162)

This key scene echoes and anticipates moments in other narratives of domestic violence when the survivor frees herself from the grip of the oppressor. Ann Wall had such a moment when she declined to give the title of parent to her abuser. Eliza Bishop’s moment came when she rid herself of her wedding ring with her teeth. Wollstonecraft transforms Eliza’s actions into a symbolic gesture on Maria’s part. Maria’s restrained removal of her wedding ring and Eliza’s unrestrained removal of hers signify women’s need to divest themselves of the ugly reminders of marriages marred by the unchecked practices of male privilege.

Other patterns found here also indicate that this moment marks a clearly established stage, the intersection of life and wider issues, in women's experiences of domestic violence. The letter from Venables to Mr. S— parallels the letter Maria's uncle sent to Venables outlining the marriage bargain. Again, the unwitting Maria is the center of a business deal between two men, a situation which signifies women as property. Indeed, Venables' offer to prostitute Maria anticipates George Norton's use of Caroline as his entrée to politics under Lord Melbourne's administration. As I will discuss later, many scholars insinuate that George Norton encouraged Caroline's friendship with Lord Melbourne in exchange for his government posts. Moreover, Maria's vow to support herself and her child mirrors Wollstonecraft's claim to Fanny. Unfortunately, Maria will learn, like Eliza before and Caroline after her, that male privilege extends not only to her body, but to her childrens' bodies as well.

Maria's symbolic divorce indicates that Venables has crossed the threshold of acceptable behavior in her eyes, but not in the eyes of the law, for he never physically abuses her. During the passionate scene that follows, Maria writes that she did not fear physical violence for "he had never struck me!" (163). Later, Venables tries to cajole his way into her bedroom "for that was the best place for husbands and wives to end their differences" (165). "But I resisted," Maria adds, "and, as he had determined not to give me any reason for saying that he used violence, after a few more efforts, he retired" (166). Maria and Venables allude to the state of British law at the time when the husband's rights of correction and responsibility for the maintenance of his wife allow him to pillage and pimp without fear of repercussions if he never strikes her.

Once Maria finally escapes, she is hunted like prey. Venables exploits all the avenues available to one who is trying to discover a fugitive from justice. He advertises in the newspaper, warning that any person found guilty of harboring her will be “menaced with the utmost severity of the law” (172). The law is on Venables’ side; Maria, plainly, has stepped outside the law. Pregnant and plagued by nightmares, she encounters landlady after landlady, each of whom has her own domestic violence narrative and who admonish her to be submissive to her husband.

The picture of the hegemonic forces of patriarchal oppression seems excessive, insurmountable. At every turn and with every new encounter, Maria discovers the abuse and degradation of women. The first landlady with whom she seeks asylum “toil[s] from morning till night; yet her husband would rob the till, and take away the money reserved for paying bills; and, returning home drunk, he would beat her if she chanced to offend him, though she had a child at the breast” (170-71). In the face of this unjust treatment, the landlady advises Maria “that, when a woman [is] once married, she must bear every thing” (170), a mandate with which the landlady evidently complies for she would not intervene on Maria’s part. Once her husband discovers the advertisement George Venables has published in the paper, he insists that Maria leave their house. Clearly sororal affections are not strong enough to counteract the real fear of another beating from Johnny.

The lack of sororal affection, of comradeship, between women is a lingering theme in the narrative. As Maria doggedly seeks a refuge from Venables, female intermediaries constantly thwart her attempts to hide. At a second residence, the landlady allows

Venables to pursue Maria to the door of her room. In concert with Venables, this woman argues for male privilege and counsels Maria to be submissive. "Indeed what could most women do? Who had they to maintain them, but their husbands?" (177), landlady number two exclaims before she launches into her own domestic violence narrative which ironically features her ability to maintain herself even as her abusive husband squanders her income on an "impudent slut" (177) and alcohol. The fact that she saved money in the first place is remarkable, considering that anytime she finds employment he "follow[s] me, and kick[s] up such a riot when he [is] drunk, that I [can] not keep a place" (177). When she does achieve some financial security, her husband assigns her hard-earned goods to his creditors. As we know, and as this landlady learns, "It was all as one, my husband had a right to whatever I had" (177); British law allows him to dispose of her property without her consent. Now, certain that her husband is dead and no longer an immediate threat, the landlady counsels Maria to return to Venables: "Every woman, and especially a lady, could not go through rough and smooth, as [the landlady] had done, to earn a little bread" (177). Even without a husband present, the landlady remains firm in her belief that challenging husbands is a futile endeavor. Using her experience of domestic violence to rationalize her support of Venables, she explains to Maria, "So, madam, you must not be angry if I am afraid to run any risk, when I know so well, that women have always the worst of it, when law is to decide" (178). The risk of losing her livelihood forces her to side with the patriarchal oppressor from whom she has lost so much.

This oppression, the landlady knows, is not just the singular abusive behavior of an individual husband; the world reinforces the male power by legal institutional barriers which make it difficult for the single woman to negotiate an existence. The landlady's continued attempts to free herself from the constraints of a male-dominated world results in perpetual defeat, a condition common to the survivor of domestic violence. Consequently, she is more vulnerable to the patriarchal forces which seek to direct her actions. Furthermore, she often begins to identify with the oppressor, as an active way to survive the abuse. Again, Jean Baker Miller informs the analysis of the dynamics at work here. Subordinates, Miller writes, must concentrate on survival by "disguised and indirect ways of acting and reacting" (10). One of these indirect methods is to "imitate the dominants" (11). The landlady has learned that anything she does will result in defeat and that the only way to control her situation is to parrot the propaganda of the dominant husbands, to comply with their program.

In addition, Wollstonecraft expertly shows how the patriarchal belief system invites people to cooperate. Living proof that a woman does not need a man to maintain her and that she may be better off if she does not have a husband at all, the landlady continues to affiliate with patriarchal power rather than with other women because of her firm belief that the practices of the patriarchy are inviolate. Miller's discussion of dominants/subordinates also explains this characteristic. "Internalization" occurs when "subordinates absorb a large part of the untruths created by the dominants" (11) and this causes a serious identity crisis. When confronted with the possibility of a different kind of female existence, the landlady smugly recites the age-old patriarchal wisdom she has

internalized. In reality, she was the more functional, yet programmed to believe she is helpless and at the mercy of the men. Wollstonecraft understood that escape from patriarchal oppression is never-ending. The battered woman may escape one confinement, only to be greeted with another limitation. As a result, escaping patriarchal oppression is a perpetual fight for those women who try to live within and without its strictures. She seems to understand that in some situations for some people, resistance is futile.

Maria is only temporarily freed from this picaresque hell of constant flight by the birth of her daughter and a fortunate inheritance from the wealthy uncle. As she flees England with her daughter, Venables pursues her to Dover and abducts her and the baby with the help of barbarous servants and drugs. Maria ends up in the asylum where the narrator closes Maria's first-person account and returns to the third-person narration.

As evidenced by the landladies' stories, The Wrongs of Woman is composed of layers of domestic violence narratives. Wollstonecraft's intention to "show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive" is accomplished by allowing the women Maria meets to tell their own stories. The most comprehensive and illuminating narrative from the lower class is that of Jemima, Maria's female attendant at the asylum, in a tale which actually precedes Maria's and foreshadows many of the oppressions Maria will observe at another level of society. Like Maria, Jemima is born of irresponsible parents with the added disadvantage of illegitimacy. Conceived out of wedlock, Jemima is put out to be nursed after her mother's death. When she is returned to her father's home it is to the care of an abusive stepmother, who like other stepmothers in these domestic

violence narratives, is portrayed as exceptionally vile and wicked. As soon as she could hold an apprenticeship, Jemima is bound to a woman who runs a slop shop. The new mistress, exercising her rights of correction under British law, often flings Jemima about, bangs her head against the wall, spits in her face, and calls her a bastard. These, however, are not the most serious offenses of her apprenticeship. Her master rapes her repeatedly, and, when he finds he has impregnated her, supplies an abortifacient which she at first refuses. Upon discovering her husband raping Jemima, the mistress throws her out onto the streets. Alone, pregnant, young, and poor, the unfortunate Jemima aborts the baby and supports herself by prostitution for several years.

Wollstonecraft reveals a perceptive view of feminist and class consciousness when Jemima describes herself and her colleagues in the sex industry as “outlaws of society” (110). This distinction allows Jemima to participate in the male sphere, a place where proper ladies are not found. Jemima reasons “Having lost the privileged respect of my sex, my presence, instead of restraining, perhaps gave the reins to their [men's] tongues; still I had the advantage of hearing discussions, from which, in the common course of life, women are excluded” (111). Outside the law and respectable society, prostitutes and mistresses achieve a freedom that the middle-class women would not experience.

Jemima's outlaw status does not afford her any advantages when the issue of inheritance arises. As a mistress, she learns that the sudden death of her “employer” throws her “into the desert of human society” (112) among the rapacious legal heirs. The heir, “a man of rigid morals” (112), barely allows her to pack her few belongings before

she is unceremoniously dislodged into the streets. Jemima has to fight for her past wages and is subjected to moral and judgmental platitudes as she walks out the door. The heir's wife, an equally ardent moralist, refuses to give Jemima a character reference for future employment possibilities because "it would go against her conscience to recommend a kept mistress" (113). Without legal protection, a character reference, money, and employment, Jemima describes herself as a "ghost among the living" (113), a condition from which she emerges as a washerwoman.

Jemima does not miss the opportunity to comment upon conditions for women in her situation. The want of education and character references effectively casts Jemima, who by now "ha[s] acquired a taste for literature" (113), into despair. Jemima notes that some people proclaim that those who really want employment can find it. Not so for those women "whose reputation misfortune or folly has tainted" (114); they are relegated to a life of hard labor. Moreover, Jemima is convinced that

A man with half my industry, and, I may say, abilities, could have procured a decent livelihood, and discharged some of the duties which knit mankind together; whilst I, who had acquired a taste for the rational, nay, in honest pride let me assert it, the virtuous enjoyments of life, was cast aside as the filth of society. Condemned to labour, like a machine, only to earn bread, and scarcely that, I became melancholy and desperate. (115-16)

Undeniably, sex discrimination and the double standard contribute to Jemima's predicament.

Apparently, Jemima's predicament is no different from other lower-class women's situations at the time. She goes on to tell of an incident in which she is the perpetrator of an injustice to another one of her class. Soon after Jemima is thrown out of her

benefactor's home, she forms an alliance with a tradesman who feels unable to give Jemima a home because he has a girl in his house who is with child by him. Jemima, finding herself on the other side of this sexual triangle, advises the tradesman to turn the girl out. "Poor wretch," Jemima remembers, "she fell upon her knees, reminded him that he had promised to marry her, that her parents were honest!--What did it avail?--She was turned out" (116). That night the young woman drowns herself in a horse trough. Recognizing her own complicity in the death of the woman, Jemima leaves the tradesman to return to work as a washerwoman, followed by a career in thievery for which she was incarcerated. Eventually, she begins to work for the man who manages the insane asylum. Jemima's remorse for the wrong she felt she had done the young woman, her own experiences with the injustices of the world, and her extreme fondness for Maria fuels her desire to aid the unfortunate inmate. Besides, Maria implores dramatically,

"With your heart, and such dreadful experience, can you lend your aid to deprive my babe of a mother's tenderness, a mother's care? In the name of God, assist me to snatch her from destruction! Let me but give her an education--let me prepare her body and mind to encounter the ills which await her sex, and I will teach her to consider you as her second mother, and herself as the prop of your age. Yes, Jemima, look at me--observe me closely, and read my very soul; you merit a better fate . . . and I will procure it for you, as a testimony of my esteem, as well as of my gratitude. (121)

Maria's appeal to Jemima's feelings of restitution and justice so challenges Jemima to make life better for Maria's child that Jemima could not resist Maria's pleas to subvert the institutional rules to help find her daughter. Maria employs Jemima's new-found sensibility, a sensibility that arises from motherhood, to pressure her into woman's agency that originates to protect children from patriarchal decrees. In essence, Maria is

encouraging Jemima to consider herself a foster mother, who will reap the benefits of having an adult child to care for her during her old age (“the prop of your age”) and the care of whom will help her alleviate some guilt for past wrongs. In this context, where Jemima is asked to make up for her past injustices to women, the “wrongs of woman” are not just the wrongs perpetuated by patriarchy, but also the wrongs that women do to themselves and one another. Contrite, eager to make up for past offensive behavior, aware of the dangers to the baby, Jemima awakens to a sense of justice which binds her to Maria and the child; in short, the illegitimate, thieving, prostitute becomes an advocate for the helpless and hopeless. Here, too, Wollstonecraft suggests a model of sisterhood, the pattern for solidarity among women. “For the good of the children” unites women from all socioeconomic groups.

When Maria tells Jemima that Venables kidnaped the child from Maria when she “was discharging the tenderest maternal office, the woman awoke in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions, and Jemima determined to alleviate all in her power, without hazarding the loss of her place, the sufferings of a wretched mother, apparently injured, and certainly unhappy” (80 my emphasis). Gary Kelly explains in his notes to the Oxford edition that Wollstonecraft equated the “essence of female character with compassion, although she realized that such an equation could be used to oppress women” (216). Thus, in what might be called a consciousness-raising experience, the woman who awakes in Jemima's bosom is the woman present in all women. Jemima's awakening corresponds to her realization of her bond with other women, a feeling which Kelly reminds us Wollstonecraft viewed in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman as

potentially dangerous for women. The danger, Wollstonecraft believed, is that women are trained to please others at the expense of their own pleasure and edification.

Normally, a woman's self-sacrifice means sacrificing for men and children. In Jemima's case, the self-sacrifice is for a woman and a child. Unlike the landladies Maria encountered who represent the compliant abuse survivors, Jemima is transformed into a "woman" in Wollstonecraft's own sense of the word. To Wollstonecraft, becoming a "woman" can provide the antidote to patriarchy when women's compassion is directed towards other women, not men and children exclusively. Also, Maria learns that women of the lower orders are not as vulgar and self-serving as she thought; Jemima survives on the margins of society where she is subject to the double oppressions of class and gender. Her story explains away many of Maria's prejudices against mistresses, servants, and the lower class.

The use of Jemima for an exemplar is another instance of Wollstonecraft's sophisticated analysis of domestic violence. Jemima's status as an abuse survivor means she has the knowledge to help Maria, a circumstance which forecasts the role of the former battered woman in the battered women's movement. The involvement of the survivor in the battered women's movement has been deemed essential, not only for the movement but for the survivor herself. In the beginning of the movement, "former battered women or women who had seen violence in their families of origin were among the first to reach out" (Schechter 56) to answer crisis line calls, provide transportation, and shelter the new persecuted. In effect, Jemima and Maria form a support group which provides them the same benefits as the modern equivalent, "a safe place for women to

find their personal power to join with other women to take back control of their lives” (Pence and Shepard 291). With Jemima’s help, Maria ultimately escapes the asylum, but not before she tastes the freedoms of sexual liberation and literary experimentation.

It is through Jemima’s intervention that Maria takes another inmate in the asylum as a lover. While it seems that Maria attaches herself too quickly to the first available man, the dynamics of this new relationship bear no resemblance to her marriage. Maria and Darnford are equals, neither in a position to exercise privilege over the other because both are at the mercy of Jemima who introduces them, arranges their meetings, and delivers their messages. Although Maria’s relationship with Darnford is troubling--for she seems to jump out of the frying pan into the fire--the fact that Jemima directs the situation suggests that sexual freedom, not affiliation with a man, is the goal of the affair.

It is Jemima who first brings paper and pens to Maria so she, too, can her autobiographical impulse, a human tendency to refashion her life through the narrative process. Telling their stories, naming their violence, empowers both Wollstonecraft and her protagonist, compelling them to search for meaning and reason in what must have seemed a chaotic world. With this meaning and reason, the narrators hoped to educate a living novel-reading public and a fictional motherless daughter.

Telling Maria’s tale proved to be difficult for Wollstonecraft. Godwin reports that she worked on The Wrongs of Woman for a period of twelve months, during which time she wrote and rewrote several versions. He notes that she worked longer and harder on this novel than any other work, hinting that she was striving for some kind of standard which her other work had failed to achieve. This standard might have been imposed by

Godwin, for she denounces his critique of her work (Collected Letters 345). Critics, too, suggest she had more difficulties writing this novel due to Godwin's interference.

Sunstein thinks that "Godwin's presence and advice may have drained from the work its drive and spontaneity, Mary's primary assets" (329).

However, I don't think Godwin's presence hampered Wollstonecraft as much as impossibility of attaining the ambitious goal she set for herself. The existing manuscript and the various endings that Wollstonecraft left suggests that she was having difficulty arranging the material in a manner which explains "the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society" (73). The writer and the survivor were battling over the representation of violence against women, a remarkable moment at the convergence of a political understanding and a personal understanding of the phenomenon. Unlike Ann Wall, whose choices for material were limited by her lived life and her lengthy list of subscribers, Wollstonecraft had a broader range of experiences and a wider audience in mind. She seemed to find it necessary to perfect the work in order to vindicate the lives of all oppressed women and educate those who had not yet become aware.

In the novel, Maria begins her domestic violence narrative as an exercise to occupy her time in her solitary confinement:

Writing was then the only alternative, and she wrote some rhapsodies descriptive of the state of her mind; but the events of her past life pressing on her, she resolved circumstantially to relate them, with the sentiments that experience, and more matured reason, would naturally suggest. They might perhaps instruct her daughter, and shield her from the misery, the tyranny, her mother knew not how to avoid. (82)

Wollstonecraft, aware that the telling of one's own story is important for an understanding of the events, writes that Maria's "soul flowed into it, and she soon found the task of recollecting almost obliterated impressions very interesting" (82). It appears that the backward glance into her own history offers Maria an opportunity to reassess her situation. Maria's effort to contain her narrative within the confines of language, to relate "sentiments that experience, and more matured reason, would naturally suggest" signals a therapeutic use for the autobiography. Rather than sit alone in her room, unoccupied and inconsolable, "she lived again in the revived emotions of youth, and forgot her present in the retrospect of sorrows that had assumed an unalterable character" (82). The task gave Maria the chance to escape the horrors of her present situation and find solace. Besides the therapeutic effects, Wollstonecraft, the consummate educator, notes the exercise will serve to instruct Maria's daughter. Maria hopes that her story will prevent her daughter from making the same kind of mistakes.

Maria's introduction to her memoirs, addressed to her daughter, outlines the method of education for women on which Wollstonecraft might be basing her novel. "From my narrative, my dear girl, you may gather the instruction, the counsel, which is meant rather to exercise than influence your mind," (124) Maria writes. Wollstonecraft, too, hopes her narrative will exercise the reasoning skills of her readers rather than arouse them with farfetched notions of improbable scenarios. Women's lack of instruction, education, or opportunity to exercise their minds resounds throughout A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and these subjects occupied much of Wollstonecraft's personal and professional life. "Knowledge," she wrote in the Preface to Original Stories from Real

Life, “should be gradually imparted, and flow more from example than teaching; example directly addresses the senses, the first inlets to the heart; and the improvement of those instruments of the understanding is the object education should have constantly in view, and over which we have most power” (1). With this view in mind, Wollstonecraft filled her educational novel with examples of domestic violence, using vivid episodes from the lives of her intimates as lessons for her readers. These episodes, rendered melodramatically in the style of the time, show rather than tell the reader of the dangers of violence against women.

The Wrongs of Woman is so “exemplary” that critics have described the layered tales as case histories. Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd maintain that Wollstonecraft copied the “ideal of integrated case histories [from] William Godwin's fiction, where he explored his studies of character in great psychological detail” (106). Tomalin asserts that the novel “embodied a whole series of case histories illustrating the iniquities of the legal position of women, defending their right to sexual freedom and bitterly attacking society's refusal to allow them proper employment” (202). George describes Jemima's story as a “formidable case study” (139).

Wollstonecraft's illustrations of domestic violence are strikingly similar to the case histories which have emerged during our time from a new arena of social science focusing on domestic violence and the behaviors which surround it. Out of those social science case histories arise analyses which seek to classify, define, and describe the phenomenon, the violence of the abuser, and the survival skills of the victim. Today we have a taxonomy which distinguishes types and forms of abuse. Researchers and

domestic violence workers use this taxonomy to refine their understanding of the phenomenon and to counsel and educate survivors about the pervasive nature of domestic violence and how to minimize its long-lasting effects. Although Wollstonecraft did not have the taxonomy, she knew the ubiquity of violence against women and sought to prove it with her uninterrupted repetition of battering and survival stories. These layered stories reinforce the message that she seeks to convey to her students: domestic violence can happen to any woman, of any class.

Not only does Wollstonecraft convey information, but she also outlines a training manual for empowerment and resistance to the patriarchy. Besides the female solidarity exemplified by the Jemima/Maria collaboration, Wollstonecraft suggests that women interpret the laws from a reasonable female perspective and act accordingly. When Venables sues Darnford for seduction and adultery, Maria's spirited resistance to the legal proceedings brought on by Venables against Darnford models behavior which Wollstonecraft herself might not have been averse to trying. Taking on Darnford's defense after he leaves the country, Maria directed the attorney to enter a plea of guilty to the charge of adultery and not guilty to the seduction. Unnerved by the way the proceedings were going and unable to testify in her own behalf, she penned a letter to be read aloud at court where again the negotiations of men were directing her life without her control. This mini-narrative sums up the major abuses she endured as her rationale for making the symbolic gesture to divorce herself from Venables and to affiliate with Darnford. Maria observes that "the respect I owe to myself, demanded my strict adherence to my determination of never viewing Mr. Venables in the light of a husband,

nor could it forbid me from encouraging another" (197). She goes on to "claim a divorce" (198) based upon her own sense of justice that forces her to reject "the individual, who has violated every moral obligation which binds man to man" (197). In effect, Maria claims a law of her own, reasoning that if she is indeed as lawless as Venables would have people believe about her, then she will make up her own laws to coincide with the very morals which direct her actions. Earlier she had wondered "if woman have a country" (159) based upon the unjust treatment of rational humans due to their gender. Maria's letter to the court implies that if women were allowed to participate in politics, then the laws would be much different.

In the wake of the lawlessness in France during the Revolution and the Reign of Terror, the judge in Maria's case did not want to encourage any citoyenne in his court: "We do not want French principles in public or private life--and, if women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was opening a flood-gate for immorality" (199). Instead of pleading feelings, the judge goes on to say, it was the wife's "duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could for herself" (199). Given the sorry examples of parents and men which Maria had endured, the judge's commandments seem absurd and condescending; absurd because Wollstonecraft's final novel clearly shows that domestic violence was not an isolated incident, altering only a few people's lives; condescending because Maria's parents were clearly not qualified to "judge better for her, than she could for herself."

The judge's disavowal of women pleading their feelings for fear it would open a “flood-gate for immorality” highlights the absurdity of patriarchal law. The system of laws based upon the patriarchal beliefs that women were inferior in strength and spirit uses feme covert as a way to shield women and uphold that belief system. There would be no reason to fear a flood if the law truly protected, rather than shackled, Maria and countless others who were obviously held hostage under the guise of protection. The power of the patriarchal belief system and its subsequent laws were so thoroughly internalized that despite the overwhelming evidence against its efficacy, the judge could not see that it might be flawed. As long as women's interpretation of the law as tyrannical disagreed with patriarchy, women would be viewed as immoral because women would be forced to subvert it, when they could, to survive. The judge's comments against women pleading their feelings are even more absurd when one believes, as Wollstonecraft argued in A Vindication of The Rights of Woman that the participation of women in all institutions would improve the society. Wollstonecraft's thesis that the increase in educational and other opportunities for women would improve living conditions for their families and consequently, the society as a whole, is rooted in basic human rights rhetoric. It is the result of conversations she held at her publisher's, Joseph Johnson, and among the leading human rights' minds of the day. The dedication to M. Talleyrand-Périgord which introduces the work distinctly refers to her wish to prepare women to become citoyennes, not “hot house flowers.” Following two hundred pages of argument, she concludes the work with an invocation: “Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when

emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty” (Vindication 213). The good of the whole is only possible when the whole can participate in all human endeavors, be they good or bad. A woman is not just an appendage; she is a part of the whole.

The judge's condescending advice “to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience to judge better for her, than she could for herself” (199) emphasizes Wollstonecraft's critique of the entire structure of the family, for if Maria's parents had been responsible, then she would not have had to escape their home so abruptly and naively. Even her kindly uncle who had arranged the dowry could not have foreseen the devastating consequences of his actions; he thought he was protecting Maria from the negligent parents. The child who suffers from ineffective parents, Wollstonecraft slyly suggests, should be able to correct those parents' wrongs by a social and legal structure which allows her freedom and liberty to make her own decisions, thereby remedying their mistakes and preventing another generation of women from suffering from ineffective parenting. Wollstonecraft demanded that the legal system take up the slack, so to speak, and protect women from the wrongs of parents and husbands through legalized divorce in this case. The judge disagrees: “Too many restrictions could not be thrown in the way of divorces, if we wished to maintain the sanctity of marriage; and though they might bear a little hard on a few, very few individuals, it was evidently for the good of the whole” (199). So the issue becomes the rights of the individual versus the good of society, a basic philosophical and political matrix that continues to perplex our modern legal system.

The judge was not the only one to stand in judgment of Maria and uphold the patriarchal beliefs about the practice of *feme covert*. The reviewers of The Wrongs of Woman confirm the acuteness of Wollstonecraft's analysis of the system for they too bought into the belief system that women are irresponsible and must be supervised by their parents or their husbands. The reviewers castigate Maria for marrying improperly. A contributor to The Critical Review states, "The partial laws and customs of society [those which Wollstonecraft mentions in her Preface] had no concern with the cause of her [Maria's] oppression. She married Mr. Venables, because she was in love with him, and had not sufficient discernment to perceive that his love was feigned, and his character detestable" (418). The Anti-Jacobin Review claims Maria's imprisonment arises from "her own injudicious choice of a husband [which Wollstonecraft mistakenly attributes] to the unequal state of women in society" (92). Clearly, these unfavorable reviewers attribute more choices to women than Wollstonecraft would allow and their critical stance approaches what we would call victim-blaming today. Wollstonecraft contends that there are no good choices available and as a consequence, the best choice may still be oppressive. Maria's choice of Venables as a husband did prove to be injudicious, but given the state of the situation at the time, her choice is not remarkable. She married Venables to escape from the unhealthy home where her father had abdicated his rights as a father. In Maria's mind, her father had injudiciously subjected his children to a topsy-turvy world where the servants and the whores tyrannize over the masters and the chaste. Her father's example, coupled with her uncle's financial arrangements, in the context of a society in which a woman's goal is to marry, leaves little choice for Maria to shop around

for a husband. Rather than blame Maria for her own oppression, Wollstonecraft would have us examine the social forces surrounding her and affix any deserved blame to them.

Many reviewers derided The Wrongs of Woman as obscene and lewd, arguing that the work urged moral decay. Those who argue thus are those who find Maria responsible for her own actions before and after her marriage to Venables. Maria would argue that she took control of her life after her symbolic divorce from Venables and that only afterwards could she be held responsible for her own life. Saddled by the institutions of the family, law, and religion as a daughter, wife, and mother, Maria was incapable of directing her life. Once she rejected those institutions or transformed them to her own making, as she tried to do after leaving Venables, Maria then created her own existence. Consequently, her letter to the judge in Darnford's defense becomes a manifesto of a woman who surpassed the chains of conformity. She gives herself a legal existence which she did not have and would be hailed as an activist in the battered women's movement of today.

Wollstonecraft's incisive political analysis in her domestic violence narrative contrasts sharply to that of Wall's Life of Lamenther. Whereas Wall was only concerned with her individual wrongs, Wollstonecraft is concerned with the wrongs of all women and comprehends the gender inequities that were commonplace in her time. Unlike Wall, Wollstonecraft does not apologize for her prose, does not ask for the reader's indulgences, does not suggest that her protagonist's oppression is a personal problem caused by an atypical unnatural father or circumstances which are unique to one woman's situation. "But this painful account of her own life is, on Mary Wollstonecraft's part no simple plea

for pity. It is the examination of a problem” (Spender 251), a universal problem creating distress for every woman in The Wrongs of Woman. Such exaggeration has prompted many of Wollstonecraft's critics to view her work as simply propaganda. If the work is indeed propaganda, it is the first of many such pieces in defense of battered women:

In the government of the physical world it is observable that the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male. This is the law of Nature; and it does not appear to be suspended or abrogated in favour of woman. A degree of physical superiority cannot, therefore, be denied, and it is a noble prerogative! But not content with this natural preeminence, men endeavour to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment; and women, intoxicated by the adoration which men, under the influence of their senses, pay them, do not seek to obtain a durable interest in their hearts, or to become the friends of the fellow-creatures who find amusement in their society. (Vindication 4)

Wollstonecraft's understanding that brute force has enabled men to legitimize a system which continues to oppress women is noticeable as early as 1791 when she wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Therefore, I believe that she chose domestic violence as the theme for The Wrongs of Woman as the most graphic form of women's oppression. She believed, as feminist thinkers and domestic violence workers do today, that brute force along with its institutional reinforcement is at the heart of women's subjugation. Her combination of the personal, the educational, and the political indicates she was an activist against domestic violence long before the battered women's movement of the late twentieth century.

Furthermore, the fictionalization of her own life from which she deduced these political truths gave her some control. First, she can control the autobiographical elements in her life thus molding our understanding of her history. If, as Wollstonecraft

commentators and biographers concur, our most thorough understanding of Wollstonecraft's life comes from her fiction, then might it be possible that she was creating herself through her fiction? As she is arranging the factual elements of her own life into patterns of abuse and injustice to prove her claim of patriarchal oppression, she simultaneously creates herself as the embodiment of her politics. These pieces of evidence serve her and her readers by making it possible to understand the theories which were first articulated in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. The realization of these theories fosters the pedagogical and social goals of Wollstonecraft's life and work; theory becomes praxis in The Wrongs of Woman suggesting that it is important to know the wrongs of woman before one can articulate the rights of woman. One must be able to recognize one has been wronged before one can assert one's rights. One must see the similarities between one's own wrongs and those of like characteristics before one can bond with others in the interest of human rights. Just as Jemima and Maria break down class distinctions to combat patriarchal oppression, Wollstonecraft hopes her readers will identify their own oppression with that of her characters. In this way she creates a mythology of oppression which educates and entertains.

CHAPTER FOUR
CAROLINE SHERIDAN NORTON
THE REFORM NARRATIVE

Although Caroline Sheridan Norton (1808-1877) probably never read the obscure The Life of Lamenther nor the more accessible The Wrongs of Woman, her contributions to the battered women's narrative can be viewed as a blend of some of the styles that Ann Wall and Mary Wollstonecraft used. Norton wrote of her experiences as a battered woman in both fictional and factual genres; she employed the Gothicism and the sentimentalism which seem so aptly suited to the tales; she critiques the male-dominated society. While she probably would have enjoyed Ann Wall's autobiography; I venture to say that she would have scorned Wollstonecraft's novel. Norton could identify with Lamenther because she saw her life as the exception rather than the rule. Assuredly, Norton knew that other women were battered and exploited under the current law, but she did not associate with the leading feminists of her day. Consequently, she would have disapproved of Wollstonecraft's joining women of different classes under the rubric of shared experiences. Furthermore, Maria's relationship with Darnford would have disturbed Norton's sense of propriety. She would never allow her battered protagonists to escape the pain of being separated from their children by falling into bed with other men.

Despite Norton's reservations about the feminism evinced in Wollstonecraft's life and the model of empowerment evident in Wollstonecraft's work, she may have done more to improve the plight of battered women than Wollstonecraft's rationally argued essay and carefully layered novel. Norton did not see the need to find a community of

like-minded women to assert their collective energies against the patriarchy when she had the Prime Minister of England, Lord Melbourne, sitting on her sofa. She appealed to the source of power directly and used her life as a testament to change the laws of England.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, public awareness of domestic violence focused on the private lives of the very lowest and very highest classes. The public attention to the lower classes came from such reform movements as those against the new poor law of 1834 or temperance; the reformers often linked domestic violence to their favorite problem. Wife beaters were seen to be from the lower orders, under the influence of alcohol, or a combination of the two. By 1843 the published Reports of the Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners recorded the successes of new reform laws and sobriety in testimonials from women such as Mrs. Britton of Calne, Wiltshire, who stated that the Poor Law Guardians supplied half the bread her nine-member household ate per week and that since her husband sobered up two years ago he no longer beat her. Poverty and intemperance were often blamed for the abuse of women and children.

At the other end of the social scale, both the regency and the reign of George IV, with his treatment of Queen Caroline, also apprised the public of royal marital abuse. The extravagant, dissolute Prince George married his German cousin in 1795 to please his father and have his gambling debts paid. According to Caroline, George was so drunk on their wedding night that he passed out and slept in the grate (Perkin 36). George intensified his careless lifestyle, developed a decided hatred against Caroline, and informed her that she would no longer share his bed after the birth of their daughter in 1796. Exiled to a country estate without her child, Caroline tried to fight back against the

mental and emotional abuses of the King and his followers, but eventually fled to the continent. In 1820, when the King tried to divorce his wife, public sentiment had turned in her favor and petitions instigated by his female subjects on behalf of Caroline flooded the press. The public was so incensed that “for the first time, English women were publicly protesting against husbands who did not fulfill their part of the marriage bargain” (Perkin 40). However, neither these protests nor the subsequent reform movements changed the legal structure of English marriages.

In 1827, another George and Caroline were wedded into an alliance as disastrous as the marriage of King George IV and Queen Caroline. George and Caroline Norton’s troubles did more to change British law than Wollstonecraft, reform movements, and exiled Queens. Caroline Sheridan Norton named the violence in an unprecedented way. Rather than begging the reader’s pardon as Wall did or cloaking personal abuses in polemical fiction like Wollstonecraft, Caroline Norton defiantly brought attention to domestic violence by disclosing her own victimization and survival without the veils of pseudonyms or fiction. Already a well-known author, she was the first to expose the hidden torments of the middle-class Victorian marriage. Due to the nature of her involvement in these reforms, Norton has been hailed as a “reluctant rebel” who “won the first battles for Victorian wives against outrageous and cruel laws” (Moore 53).

Caroline Norton’s contributions to legal reform were noteworthy, but she was not an anachronism. Of the many reforms endorsed in the nineteenth century, the progress of the feminist movement was a sure sign that some changes had taken place between 1771 and the 1830s. Better education for girls, more female authors, Methodism, the abolition

of slavery and temperance movements--all fostered reform and increased interest in women's issues.

Despite her fight for wives' and mothers' rights, Norton was not for women's rights. In fact, she thought women inferior to men, a notion to which she held firm even with so much evidence against it. Her heroines are sometimes helpless and hopeless, as Norton considered herself. But her actions defied her words, for she persistently and successfully defied men in person, especially her husband, and in her writing for a good part of the nineteenth century. As a result of this dissonance between her professed passivity and her actual activity, Caroline Sheridan Norton was a decidedly ambiguous author of the domestic violence narrative.

Most scholars date Norton's transformation into an activist to the abduction of her children by their father, George Norton, in the spring of 1836. At that time, she launched a campaign against the tyrannical law, which held that legal fathers had indisputable custody rights to their children by marshaling the forces of her friends in Parliament. The resulting Infant Custody Act of 1839 was the first of her reforms. In truth, her activism had begun at least ten years earlier in 1829 when she first published poetry that revealed the nature of her marriage. Two years after her wedding, Norton, in her poems, was surreptitiously rebelling against the married woman's plight by questioning the absolute powers of the husband. She did not stop there. The theme of domestic violence reverberates throughout all of the genres in which she wrote. She transformed her life as a domestic violence survivor into the art of poetry, short stories, novels, and pamphlets.

Some might have predicted that Caroline Sheridan Norton's life would take a literary bent when she was born on March 22, 1808 into the productive--others would say dissipated--Sheridan family. Her great-grandmother was Frances Sheridan, who authored The Discovery (1763), Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1761?, 1767), The History of Nourjahad (1767), and Eugenia and Adelaide (1791), and her great-grandfather was Thomas Sheridan, the well-known actor and theater manager. From this couple and her grandfather, the celebrated Richard Brinsley Sheridan, she inherited a taste for authorship, the theatre, and politics. The Sheridan clan considered literary endeavors a birthright and Caroline was no exception. In this way she was distinctly different from Ann Wall and Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote without their families' support.

As important as her family's literary heritage was to her, Norton also relied upon the women's tradition in literature bequeathed to her by the writers of her great-grandmother's generation and their successors. Dale Spender traces the emerging pattern in which female authors reveal the more intimate details of women's lives. She notes that "Charlotte Lennox, Frances Sheridan and Charlotte Smith had hinted at the frustration and the bitterness below the surface in the lives of many wives, but they had maintained the surface: Mary Wollstonecraft swept it all away" (261). Surpassing the revelations of her predecessors, both biological and historical, Norton used her life experiences to influence the public and to change social policy. She addressed her work to people who had the power to make the changes she saw as necessary and actively lobbied public policy makers to ensure the reforms. This work was not an easy matter, however, because she had to endure beatings from her husband, severe public censure when she

refused to live with him, and lengthy separations from her sons before she was able to write about it. Boldly, Caroline Sheridan Norton used her narratives to sway public opinion and change the progression of British law.

Unlike Ann Wall and Mary Wollstonecraft, the young Caroline Sheridan witnessed no domestic violence. By the age of five Caroline was living with unmarried aunts in Scotland while her mother, father, and eldest sister were making a futile trip to the Cape of Good Hope in an effort to save her father's life. By the age of nine she was fatherless. Her mother and the three youngest children returned home to the four awaiting her in England. With seven children and a disastrous financial situation, Mrs. Thomas Sheridan was aided by her father-in-law's old friends who obtained a grace and favour home at Hampton Court for her and the children. All accounts indicate that Caroline and her siblings lived merrily and peacefully there (Acland 21-23; Chedzoy 24-30; Perkins 4-7).

The drama of Caroline's life began once she left her mother's home to attend boarding school at the age of sixteen. There she captured the attention of two children of the local aristocratic family, Augusta and George Norton. Augusta was drawn to the young Caroline's energy and talent. George, younger brother to the childless Lord Grantley from whom he stood to inherit, was so taken by Caroline that he wrote her mother asking to marry her after a very brief and casual acquaintance. Mrs. Sheridan, a broker in the marriage market with three undowered daughters to dispose of, denied his preemptive request because she thought her daughter too young. This rejection did little to discourage George Norton, for he found Caroline in London a few years later after she

had come out. He immediately resumed his attentions and she responded. Mrs. Jane Gray Perkins, a turn of the twentieth century biographer of Caroline, muses about her complicity:

So at the end of her second season, with another sister coming on after her, having learned by this time that the world was not entirely made for girls like herself--girls who had neither great family nor great position to make up for their lack of dower--in a mood of momentary disgust at what the world had hitherto given her, or submission to her obvious duty to her family, touched and misled no doubt by the permanence of the passion she seemed to have excited in this one lover, she married George Norton, July 30, 1827, he being at that time twenty-six, and she nineteen. (13)

Although her family life and childhood were unconventional, she endured treatment from George Norton like what thousands of other women had suffered, were suffering, and will suffer. He manipulated, tormented, exploited, and humiliated Caroline throughout the forty-eight years of their marriage. After the first nine years, his abuse was not physical, but he continued to haunt Caroline until his death in 1875. Her saga, from which she emerged a powerful voice for the battered woman, remains relatively unknown in current domestic violence lore.

I think the best way to examine the domestic violence in Caroline Norton's life and art is to begin in the middle with English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (1854) which she self-published at the age of forty-six, twenty-seven years after she had married George Norton. English Laws is the most factual narrative of her life, written as if she were testifying in court. Perkins comments on the style:

The tract is largely taken up with her own story, told, however, with no effort to please or conciliate, no appeal for personal sympathy, only as a sort of harsh illustration of the various defects of the law as it stood at that day. . . . Her accounts of her husband's cruelty to her are made in the same

ruthless fashion--stripped of everything except what could be proved by witnesses or statements other than her own, always including the provocation she herself might have given him as legally part of the story. (241)

She privately published the pamphlet in response to her husband's most recent legal proceedings against her and according to her preface desired "to prove, not my suffering or his injustice, but that the present law of England cannot prevent any such suffering, or control any such injustice. I write in the hope that the law may be amended" (English Laws 1). By this time, she had analyzed the meaning of her life with George Norton and had concluded that it was not different from the lives of other women under British law. As a result of that analysis, she desired to change the law, to become active in the man's world, making their social structure meet her demands.

The legal style that Perkins notes becomes quickly evident. "The treatment I received as a Wife, would be incredible if, fortunately (or unfortunately), there were not witnesses who can prove it on oath. We had been married but a few weeks when I found that a part of my lot was that which generally belongs to a lower sphere--and that, when angry, Mr. Norton resorted to personal violence" (English Laws 31-2). Her observation about personal violence was made two months after the wedding when she disagreed "very uncivilly" with him about some opinion, exclaiming "that 'I thought I had never heard so silly or ridiculous a conclusion.'" George responded with a "sudden and violent kick; the blow reached my side; it caused great pain for many days, and being afraid to remain with him, I sat up the whole night in another apartment" (English Laws 32).

Caroline begins the story of her experience of domestic violence by noting the similarities between marriages in the middle and lower classes. She was not ignorant of class issues, for as an unabashed Whig she actively supported the Reform Act of 1832. In late 1836, she published A Voice from the Factories which championed working children's rights. Yet, the reference to wife-beating in English Laws as "that which generally belongs to a lower sphere" perpetuates the stereotypes of the lower orders as uncivilized and violent. Using the stereotype as her foil, Caroline says that her husband is a vulgarian. With all his privilege, Mr. Norton could not have disagreements without resorting to personal violence. Caroline claims that the British gentleman can not excuse his behavior by the effects of poverty, or intemperance, the common causes of abuse. It must be some other factors.

Such an early and unexpected violence shocked Caroline out of her bedroom that night, but did not shock her into silence. When she disagreed with George in an uncivilized manner, she indicated she could not be silenced, nor did she see any reason to downplay her own complicity years later when she recast the incident in English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century. The singularity, clarity, yet blending, of characters' and narrator's voices elucidates Norton's purpose. She never fails to speak for herself. George, through all his corrective techniques was never able to silence Caroline. Unlike many early-modern battered women who lost their voices as well as their legal status when they married, Caroline may be said to have found her voice in marriage. Born into a distinguished, close-knit family and buoyed by a developing women's literary heritage,

Caroline Norton had a few more resources than her predecessors, including Ann Wall and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Her family's support was perhaps Caroline's greatest defense against George's continued assaults. In 1827, he quickly learned that he not only had married Caroline but was to swear fealty to her loyal, devoted and extended family as well. These expectations caused resentment:

Four or five months afterwards, when we were settled in London, we had returned home from a ball; I had then no personal dispute with Mr Norton, but he indulged in bitter and coarse remarks respecting a young relative of mine, who, though married, continued to dance,--a practice, Mr. Norton said, no husband ought to permit. I defended the lady spoken of, and then stood silently looking out of the window at the quiet light of dawn, by way of contrast. Mr. Norton desired I would "cease my contemplations," and retire to rest, as he had already done; and this mandate producing no result, he suddenly sprang from the bed, seized me by the nape of the neck, and dashed me down on the floor. The sound of my fall woke my sister and brother-in-law, who slept in a room below, and they ran up to my door. Mr. Norton locked it, and stood over me, declaring no one should enter. I could not speak,--I only moaned. My brother-in-law burst the door open, and carried me down stairs. I had a swelling on my head for many days afterwards, and the shock made my sister exceedingly ill. (English Laws 32-3)

This early incident foreshadows numerous disputes between Caroline and George, for it highlights the manner in which Caroline's family was always more important to her than a peaceful relationship with George. As loyal to her family as they are to her, her quick defense of a distant relative signals disloyalty to George.

Also, this incident educates Caroline about George's patriarchal rules.

Apparently, following social conventions is important to him. By objecting to the young relative's dancing as an action "no husband ought to permit," he insinuates that Caroline

too will need his permission for certain behaviors. Indeed, he implies that a wife is controlled by her husband, not her family. But just as George could never control Caroline, he certainly could not control the Sheridans. Brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, and uncles came to her rescue when she needed help. Clearly, familial support protected her from the insecurities to which Wall and Wollstonecraft were prey.

Caroline's family was the antithesis of the Nortons. The Sheridans' resistance to social conventions, their familial ties which bound them together during times of crisis and conviviality, their ardent support of Whig politics and easy access to the politicians: these characteristics were not present in his family. Caroline's biographers paint a very unflattering picture of the Nortons, emphasizing the greed and dull-wittedness of the clan. Lord and Lady Grantley and Lord and Lady Menzies, George's siblings and their spouses, are said to have disapproved of the marriage in the first place and their insistence that Caroline and her family were gold diggers did very little to ingratiate George to his new Sheridan in-laws (Perkins 16, Chedzoy 52). On numerous occasions the Sheridans witnessed George's violence and periodically provided Caroline refuge, culminating in their reception of her into their homes when she finally did leave him. George Norton was not able to isolate Caroline from the people who could help her nor was he capable of becoming part of her kinship system.

Although George had traditional beliefs about the husband's control of his wife, he was not so strict about the age-old notion that husbands should earn the family income. On one hand, Caroline's notorious family, her ability to succeed in a political and intellectual circles which shaped the course of the nation, and her ability to write

appeared unpleasant and unwifely to George Norton. On the other, Caroline's status and accomplishments were also the source of his economic stability. The Sheridan name entitled her to socialize with the most prominent people of the day, including the leading Whigs who regained Parliament in 1830. All scholars agree that Caroline's interventions earned George a position in his opposition party's government. He exploited her social connections to secure a steady income. Since Caroline had already written some juvenilia when she married him and wished to continue writing, it was only natural and legally requisite that she contribute her income to the family coffers. Soon, Caroline's publications supplied more than pin money, ensuring George of a helpful, if sporadic, income. Their financial situation was greatly eased through Caroline's constant writing and attention to the political process. Ironically, her publications and connections reinforced her independence and autonomy. To George, her assets were also her liabilities.

Since George never seemed to have any compunctions about abusing Caroline in front of others, her family, friends, and servants knew of the beatings and emotional terrors from as early as 1828. She confirmed the violence to the public in 1854 when she told her story in English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century. In the meantime, she made reference to domestic unhappiness in her poetry and fiction. Her first publication, The Sorrows of Rosalie and Other Poems, included "Marriage and Love," a sentimental poem about an ill-matched couple, not unlike herself and George. Caroline profited enough from her first publication in 1829 to pay for her first confinement. After

producing The Sorrows of Rosalie and her son, Spencer, in the same year, she went on to publish The Undying One and Other Poems in 1830.

It was also in 1830 that George lost his seat in Parliament and the Whigs took control of the government. As a Tory, George had little chance of finding employment in the new government until Caroline interceded with an old friend of her grandfather's, Lord Melbourne, then Home Secretary, and George was appointed to a judgeship in the London Police Courts in 1831. Caroline remained a constant friend of Lord Melbourne as he distinguished himself, finally accepting the position of Prime Minister which he had not sought. Despite a personal life notorious for scandal, William Lamb, Second Lord Melbourne became prime minister for five months in 1834 and again from 1835-1841. From 1831 until 1836, Caroline and Lord Melbourne wrote each other at least once a day and visited three times a week in Caroline's home, often when George was away. Their intimacy invited public notice. Before long, The Satirist newspaper was printing pun-filled poems which asserted the two were lovers; in fact, the paper insinuated that Lord Melbourne had fathered one of her sons.

Meanwhile, George periodically reinforced his dominance over Caroline with physical abuse to punctuate the constant mental, emotional, financial, and psychological torments, asserting his male privilege and making all the household uncomfortable. She discusses an episode which occurred in the summer of 1833 when she was pregnant with William:

About the same period, a dispute having arisen after dinner, I said I really was weary of my life with the perpetual wranglings; that I had a great deal to do, and would sit no longer with him, but go to the drawing-room and

write for a Periodical, of which I then had the editorship; that I only asked him to stay where he was, and smoke there, instead of upstairs. He answered, that the house was his,--not mine;--that he should sit in what room he pleased; and that I should find I could not carry things with such a high hand as I desired to do. I left him; called my maid, desired her to bring her work and remain in the room, as I did not feel well, and, locking the door of the drawing-room for further security, prepared to write. Mr. Norton came and demanded admittance. I refused, and said I was undressing. After repeating his demand, and saying, if the door was not instantly opened he would break it open, he was as good as his word. He forced in the door, forcing away the framework with it, and rushed forward. He stopped short on seeing my maid, and desired her instantly to leave the room. I said she must stay, for I was afraid of being left alone with him. Mr. Norton then gave way to the most frantic rage, blew out the candles, flung the furniture about, and seized my maid to turn her out of the room by force. I clung to her, and being extremely frightened, and naturally at that time less strong than usual, I became very faint, and some of the other servants entering, Mr. Norton desisted. He then lighted a taper, examined the door, asked where the carpenter lived, and left the room. I thought the worst was over; but I was mistaken. Mr. Norton returned almost immediately, and seizing me, forced me out of the room and down on the stairs. I really feared for my life; I shrieked for help, and said I was sure Mr. Norton was "gone mad." The man-servant held back his arm while he was struggling with the maid, who was terrified to death,--and at length, assisted by the servants, I retired once again to the nursery, and slept with the nurse; leaving Mr. Norton master of the room he had broken into, and my literary tasks and the furniture scattered over the ground. (English Laws 34-35)

I submit this long passage as indicative of the pervasive forms of abuse which existed in the Norton household. Caroline mentions the "perpetual wranglings," suggesting that the verbal abuse and arguing were interminable. Contrary to George's wishes, she did not need his presence, actually resented it when he was smoking and argumentative, to enjoy herself and feel at peace. George, insecure and totalitarian as most batterers, always wanted her under his eye and dominance. As master of the house, he aggressively resisted any attempts on Caroline's part to separate herself from him or to avoid his

company. The fact that she needed to write to augment the household income, to pay her way, did not minimize George's assertion of his male rights. Even though she contributed to their financial situation, her work was not important if George felt he had been wronged. George's defiance of Caroline's need to work privately and quietly might also suggest that he was envious of her ability to pay her own way. This incident reads as if he was trying to sabotage her autonomy, her self-contained identity. I find George's behavior economically abusive for he relies upon her income, but won't afford her the space, time, and energy to work.

In his reply to Caroline's brother's inquiry into this incident, George reported that he had “broken open the door ‘on principle; thinking it necessary as a husband, to resist such extravagant and disrespectful proceedings’ as having any door of his house locked against him” (English Laws 35). Acting on his legal rights, George's actions would be sanctioned by English law. On principle, George subscribed to the notion of male privilege which does not honor ability but gender.

It was not uncommon in households such as the Walls', the Wollstonecrafts' and the Nortons' for the servants to become involved in the power struggles between the combatants. Whether the servants sided with the abuser or the abused, their employment was in jeopardy. In Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman, the “artful upper servant” sided with Maria's negligent father; later, Jemima sided with Maria. Here, Caroline clings to her maid, and is only freed from George's wrath when a man-servant intervenes. These middle-class chronicles of family abuse survey the variety of roles forced upon

servants in times of crisis. We find that ancillary observers often become as embroiled in the disputes as the major participants.

Jane Gray Perkins' account of this incident differs slightly from Caroline's report in English Laws for Women. Whether Perkins had access to some letters which had more information or whether she speculates from Caroline's account, I have not been able to determine. Perkins states that Caroline locked her husband in the dining room when she left to retire upstairs. George escaped his confinement in the room by another outside entry and gained re-admittance to the house by knocking on the front door (53). We can be sure that if Caroline did this, it only exacerbated George's anger by further humiliating him in the eyes of his servants and positioned her as a woman who knows how to survive.

The next day Caroline wrote her brother, Brinsley, about the altercation. Unlike so many other battered women, she had no qualms about informing her family of the state of affairs in the Norton household. Indeed, it would have been ludicrous to pretend otherwise since some of them had been present when George was most abusive. Brinsley, according to biographer Alan Chedzoy, wrote to George in an attempt to intervene, but his intercession was soon overshadowed by the birth of William after which Caroline and George resumed their strained relationship.

Years after the incident, when Caroline and George were battling publicly on the editorial pages of the Times, George referred to it as a "frivolous quarrel" (English Laws 35). Caroline was incensed. Just as she had no qualms about exposing her treatment to the family in 1833, she fought back publicly twenty years later in her letters to the Times and English Laws for Women. In 1833, Caroline's acute sense of justice was assaulted,

for she paid the household bills and George was trying to prevent her from doing the very thing that paid those bills. In truth, Caroline was claiming for herself the rights of a husband, the right to earn a living and the right to privacy.

Caroline's candor presented problems far outside of the realm of her domestic situation. Since she has no hesitation about defying George and his domineering policies, she did not represent herself as a completely passive victim. This was one of the reasons that English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century received a harsh response from the public. She did not act as if she were a passive victim. Caroline's ways to power were clearly not indirect; she participates in the male world where power and control are negotiated direct responses to perceived abuses. Caroline's blunt responses to George's intimidating tactics lost her the sympathy of the British public who were conditioned and legally coerced to believe that the ideal wife should be passive and compliant.

During the year of 1834 George was spending an inordinate amount of time with an older relative, Mrs. Vaughn. Alan Chedzoy suggests that George's renewed interest in his older relative hardened him to Caroline's wishes. Since George was jealous of Caroline's relationship with her family, Chedzoy speculates that George used Mrs. Vaughn as his surrogate for the bonds Caroline enjoyed with her family and that George may have been having an affair with Vaughn. He further suggests that George pitted his family against Caroline's family in a way that foreshadowed the power plays that were to follow (93). Mrs. Vaughn thereby became a pivotal figure in Caroline's life and later in fiction.

Further marital abuse followed. In September, after more “perpetual wrangling” between the two, Caroline and George accompanied her family on a pleasure trip to the continent. When the excursion was first proposed, George said that Caroline couldn't go unless he was also invited and she paid both their expenses. Their ability to make the tour was in question up until the last minute when Caroline received an advance on her first novel. As much as she anticipated the trip, Caroline must have regretted going to Europe soon after they arrived on the continent. By all the biographers' accounts, George was cranky, unsuited to travel abroad among the fun-seeking Sheridans. He became ill and forced Caroline to stay behind with him while the rest of her family continued on their journey, effectively distancing Caroline from her family in order to dominate her time and attention. His conduct seems to be what has earned him the reputation among the biographers as weak and self-centered. In the tract, Caroline details how frustrated and worn down she became after nursing George through his illness.

Even after they resumed their journey to rejoin Caroline's family, George and Caroline had disputes when his petulant, aggressive behavior increased. Caroline writes of the “hookah incident”:

I objected to his smoking in our little travelling carriage, especially as he smoked a hookah. I was irritated and suffocated by the volume of tobacco in so confined a space. I begged Mr. Norton several times to wait till we arrived at the hotel. He did not answer or desist. At length I impatiently snatched at the pipe, and flung the mouth-piece out of the window. The carriage was then slowly ascending a hill, and Mr. Norton alighted and recovered the missing portion of the pipe. He then seized me by the throat, and pinned me back with a fierce oath against the hood of the carriage. I thought then, and I think now, that I should have been strangled in a minute or two more, but that I struggled from his grasp, and without even attempting to have the carriage stopped, slipped down

through the door, (which he had not closed,) into the road. I ran after the other carriages, and entreated some one of my family to travel with us to protect me, which was accordingly done. The marks of his fingers were in bruises on my throat; and from the date of this foreign tour there existed an alienation from my husband on the part of my family, which his subsequent conduct completed. (English Laws 37-38)

The “hookah incident” illustrates one of the remarkable features of domestic violence, the way minor infractions turn into epic grievances. George’s behavior coincides with the common picture of the batterer, a man out of emotional control who overreacts to the presenting problem. Any insignificant transgression which challenges his lifestyle and ability to rule his enclave sets off a response that is often out of proportion to the severity of the situation. When Caroline objects to George smoking in the carriage, she contests his identity as the “master of his carriage” because she interrupts his ability to get what he wants. Her insubordination, coupled with the fact that her family surrounds her in other carriages, increases the threat to George’s identity as a dominant male. To reassert his superiority, he must punish her and exercise his right of correction.

Of course, the spirited Caroline did not de-escalate the dispute by flinging the mouthpiece out the window. Her provocative gesture tests George’s limited patience, and neither backs down from the ensuing battle. Caroline’s actions are a far cry from the mythological battered woman who acquiesces to the most insolent abuser behavior. Quick-witted and no doubt quick-tempered, Caroline, while surrounded by her family, is not without resources to resist George’s aggression.

The hookah incident apparently reinforced the Sheridans' distaste for George. Faced with overwhelming evidence of his violence and aggression, Caroline's family

quickly sided with her and offered her a refuge. It was to them that she ran in the summer of 1835 when George's behavior warranted her leaving. Again pregnant, she took the children to her sister and brother-in-law's house where George found her and begged her to return. Contrite when confronted with Caroline's absence, he wrote long passionate letters to her, promising change and conciliation. In English Laws for Women, Caroline gives examples of George's penitence.

He said "no words could prove his remorse." He said, "As there is a God above us, who will judge our actions, I think I have a right to ask you to trust to me for the future. If I cannot make you happy, let us then quietly and rationally separate, I declaring to the world that the cause of it was not any imputation on you." He implored me by all that was dear and holy to grant a "complete" forgiveness--a "real" pardon--to write it the moment I had read his letter--to seal and send it by the post, and not let anyone see it, for fear they should advise against it. (39)

This passage illustrates the dance of separation and reconciliation between violent couples which social scientists have examined at length. Lenore Walker would characterize George's behavior as typical of the batterer in Phase Three of the Cycle Theory of Violence. In this "honeymoon phase," the batterer is "extremely loving, kind, and contrite . . . He knows he has gone too far and he tries to make it up to her [the battered woman]." Furthermore, "the batterer truly believes he will never again hurt the woman he loves; he believes he can control himself from now on. He also believes he has taught her such a lesson that she will never again behave in such a manner, and so he will not be tempted to beat her" (65-66). In reply to these emotional admonitions, to behavior that the battered woman wishes her husband would evince all the time, she often returns to the abuser. R. Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash claim that abusers

reinforce the victim's wish for the relationship's reform and continuation by evincing this contrite behavior (230). Evidently, Caroline still had hope for George and the marriage because she soon returned to him. However, within two days George beat her again and Caroline fell so ill that she miscarried.

The complete rupture of their marriage occurred during the Easter season of 1836. Caroline wanted to spend the holiday with her family in Dorsetshire. When George realized he would not be invited, he gave orders to the servants on the evening of March 29 that the children were not to accompany their mother. The next morning Caroline scurried out of the house to consult with her sister and brother-in-law about what to do. While she was gone, George abducted the children and took them to Margaret Vaughn's house where Caroline was not allowed to see them. Caroline never returned to George Norton's house, nor did she see her children for months. She was not able to nurture them again until one had died. The dull yet wily George Norton's lengthiest abusive actions were tied to his kidnaping of their sons, a coercive technique now recognized as a devastating and dangerous tool in the abuser's arsenal.

In the Norton case, George's retention of the children after Caroline left the house on that morning in 1836 set in motion a chain of events which changed English law. Not one to abdicate quietly her responsibilities as a mother, Caroline channeled her energies and her money into raising the awareness of the English public of the sorry state of affairs for mothers. Her pamphlets, often printed at her own expense, related to the rights of mothers included Observations on the Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Infant Children (1836), A Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of Custody of

Infants Considered (1837), A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Law of the Custody of Infants (1839), The Case of the Hon. Mrs. Norton (n.d. reported in Holcombe 83). She fought for the rights of mothers which years later became a fight for the rights of married women.

Caroline's activism, however, evolved into a two-fold battle. Not only did she have to combat the legal system, she also had to battle public opinion. Once George learned that Caroline would not return home, he reignited the public's interest in her and Lord Melbourne by filing a "criminal conversation" (crim. con.) charge against Lord Melbourne, the sitting Prime Minister. Apparently, a Tory conspiracy seeking the downfall of Lord Melbourne coerced George into filing the charges. It would seem that the jury's verdict against George would have vindicated Caroline, but this was not the case. The celebrated crim. con. case and various other legal proceedings haunted Caroline and tarnished her reputation as an advocate for children and women. Without a flawless, or at least discreet personal life, most public figures lose face when promoting their political views.

Even if George was not involved in a larger Tory conspiracy, he acted like the typical batterer. After she defied his will in that Easter season of 1836, when he found he could no longer count on her, no longer oppose her strong will, no longer beat her into submission, he sought revenge, retaliation, and a form of restitution by besmirching her and Lord Melbourne. Furthermore, he extracted his patriarchal due by depriving her of the three most important products of her ill-fated marriage, her sons (I wonder if he would have acted any differently if they had been daughters). The rights of the father

prevailed until Caroline Norton felt its deleterious effects and with or without public opinion, she was determined to have her sons back.

Unable to intimidate Caroline through the crim. con. proceedings, George concentrated his efforts on retaining both the boys and her property, avoiding debts, and collecting any income she earned. He used the children as pawns in the constant separation negotiations which took place between the couple. The sons, ranging in age from three to seven at the time of the kidnaping, were shuttled between members of George's family, sometimes residing in Scotland, sometimes at the Grantley residence. George and Caroline communicated through intermediaries when they were combative or directly when they were cooperative. The dispute, while it centered on custody of the boys, also included matters concerning finances. Indeed, her legal situation with regard to the children was just the tip of the iceberg.

What happened between Caroline and George over the next two decades can best be described as another example of the absurdity of British marital law. After Caroline left, George took possession of her clothing and personal belongings and would not return them to her. Furthermore, he advertised in the London papers that he was no longer responsible for her debts. Despite his public notices in 1836, 1837 and again in 1838, her creditors billed him for her debts and in 1838 took him to court. Meanwhile, Caroline continued to incur debts in her husband's name because any income she had before and after the separation went legally to George. Due to these perpetual financial disagreements, Caroline's economic situation remained precarious throughout her life.

From 1836 until 1842, Caroline saw the boys intermittently, the meetings arranged according to George's whims. Even after the passage of the Infant Custody Bill 1839, she was denied visitation or custody rights because George had moved the children to Scotland, out of the jurisdiction of English law. Caroline's contemporaries and biographers agree that she suffered greatly from the loss. She complained of the care they received from the Nortons, a concern which was not unfounded, for in 1842, William, the youngest at eight, died of untreated complications from an accident. Caroline was not notified until it was too late for her to reach him before he died. It was only after William's death that she and George worked out an equal custody arrangement and not until 1848 did they reach a financial agreement.

The last of George's major abuses occurred in 1853, five years after she had signed a deed of separation (not legally approved) with him that guaranteed her an annual income. This controversy arose after the deaths of Caroline's mother and Lord Melbourne, both of whom left her legacies. Upon learning of her additional income, George refused to pay her the allowance, stating that he was not legally bound by the contract they signed in 1848 because a husband cannot contract with his wife. The court decided in George's favor, not upon the contract issue, but upon a technicality. Consequently, after a public quarrel in the newspapers, Caroline wrote English Laws for Women and A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill to advocate for divorce reform. The bill passed and George restored Caroline's allowance shortly before the Bill would have required him to do so.

From 1827 to 1875, the year George died, Caroline and he fought, constantly jockeying for power and control in the relationship. George perceived Caroline as threatening his male superiority. She published and earned money from at least 1829; she enlisted and garnered her family's and other's support for her causes; she charmed and influenced prime ministers and policy-makers. To compensate for his perceived loss of power, he resorted to physical violence. Once he was no longer able to control her with violence, he devised other ways to harass her, to direct her actions. These methods, using the children and economic deprivation, caused Caroline much anxiety and worry, yet she never acceded to his will. Only George's death freed her from the indissoluble bond.

Throughout her life, Caroline's writing is permeated with the theme of domestic violence. She mentions the subordination of married women in her poem "Marriage and Love" in her first book of poetry (The Sorrows of Rosalie) published in 1829. The protagonist, Laura, marries into the peerage because her mother insists:

But Laura's lord was not what lords should be;--
Cold, harsh, unfeeling, proud, alas! was he--
And yet a very fool--had he been stern,
She would have tried the tyrant's will to learn--
Had he been passionate, she still had loved--
Or Jealous, time her virtue would have proved;
But, as he was, without a soul or mind
Too savage e'en to be in seeming kind--
The slave of petty feelings, every hour
He changed his will to show he had the power;
And Laura wept, that she had linked her fate
With one too cold to love, too mean to hate. (118-19)

Written within two years after Caroline herself "had linked her fate / With one too cold to love, too mean to hate," she portrays a husband not much different from her own.

George was often “cold, harsh, unfeeling, proud,” and a “very fool,” characteristics which made him “The slave of petty feelings, every hour / He changed his will to show he had the power.” In defiance of the sense and intelligence of his accomplished wife, George banked on his right as a husband in this patriarchal system to assert his power, a system which gave him permission to conveniently change the rules when he wished.

Caroline was not only aware of the abuser's faults, but she also understood the power dynamics. “[H]e had the power, the past tense suggesting that his ascendancy will end. By the conclusion of Marriage and Love Laura has escaped the Lord's power by propitiously eloping with her cousin, Francis. Unfortunately, this escapade results in guilt and sorrow all around and Laura dies in misery, leaving the reader with the notion that one cannot escape abusive men by attaching oneself to illicit lovers, a lesson Caroline conveyed to her audience again in Stuart of Dunleath.

After the publication of another collection of poetry in 1830, Caroline began editing annual gift books, one of which was La Belle Assemblée or Court and Fashionable Magazine. In April, 1832, she included one of her own short stories called “Leaves of a Life; or, The Templar's Tale” under her pseudonym C***y. Alan Chedzoy describes it as a “tale of courtship, marriage and domestic violence very close to her own experience” (89). He speculates that “The Templar's Tale” was conceived because “the scrapbooks took up an increasing amount of Caroline's time in the early 1830s and the discipline of providing matter for them became an increasingly arduous one. Sometimes, she was so short of material that she dashed off stories which were barely disguised bits of autobiography” (89). It seems likely that the overriding consternation of living in an

abusive fueled her imagination, for the tale, filled with the symbols of domestic violence, exploits the drama inherent in the psychology of the batterer. Since Caroline's purpose for this kind of work, her annual gift books, was to sell copies, she could use her unhealthy marriage as fodder for her income. Unarguably, naming the violence to make money suggests many motives on Caroline's part, besides financial. Wall's and Wollstonecraft's stories show that the retelling, whether in autobiography or fiction, helps the survivor organize her thoughts into a cohesive narrative, narratives which attempted to justify her actions on Wall's part and to build Wollstonecraft's theory. Revenge, too, may have been a part of Norton's conscious or unconscious plan. Even though George had superior physical strength and a monolithic legal system at his disposal, Caroline had a quick tongue and a fluent pen. However complex Caroline's motives, her chief aim was to regain control of the situation. By exploiting her life in this manner, Caroline gained independence, self-reliance, and self-esteem. Of no small consideration is the fact that this type of fictional revelation posed little danger to her social position and reputation. Early in her career, these "barely disguised bits of autobiography," published under a pseudonym, would hardly be recognizable. Later, she defied all gossip and used her own experience for political gain.

The narrator of "The Templar's Tale," Dudley De Vere begins his story with a fortuitous catch. While visiting a strange village on business, he attends a church service where he notices a young girl fainting. He instantly springs to catch her before she strikes the floor. As she lies lifeless and pale in his arms, De Vere gazes upon her, describing her as a faintly sexualized angel. Her hair, "a mass of ringlets, of the brightest

auburn, fell wildly . . . displaying a countenance colourless as death, but pure as an angel's" (153), a "seraphic" face (154). Other angelic adjectives which enliven his description, "fair," "pale," "delicately-developed," "softly-modelled," contrast sharply with the sexually-charged observations of a "slender and budding figure" (153). Upon her recovering consciousness, De Vere notices "the rich stream of life [that] flowed into her lip, deepening it to the ruby" (154). Norton's language artfully conveys the passionate De Vere's image of innocence and passivity, two appropriate attributes for a potential abuser's gaze.

From then, De Vere is "haunted by the vision of the unknown girl" (154) and, again fortuitously, becomes reacquainted with her two years later in London, a circumstance reminiscent of George Norton's reappearance in Caroline's life. De Vere commences his courtship and is soon recognized as her lover. However, De Vere is haunted not only by Lucia, but also by jealousy: "The slightest tone or look, a passing expression of admiration, or a general remark, nay, even the common etiquette of society was sufficient to arouse my distorted imagination" (156). Soon, he becomes hyper-conscious of a visitor, Colonel Etherington, to Lucia's father's home. After a quarrel at a ball, in which De Vere calls Etherington a villain, the two men meet for a duel. Lucia intercedes, fainting as she interposes herself between the two defenders. They interrupt their duel, united in their concern. To De Vere's short-lived relief, Etherington fades into the background until De Vere finds Lucia cooing over a canary which Etherington had given her. De Vere describes what he saw and felt:

Expanding its pale topaz wings, the bird endeavoured to reach her mouth with its ivory bill; she playfully put it back, and an air of seriousness gradually stole over her countenance as she regarded it: I noted it, and felt the uncoiling of the adder around my heart. "She is thinking of him," I mentally exclaimed; "by all that's merciful she is ! or why that abstracted mien? why that pensive tenderness? an irrational object *cannot* call it forth; no, no, 'tis plain her thoughts are his. His!" . . . A demon possessed me, and I shook with suppressed emotion, . . . and taking the unfortunate little songster from the hand of its mistress, I twisted its neck with an impulse of malevolence which I could not possibly restrain. The deed was of the instant, and the ill-fated bird fell lifeless upon the floor. ("Templar's Tale"159)

The imagery is worth exploring at length for this is another moment in a domestic violence narrative rich with symbolism. First, only the male canary sings, so its murder suggests that the abuser is jealous of another male; in Lucia's case, the canary is a gift from another man. Obviously, De Vere wishes to eradicate the other man and all reminders of him. Second, the caged bird is a common metaphor for women's lives. De Vere's destruction of the canary foretells the way he will kill Lucia in a marriage. Third, the destruction of something so valuable to the victim, something she owns and over whom she has power, indicates the abuser's wish to eliminate any powers she may have. The fact that Lucia can accept and keep such a gift without De Vere's approval augments and fuels his anger and possessiveness. The victim is punished for having power over something else.

The significance of Norton's bird imagery does not end with this episode. Birds are found throughout her work and call to mind other birds in women's literature. Birds of prey populate Norton's novels Stuart of Dunleath and Lost and Saved. In these works, the abusers are compared to the predators of the species. Furthermore, Lucia's canary's

death closely resembles the death of Mrs. Wright's canary in Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" (or the short story "A Jury of Her Peers"). It is intriguing to note that both Norton and Glaspell use canaries as the object of the abuser's anger.

The canary's death confirms a theme which we've noticed before: the abuser's tendency to destroy that which is valuable to the victim in an attempt to intimidate her. Abusers will destroy those very things that the victims find necessary for survival or that are precious or of sentimental value. From English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century, we know that Caroline was no stranger to this form of intimidation.

On another occasion, when I was writing to my mother, Mr. Norton (who was sipping spirits and water, while he smoked his cigar) said he was sure "from the expression of my countenance," that I was "complaining." I answered, that "I seldom could do anything else." Irritated by the reply, Mr. Norton said I should not write at all, and tore the letter up. I took another sheet of paper, and recommenced. After watching and smoking for a few minutes, he rose, took one of the allumettes I had placed for his cigar, lit it, poured some of the spirits that stood by him over my writing book, and, in a moment, set the whole in a blaze. But Mr. Norton vouchsafed no other notice of my alarm, than that it would "teach me not to brave him." (33)

By destroying Caroline's letter to her mother, George tries to destroy her ties to her family and isolate her from other means of tangible and intangible support. This episode has certain elements which echo the earlier Ann Wall's autobiography when she reported Mr. Wall stole and destroyed Mrs. Wall's possessions, many given to her by her father. Abusers desire to eradicate all other influences in their victim's lives, even if the influence is as harmless as a canary. Again, Caroline seems to report accurately her contributions to the dispute, faithfully recording her witty response to George's observation. She continues to resist the domination George desired so desperately.

“The Templar’s Tale” ends with Lucia’s father’s intervention which decidedly ends her relationship with De Vere and in De Vere’s eternal remorse for his actions. This happy ending causes Chedzoy to characterize “The Templar’s Tale” a “wish-fulfillment” (90) for two reasons. Chedzoy argues that Norton would have liked to have had a father who would have prevented her marrying an abuser in the first place. Equally important, he believes that Norton would have liked to have had a remorseful, reformed abuser. I believe the tale is wish-fulfillment on a third level. By taking on the persona of the abuser, she selects episodes and portrays characters which would make sense to a battered woman. She ascribes motivations to the abuser, establishes causal relationships, and most importantly, ends his abuses.

“The Templar’s Tale” was Caroline’s wish to tell George’s story, her wish to understand her husband’s abusive behavior, true wish-fulfillment from a battered woman’s point of view. De Vere’s energy, depth, and complexity are qualities which the biographers have failed to attribute to George Norton. Instead, George is depicted in most biographies as a spineless, loutish, buffoonish, drunk. Chedzoy describes George’s

chief characteristics as pride and lethargy . . . conscious that he was doing the stooping [in proposing to the undowered, untitled Caroline Sheridan]. . . But he was determined to have her, however long it took. His was a vegetable sensuality. He never condescended to be urgently enthusiastic about anything. He was always slow-moving; even at school they had called him ‘the late George Norton’. (35)

Several of Caroline’s biographers agree with Chedzoy. Jane Gray Perkins pictures George as a “dangerous mixture which is often found in dull natures, weak but excessively obstinate and suspicious when he thought he was being led, narrow-spirited,

intolerant, slow-witted, yet not silent” (14). Alice Acland portrays him as “slow, complacent, weak and obstinate. He was also mean about money” (33). Yet, Caroline's fictitious George, Dudley De Vere, and the original shared the same kind of obsessive love, a quality which some women find attractive at first. Caroline will have more to say about men's obsessions later in her career in her Stuart of Dunleath.

For the battered woman's wish-fulfillment, Caroline Norton selects people and experiences from her own life and orders them to illustrate her purpose. She attributes thoughts and motivations to the abuser which further her and her readers' understanding of domestic violence. These motivations show the obsessive reasonings which spark the violent behavior. In a battered women's narrative, this ability to show direct cause and effect persuades readers that they can control the abuse. Once privy to the causes, they think that they stand a better chance of preventing violent attacks. Armed with this kind of knowledge, Norton and her readers believe they have a better chance of survival. The final coup de grace, of course, is the batterer's perpetual remorse, an emotion which is all the more plausible because the readers have already been convinced that De Vere has a sensitive and delicate soul. Thus, Norton's art creates the myth of the abuser.

With George transformed into Dudley De Vere, it is only natural to assume that Lucia is Caroline herself. Constructing Lucia as the object of an obsessive love, Caroline absolves her of any responsibility for the abuser's violence. This is the way Caroline wished the world to view her situation as well. She, too, was the victim of George's wild, obsessive moments. But the similarities end here, for what becomes evident from English Laws for Women is that Caroline fought back. She did not cave in to the

“perpetual wrangling” and might have been charged with contributing to it. Her witty responses to George's patriarchal bravado indicate that she could win any verbal swordplay with him. If he were really as dull and slow-witted as the biographers imply, he must have resented her quick thinking and seethed with a sense his own inferiority and the injustice of having an intelligent wife.

In 1851, fifteen years after her separation from George and the loss of her children, Caroline Norton published her first novel dealing exclusively with domestic abuses. Norton had published The Wife and Woman's Reward in 1835 before she escaped the marriage and though some of the characters in these novels are certainly abusive, the dynamics of domestic violence were not as well defined as in Stuart of Dunleath: A Story of Modern Times. The heroines of these two earlier novels, one the sister of a dissipated cad and the other an unprincipled flirt, are plagued by oppressions, but not by the systematic abuses which accompany domestic violence in Dunleath.

Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt argues that Norton's novels concern two central themes, “the motifs of manipulation and pride of property (ownership motif). In most cases, the individuals being manipulated and the property being owned are women” (28). These dynamics and the ramifications for abused wives resound through the pages of Dunleath. Caroline's subject matter demands that the reader examine her own life in the context of the novel for so many of the episodes in the novel, while highly dramatized, may be traced to her own experiences. She uses her fiction as Wollstonecraft did, as a non-threatening way to express her views of life, a way to further her understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, and a way to earn a living.

The heroine of Stuart of Dunleath is a young girl who, left in custody of her frail, invalid, and sorrowfully inept mother, is remanded to the guardianship of her recently deceased father's male secretary, David Stuart. Eleanor Raymond, the bright, rich, and beautiful heroine, quickly adopts Stuart as a friend and teacher. Mysteriously characterized as a despondent yet compassionate guardian, he takes up residence with Eleanor and her mother to provide Eleanor an education.

The appearance of Godfrey Marsden, Eleanor's half-brother and favored son of Lady Raymond from her first marriage to a military man, Captain Marsden, soon disrupts this seemingly idyllic household arrangement. Apparently Godfrey, also in the military, is much like his father, a man whose

temper was stern, imperious, and irritable; he had a constitution of iron, revered punctuality, and had a secret (and very unsailor-like) contempt for women in general, and for fragile and helpless women in particular. He desired to find in his wife the qualities he valued in his crew--activity and obedience; as his home, the exact order which is observed on board a man-of-war. (6-7)

These military misogynists are familiar to readers of domestic violence tales. Captain Marsden and his son, Godfrey, mirror Wollstonecraft's Maria's father, also a Captain, whom Wollstonecraft describes as authoritarian, irascible, and intolerant. Likewise, Lady Raymond's preference for Godfrey replicates the favor Maria's mother and father showed their eldest son. For example, Lady Raymond "did not imagine herself the mother of a seraph, but she certainly thought human perfection had reached its acme, in the good-looking, stern, square-shouldered young officer she had the happiness to call her son. What he said was law" (13). While these military men were not physical abusers, per se,

they did torment the women around them with their strict patriarchal, hierarchical, and militaristic code of conduct. Within the domestic violence narrative, they represent the effects of the exclusive men's world which restricts women to second-class status.

Wollstonecraft and Norton were quick to point out that these military behaviors contrasted to the gentleness, indeed the gentlemanly, behavior of such men as David Stuart and Henry Darnford. In Dunleath, Stuart and Marsden the younger soon argue over Eleanor's education, Marsden ridiculing "the notion of a man educating a girl" (14). Clearly, Godfrey Marsden does not believe that men should be like Locke's "nursing father."

David Stuart prevails and continues his residence in Lady Raymond's house as Eleanor's tutor, guardian, mentor, and companion until her successful introduction to society through the machinations of a chaperon, Lady Margaret Fordyce. One of Eleanor's admirers takes notice of her after a most unlikely introduction in a scene which echoes Norton's life and "The Templar's Tale." While Eleanor and others are riding in London, her dog, Ruellach, a gift from Stuart, chases and fights another dog. The other dog's owner quickly dismounts from his horse, takes a riding-whip to Eleanor's animal and slashes him unmercifully until one of Eleanor's party intervenes. This scene is dynamically very similar to the wringing of the canary's neck in Norton's short story.

Sir Stephen Penrhyn, the dog-beater, like his predecessors George Norton and Dudley De Vere, becomes instantly obsessed with Eleanor.

From that day forth [the "dog day"] Sir Stephen Penrhyn haunted Eleanor Raymond like her shadow. He had never seen her before. He did not belong to the "smart set" of London society; he had not cared to belong to

it. But now every one who gave or procured for him invitations which insured his meeting Miss Raymond, commanded his gratitude; and as he had the reputation of being very rich, people were glad to oblige him. He got up late, to begin the day as near as possible to the hour when he might see her. He called incessantly; he paid Ruellach the most devoted attention; he lingered in the park even when Eleanor was riding and occupied with others, till he saw her leave it. He ate his dinner in a sort of dream, as something done to fill up a gap of time in which he could not be in her society. (32)

Sir Stephen's obsession and desire to marry Eleanor outlasts the news that she is no longer an heiress. Learning that David Stuart has squandered her legacy and committed suicide dumbfounds Eleanor (for she secretly has loved him) and dismays Marsden and others (for they feared Eleanor's marriage-market value would be compromised). Sir Stephen is not put off.

Norton's ability to characterize Sir Stephen's fixation on Eleanor is worth recounting at length because it conveys the full sense of his possessiveness and demonstrates Norton's sense of the batterer's psychology.

Perhaps no better explanation can be given of the nature of Sir Stephen's attachment than the fact, that it was a secondary consideration with him whether Eleanor seemed "in love," or not, so long as she accepted him. Let the marriage take place; that was the boundary of his requisition. If Stuart had died on the gallows--if he had died on the rack--what was that to Sir Stephen? The event, as he truly said, made no change in his sentiments. Her fortune was gone; very well; his was not; he had still eighteen thousand a year and his prospects. Give her to him. Don't make circumstances seem obstacles that were in fact facilities. Give him this beggared beauty; he wanted her, not her fortune. Give her to him, there, now; under what conditions they pleased; settlements, or no settlements; debts, or no debts; love, or no love, Of course, he would be glad to inspire her with affection, if he could; but if not still let her be his--his, dressed like other brides, in smiles and blushes, or choked in sobs and mourning; HIS at all hazards! His passion for her was as a bird of prey, swooping down to seize her in its talons. Hope, tenderness, courtship,

delay, were as little present in his thoughts, as in the hawk that sweeps its circle and drops through the air. (46)

The bird of prey leitmotif intensifies Norton's description of Sir Stephen and calls to mind the other manifestations of birds in Norton's writing: the canary killer, De Vere, and the opportunistic Traherne in Lost and Saved. Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt attributes these images in the novels to the pride of ownership theme spiraling through Norton's work; she likens Sir Stephen's "eventual achievement of Eleanor Raymond [to] at last procuring a fine steed, something in which he can take pride of ownership" (32). Acquiring women is to the Victorian gentleman what acquiring sustenance is to the instinctual and primitive raptor.

In addition to the repeated themes, Norton's language strikes powerful chords, resonating with repetition and sophisticated rhetorical devices. The pounding rhythm of Sir Stephen's thoughts--"Give her to him . . . Give him his beggared beauty . . . Give her to him"-- and the alliterative "swooping down to seize her" underscore the single-minded passion which fuels an abuser's motives. Norton's psychological portrait of the man who needs to possess his mate reveals something uncannily similar between Sir Stephen and George Norton. George, too, was obsessed with Caroline before he finally possessed her. Plainly, Norton knew of whom she wrote literally and figuratively.

Norton does not let Sir Stephen's psychological portrait go without commentary, one of many asides which intersperse her authorial voice into the narrative. She warns women against this seemingly powerful obsession, an obsession which charms the woman who believes she has inspired an incendiary, long-lasting love from her admirers:

There are women who think it sublime to be loved with this sort of passion; who are proud of inspiring it. The sublime of sensuality! It is a love, which when the sum is cast up, and the loss and gain balanced, can be effaced as easily as the figures on a child's slate. It is a love which retains no memory of the past, and gives no hold over the future. Many a poor village girl has lived to learn its worth; and marveled in the simple-heartedness of her despair, how it was that tears and prayers failed to move one who seemed so ready to lay down life for her smile; how it was that the same man who was well-nigh shooting himself for her sake, could almost see her drown herself with indifference. "He loved me once--how can he be so hard with me now?" Poor little sorrowful fool, he never loved you; he loved himself. Love is pitiful, and prone to sacrifice. Look back, and see who made those sacrifices. You did. Now, dig for pity in that sterile heart, and find the soil--hot sand! (46)

From experience, Norton learned that the obsessive qualities of a predatory lover are no more than a wish to conquer the a woman. Once inextricably entangled in marriage or motherhood, the prey learns she no longer has the control she once had to inflame the romantic passions of the predator nor can she count on his continuing affection. She sacrifices her limited freedom of choice to a man who no longer channels his passion into charming her but into confining her. Norton knew only too well the "hot sand" of George's "sterile heart" and the chilling conjugal realities which supersede the romantic notions of a young bride.

Eleanor does marry Sir Stephen, even though "she [feels], she knew not why, a sort of horror of that strength of which Sir Stephen was so proud. There was something terrible and repulsive to her in the savage fondness of his locked embrace--in the wild eagerness of his anxious eyes" (47). As a bride, she is relocated to Sir Stephen's isolated Scottish estate under the watchful eyes of his sister, Lady MacFarren, who appears to be a fictionalized version of George Norton's cousin, Margaret Vaughn. Lady MacFarren

undermines Eleanor Raymond Penrhyn, sabotaging Eleanor's relationship with her husband with tales of infidelity and disobedience, insisting that Eleanor has always been poor and the fanciful story of David Stuart's ruin of the estate was concocted to trap Sir Stephen. These insinuations are even more disheartening to Eleanor because Sir Stephen does not protect his young bride from the vicious attacks. He admonishes Eleanor to get along with his sister, no matter what kind of insolence Lady MacFarren manufactures.

The residents of the lodge at the castle gates are a mystery who greet Eleanor at the isolated Penrhyn Castle. Upon their arrival, Sir Stephen and his new bride are met by unusual gatekeepers, a "beautiful young woman, followed by a handsome robust child of three or four" (55); the woman reluctantly unlocks the gates before she bursts into tears. Sir Stephen angrily jumps out of the carriage, grabs the woman by the arm, and speaks to her "first, apparently in the way of menace; then arguing with her; then, as she [continues] to sob without answering, he [releases] her arm, and [lays] his hand as if soothingly upon it" (56). The child, left standing by the gates, angrily responds to Sir Stephen's behavior by flinging the man's proffered coin back to him. When Eleanor pleads to help the woman, Sir Stephen emits "a torrent of mad, furious oaths" observing "that women are the d---dest fools in creation" (56); whereupon, noticing he has upset her, he instantly apologizes for his wrathful actions.

Eleanor, reminded of earlier episodes of Sir Stephen's uncontrolled temper immediately followed by complete peace, is haunted by the strange woman at the gate who resists her attempts to be friendly. The observant reader soon realizes that this woman, Bridget Owen, has a history with Sir Stephen and suspects his explanation that

an errant tenant who has been deported left Bridget and her child in his care. Finally, after years, Eleanor realizes that the child is Sir Stephen's, yet she never confronts him, silently keeping the secret that her husband's mistress is living within the castle walls. The combination of Sir Stephen's tempestuous mood swings and the other woman's presence serve to confound Eleanor, creating an environment which distorts reality. Unprepared to deal with infidelity and inconsistency, in a world where lies and secrets prevail over honesty, truth, and security, Eleanor is faced with a psychological crisis. Her touchstones, David Stuart and Lady Margaret, are gone and her mother is as ineffectual as usual. Confronted with this affront to her beliefs, Eleanor is left without a sense of self. Sir Stephen has successfully reduced his victim to the point that she is unable to resist him. Norton adeptly compiles a list of abusive behaviors which alter the battered woman, mysteries which confuse her understanding of reality and contribute to a sense of worthlessness and helplessness.

Meanwhile "Penrhyn Castle [is] lone, and gray, and gaunt; Sir Stephen [is] violent and capricious; Lady Raymond [Eleanor's ineffectual mother who now lives with the couple] low-spirited and ill; and Eleanor [relapses] into dejection" (56). There is, of course, a Gothic quality to Eleanor's plight, a quality that these early domestic violence narratives exploit to engender a sense of apprehension and eeriness in the reader. The Gothic effectively conveys the barbaric mystery, magic, and chivalry synonymous with the domestic violence experience. The mystery exudes from the unknown forces of the abuser, the magic from the survivor's ability to weather such inexplicable behaviors, and the chivalry from a rescuer, in this case David Stuart.

The birth of twin sons lifts Eleanor's dejection and presents Norton with an opportunity to editorialize upon the sanctity of motherhood. Since Eleanor married Sir Stephen without loving him and has found little reason to love him thereafter, she discovers objects worthy of her undivided devotion in her children. As proof of the elation which Eleanor now finds in her life, Norton elaborately describes the "sacred happiness" of children and the joy of motherhood: "Idiots are they, who in family quarrels seek to punish the mother by parting her from her offspring; for in that blasphemy against nature they do violence to God's own decrees, and lift away from her heart the consecrated instruments of His power" (58). Fifteen years after George stole her children she is still damning him for violating natural and Christian laws, still recalling the pain and torment he put her through, still calling for justice with this fictional passage which replicates her own situation. She also calls to mind the way that children can be used to manipulate abused women by exalting motherhood as the price one pays for living with an abuser. The threat of the loss of the children, of which Norton's own situation is a prime example, keeps many women locked in their debilitating marriages. Norton reasons that the sanctity of motherhood is inviolate, one of "God's own decrees," a notion to which many, men and women, past and present, use to their advantage. Motherhood is so powerful, she asserts, that the mother's rights to the children displace those of the father.

Besides the separation from their children, battered women have other reasons to fear an abuser's exclusive custody. Caroline loathed relinquishing control of their children because she feared George's direct or indirect violent influence on the children.

As direct victims of their father's abusive behavior, children may become the targets for their father's anger. Indirectly, the abuser instills oppressive principles into the children's education.

Caroline fictionalized the battle of influences in Dunleath. The education of the Penrhyn children becomes an important arena in which power and control dynamics are negotiated, mimicking, of course, the Nortons. Eleanor's ideas about parenting diverge from those of her husband and his sister. Norton contrasts the Penrhyn approach (flogging, boarding schools) to the gentle, humane way Eleanor is educated by David Stuart. Even daily outings become a point of contention when Sir Stephen demands the boys' presence with him notwithstanding the fact that Eleanor thinks the activities are too rough for her favorite, the frail, sickly child, Clephane. Sir Stephen gruffly replies that she makes "a girl and bookworm of the boy . . . the boy must begin some time or other to do like other boys" (63). By way of Sir Stephen, Norton acknowledges that abusive fathers reinforce sex role stereotypes which degrade girls and boys who act like girls. Clearly, Norton disagrees with this view, by putting the words in the mouth of the villain, Sir Stephen. Furthermore, Sir Stephen's statement has an anti-intellectual ring, another of Norton's subtle indictments against patriarchal methods of education.

Other abuses which Eleanor endures also spring from Norton's own life. Sir Stephen's insistence upon the boys' pursuance of manly sports results in their deaths in a drowning accident. Sir Stephen tries to save the stronger of the boys, leaving the fragile Clephane in the sinking boat. Clephane encourages his father to save his twin, Frederick (the father's favorite) while reciting the Lord's Prayer, a sentimental touch which mirrors

the death of Norton's son, William, where he reportedly prayed with his father, conscious until the last moment. Norton blamed George for William's death just as Eleanor blamed Sir Stephen for Clephane and Frederick's deaths; mothers' rights are upheld.

Kidnapping and deaths, losses which mothers hope they will never endure, compound the torment battered wives must survive in fact and fiction. As a veteran of such losses, Norton observes, "If any one had told Eleanor that she would have survived her children's death, she would not have believed the prophecy. None of us know what we can live past, till we have proved it" (71). Norton proved she could live past the death of a son and use his untimely demise as fuel for her fire of indignation against men like George Norton and Sir Stephen Penrhyn.

Norton amplifies Eleanor's misfortune by inserting a scene in which Eleanor secretly witnesses Sir Stephen confiding to his paramour, Bridget Owen, his sorrow at the deaths of his sons. To Eleanor's horror, Sir Stephen admits to Bridget that he might have withstood the loss of Eleanor's favorite, Clephane: "But that Frederick should go!--such a strong hearty, merry little fellow! Oh! my boy--oh! my Fred!" (73). Eleanor stands spellbound, watching Bridget comfort the shaken man, as he curses the day he fathered the twins and wishes that he could make Bridget and her son the rightful heirs of Penrhyn Castle. This scene affords Norton the opportunity to comment upon the forces that paralyze the abused woman:

Many young wives will say, Why did Eleanor bear this? They are very fond of saying: "Oh! if my husband were to strike me, I would leave him that moment." "If my husband were false to me, I would not remain under the shadow of his roof." But the question sometimes is, under the shadow of what other roof they are to sit; since they can not pitch a Bedouin tent in

the world's desert, nor cross their own thresholds to climb up the door-step of other peoples' houses. They must have friends, home, money, a protection of some sort, somewhere to go to. Eleanor had none of these things. (73)

Graphically, Norton enumerates the true situation of many battered women who, lacking any outside resources, must submit to the fate imposed by their husbands. The woman who is friendless, homeless, and moneyless because all of her energies and resources have been invested, either by choice or force, in her husband, soon finds herself in the caged-bird scenario.

Yet, Norton's sympathies are ambiguous, for she concludes by writing: "Perhaps it would be well for many a young wife in her anger--ay, even in her just, legitimate anger against the husband she was vowed to at the altar--if she had not other refuge to count upon, but was compelled, by the very force of friendless circumstance, to await the working out of God's will in her hard destiny, by her own fireside" (73). Norton's equivocation on such an important issue is complicated. The most simple explanation for this reactionary stance might be that she felt she had taken her views too far and needed to dilute them. At the same time, she might view her specific readers, the "young wives," in need of a repertoire of behaviors to combat the abusive forces of the husband. While leaving seems desirable, the woman's dependency upon others which such rootlessness brings is hardly an improvement upon her situation.

To no intelligent reader's surprise, David Stuart, disguised as an agent representing himself, returns to Britain to vindicate himself and make restitution for the money he had lost eight years earlier. Eleanor, who recognizes Mr. Lindsay as Stuart,

her guardian and secret love, keeps the stranger's identity hidden from her temporarily-absent husband and his sister. Lady MacFarren intuits something odd about Mr. Lindsay, notes the amount of time he spends with Eleanor, surmises they are having an affair, and encourages the absent Sir Stephen to return home. At first, the arrogant and presumptuous Sir Stephen does not believe his sister, nor admit that "a woman who[is] married to him, [is] to take upon with every lath-and-plaster fellow that [crosses] her path" (106).

The only strangeness Sir Stephen notices when Eleanor proposes buying David Stuart's old home, Dunleath Castle, with her newly restored inheritance is her ignorance about married women's legal position:

"G--d d--n it, how stupid women are in matters of business. Your fortune's mine; do you understand that?"

"The fortune my father left me."

"The fortune your father left you? No married woman has a fortune of her own, as you call it, that isn't specially settled upon her. There's no such settlement in your case, the money has fallen in and been replaced, that's all. I'm your husband, and it's mine."

"I do not understand."

"Oh! d--n it! confound it, I'm not going to spend the whole morning talking business with you. Every thing that's yours is mine. The clothes you have on, the chain round your neck, the rings on your fingers are mine. The law don't admit a married woman has a right to a farthing's worth of property. It can't be done. If you were robbed to-morrow, and chose to take it into court, the thief might be acquitted unless the loss were laid in my name; a man was acquitted in that way; because a married woman can't have money of her own, it's her husband's money." (92)

Sir Stephen's vivid appraisal of married women's financial predicaments is not exaggerated, and Norton capitalizes on this explicit reminder of Eleanor's dependency to show the effects of the nineteenth-century patriarchal totalitarian regime. Without

children, without money, without a considerate, loving husband, Eleanor is alienated from any meaningful existence. She is so non-existent that she cannot be violated by a thief.

Stuart's real identity is soon revealed and Sir Stephen begins to question Eleanor's deception. He confronts her:

[Sir Stephen] seized her arm with his right hand, he grasped her shoulder with his left, and he shook her as passionate nurses shake a rebellious child. Her bonnet fell off; the long braids of her beautiful hair were loosened; a wild, short, sharp cry escaped her, and when he relaxed his grasp at the sound, she staggered to the nearest chair, and dropped into it; her eyes fixed in speechless amazement and horror on his face.

"G--d d--n you, I wonder you are not ashamed to look at me," said he, fiercely, panting with anger and excitement; "I wonder you are not afraid for your life, by God, after your conduct toward me."

"Oh!" said Eleanor, with a bitterness and desperation which did not seem to belong to her nature, and in a tone as vehement, though not as loud as his own--"I am afraid of nothing--you can only kill me!" (106)

Suddenly, as soon as she explains why she kept Stuart's identity a secret, Sir Stephen calms down, apologizing for his roughness and asking for a kiss. The damage is done, however, for Eleanor's arm is broken. They collaborate on a cover-up, Sir Stephen minimizing the violence--"you must know, of course, Eleanor, that I did not break your arm on purpose"--and Eleanor concocting a story --" . . . Say to them," added she, after a pause, "that I slipped on the steps leading to the reading-room; it will account for this accident" (107).

There is much to be said about this incident. First, Sir Stephen's jealousy, his desire to possess and own Eleanor, has been forecast by allusions to his obsessive behavior. "Give her to me," Sir Stephen has intoned before the wedding and now that he

has her, he will be damned if anyone else will. Norton also alludes to Sir Stephen's strength and the horrible revulsion Eleanor has to it, insinuating that Eleanor lives in fear of the day she would feel its effects. Once the waiting is over, once he has broken her, psychologically in so many ways and now physically, Eleanor fears nothing in a sort of existential nothingness, which may precede a battered woman's suicide, an attempt on her husband's life, or an escape from the abusive situation. The battered woman arrives at a point when she feels she has nothing to lose and Eleanor is at that point. However, after he becomes contrite, conciliatory, Eleanor decides there is no harm in conspiring with his minimalization of the incident. "Oh! what does it signify?" she reasons. "Pray do not let us speak of it. When all's done, it's only a little agony more or less. What is a broken arm? I've seen children bear more than that patiently; I would not care if it were death" (107).

Again Norton indulges in some wish-fulfillment as she did in "The Templar's Tale." Sir Stephen agonizes over Eleanor's desire for death, suffers a sleepless night, is relieved by a blood-letting, and unlike Dudley De Vere, finds solace in Bridget's company.

Norton complicates Eleanor's escape from Sir Stephen's house by making her removal contingent upon an altercation between Stuart and Sir Stephen, implying that Eleanor leaves only after Stuart is present to rescue her. At the gates of the castle, outside the lodge, Stuart and Eleanor are confronted with the defiant young Owen, the son of Bridget and Sir Stephen, who will not unlock the gate and enrages Stuart with his highborn attitude. As Stuart threatens to whip the boy for insubordination, Sir Stephen

intervenes. The scene results in Sir Stephen's public announcement that Owen is his own son. To make matters worse, Sir Stephen arrogantly seats the boy at his own table that evening. Now Eleanor's position as the lady of the house is usurped by the revelation that she is not the mother of the next-recognized heir. She flees Penrhyn Castle after receiving a note from Stuart that he will arrange for her departure, lodgings, and divorce.

Once in London, Eleanor finds a divorce is not as easy as Stuart predicted. Because she failed to leave Sir Stephen when she first learned that he fathered a child by Bridget Owen, Eleanor's attorney insinuates that her "prior knowledge" might affect her present intent. "Prior knowledge" plagued Norton as well. Once the crim. con. case against Lord Melbourne had been decided, Norton consulted counsel about obtaining a divorce from George "by reason of cruelty." She reports, "I was then told that no divorce I could obtain would break my marriage; that I could not plead cruelty which I had forgiven; that by returning to Mr. Norton I had "condoned" all I complained of" (A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill 70). Likewise, Eleanor's attorney alludes to her remaining with Sir Stephen as a condonation of his behavior and implies by asking her whether David Stuart had foreknowledge of Sir Stephen's infidelities that Eleanor is now using the adultery when it most suits her to be free. She begins to see her situation as the world would see it and to question her reasons for leaving Sir Stephen. Norton cleverly arranges Eleanor's meditation upon the indissoluble bonds of marriage to further problematize the issue. In Eleanor's mind, she cannot divorce Sir Stephen because her reason for doing so is her love for David Stuart, but she cannot have David Stuart because she is married to Sir Stephen.

True, her husband was false to her; but his falsehood could not quit her of her vow. His sin was not to be balanced by her sin; even were it because of his sin, and not because of her own wild love, that she had forever forsaken the shelter of his house. (118)

In her paroxysms of moral and spiritual doubt, Eleanor falls to her knees in prayer begging God to “bring me back to Thee, though it be by a thorny path!” (119). Her “thorny path” is to remain separated from both Sir Stephen and Stuart, a decision which ostensibly has feminist overtones. Eleanor chooses a life of retirement with her half-brother, Godfrey, and his wife, rejecting the life of financial ease, male protection, and social acceptance which a husband might provide. Once free of male influence (except for Godfrey who remains formidable, judgmental, and angry), Eleanor is not happy, for Norton undercuts the brave, independent stance Eleanor takes by portraying her as miserable woman who dies soon after learning that her old friend Lady Margaret has married David Stuart. The fictional battered woman has no peace after escaping the horrors of her marriage. Nor did Norton herself.

Despite the implied message that women should “suffer and be still,” Norton did not. After Stuart of Dunleath, she went on to write her two most radical works: English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (1854) and A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill (1855). I find these works reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman for they vehemently take patriarchy to task. Granted, Norton's argument rests on the assumption that men should protect women:

The natural position of woman is inferiority to man. Amen! That is a thing of God's appointing, not man's devising. I believe it sincerely, as

part of my religion: and I accept it as a matter proved to my reason. I never pretended to the wild and ridiculous doctrine of equality. I will even hold that (as one coming under the general rule that the wife must be inferior to the husband), I occupy that position. Uxor fulget radiis Mariti: I am Mr. Norton's inferior; I am the clouded moon of that sun. Put me then--(my ambition extends no further)--in the same position as all his other inferiors! In that of his housekeeper, whom he could not libel with impunity, and without possible defence; of an apprentice whom he could not maltreat lawlessly, even if the boy "condoned" original ill-usage; of a scullion, whose wages he could not refuse on the plea that she is legally "non-existent"; of the day-labourer, with whom he would not argue that his signature to a contract is "worthless." Put me under some law of protection; and do not leave me to the mercy of one who has never shewn me mercy. For want of such a law of protection, all other protection has been vain! (A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill 98-99).

She doesn't challenge the age-old beliefs that women are inferior, but she does challenge the government and laws to protect women when their husbands don't. With distinct proof that the law will protect servants and employees who are abused by their masters, Norton asks only that the law give the wife the same respect. Nevertheless, the tone of Norton's tract is ambiguous. While admitting women's inferiority, she uses the language of a scholar and reasons as if she were a barrister, both professions limited exclusively to men. I find it difficult to believe that she truly saw herself as inferior to men, in particular the dull and slow George Norton.

Much has been made of Caroline Sheridan Norton's influence over her colleagues and over social reforms. It is said that an episode in her life was the basis for George Meredith's Diana of the Crossways; contemporary scholar Micael M. Clarke argues that she influenced William Thackeray to such an extent that he copied her in Barry Lyndon, Vanity Fair, and The Newcomes; Lee Holcombe asserts that Norton inspired Barbara

Leigh Smith and the "first public work for women's causes" in England (57). She was widely recognized as an activist for battered women. What has not been recognized is that she used the domestic violence narrative to transform British law and culture, and she transformed her life into the art of the narrative surpassing the achievements of her predecessors in this study.

Inherent in all domestic violence narratives is the implicit or explicit call for social change, because any published work assumes readers and an author's wish to impose another view of reality upon the audience. Ann Wall and Mary Wollstonecraft wrote their works because they had experienced a life of violence and desired a life without violence to women. Naming the violence empowers the author by expressing her reality upon the world; reading these words empowers the reader who finds that her experiences are not unique and unusual. We might view Norton's work as a hybrid of different styles and genres which had previously been employed to name the violence. Ann Wall whispered her complaints under an assumed name; Wollstonecraft wrote under her own name, but fictionalized the domestic violence tale. Norton, however, shouts of her abuses uninhibitedly. She began the process by fictionalizing her experience and telling her story under assumed names; however, by 1854, she was prepared to expose her whole life to public censure. Each time she spoke out, she got a little closer to the truth and ended by recounting her tale in the most factual and objective manner possible. She completed her repertoire of domestic violence tales by producing a case history or a legal deposition. Since she had access to the lawmakers and studied the law, her testimonial reads like a legal document because she is, in effect, testifying before these lawmakers.

Using her experience as a victim of abuse to emphasize the need not only for personal responses to the problem, but for social responses as well, Norton represents the first of many women whose voices began to influence public policy about violence against women. Incrementally, Caroline Norton built her domestic violence narrative upon pieces in various genres culminating in the autobiographical tract, English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century (1854).

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, Ruth Nadelhaft has asked if we can observe “over literary time, any developments or threads of development which indicate that literature treats the subject of domestic violence in changing ways ” (244). My answer is no.

First, it is obvious that as early as 1771 women were recognizing and naming the violence to the public despite overwhelming patriarchal disapproval. Ann Wall defied her father to expose the terrorism that existed in her home. Her autobiography testifies to the extreme tortures which reside behind closed doors. She broke the silence and confirmed that survival is possible. Her aim to “shew the World a Series of unparallelled Misfortunes, adorned only with the naked Beauty of Truth in as clear a Light as my weak Capacity will permit” (iii-iv) exemplifies the private confessional or testimonial aspects of the domestic violence narrative, a personal story for a limited audience. The modern equivalents of Wall’s narrative may be heard in a support group or read in one of the many recent chapbooks devoted to battered women’s stories or found on the Internet shrouded in anonymity.

Mary Wollstonecraft showed that domestic violence can happen to any woman at any time, not just women of the lower classes saddled by drunken louts. She realized that the power and control a man has over a woman is not just an isolated incident due to an unnatural personality. Instead, she demonstrates that a system of laws and social conventions keeps women bound in disastrous marriages who are at the mercy of unprincipled men. Furthermore, she implies that the collective effort of like-minded

women who survive domestic violence can end its reign. Lastly, she established that novels are the perfect vehicle for the domestic violence tale because of the literary requirements and their target audience. In one way, Wollstonecraft's novel anticipates current social science research where researchers weave their theories from the evidence of case studies. However, rather than limiting her audience to the few academicians and professionals who wade through such findings, Wollstonecraft entertains her readers with the period's predilection for Gothicism, romance, and melodrama. So, in reality, The Wrongs of Woman may be more closely akin to our popular novels describing domestic violence such as The Color Purple, Bastard out of Carolina, Bitterroot Landing, or even mass-market suspense thrillers like Stephen King's Rose Madder.

Caroline Norton presented evidence that not only the autobiography and the novel, but the short story can effectively tell the domestic violence narrative. She explored many of the same avenues as Wollstonecraft, emphasizing the pervasive nature of the problem. Norton's most important contribution to the evolution of the narrative is her ability to take the autobiographical aspects and turn them into an argument to change laws. Using the evidence of her life she effectively and logically dovetailed her abuses with the abuses of the legal system to show that the government sanctions domestic terrorism. In addition, Norton wrote under her own name without the veil of anonymity of the pretense of fiction to disguise her victimization. The modern equivalent of Caroline Norton's English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century may have been heard in the United States on Capitol Hill in the early 1990s when Senator Biden's bill, the Violence Against Women Act, was being debated in Congress. Scores of women

testified to the abuses of their husbands and the law in a successful campaign to raise awareness and money to fight domestic violence. Although Caroline Norton could not testify in any Congressional hearing, she added her voice to countless others who were naming the violence.

All together, Wall, Wollstonecraft, and Norton give a picture of domestic violence in literature which is not much different than today. They enumerate the same kind of abuses, the same kind of responses, and the same kind of resistance. They speak in voices similar to today's survivors and victims: timid, outraged, saddened, confused. They found, I hope, some degree of satisfaction, either monetary and/or personal, from telling their stories. They give hope to women who are still victimized.

Although these three authors have been presented in a chronological order which replicates progressive stages of empowerment, I do not wish to suggest that naming the violence is linear. In other words, once a woman has revealed her experiences, there is no guarantee that she will find a community of like-minded people with whom she can further her self-empowerment collectively supported by others. Or, if one finds a constituency of peers, there is no guarantee that social activism will follow. Furthermore, the process of empowerment demands that the most politically and socially aware person must sometimes return to the pain and misery of the oppression in order to remind herself of the reason for her activism. If this essay can prove one thing with certainty it is that the process of empowerment for individuals and groups is not linear, but recursive. Hence, in 1998, we find that we are still doing what women did in 1798.

Domestic violence has been, continues to be, and will be a constant theme in women's writing. Female authors, along with historians, literary critics, and sociologists, have created a representation of violence against women which resounds with similarities and differences. The future for all who wish to eliminate the problem is to listen to and believe in the domestic violence narrative.

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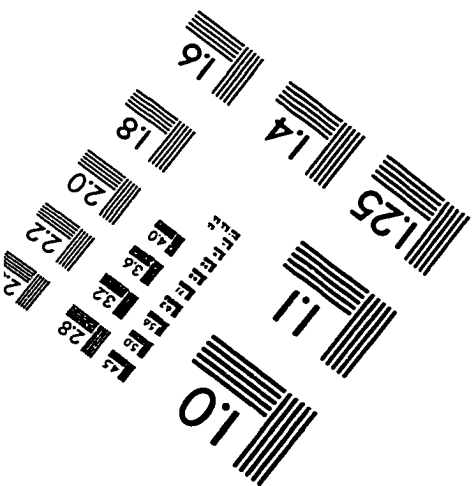
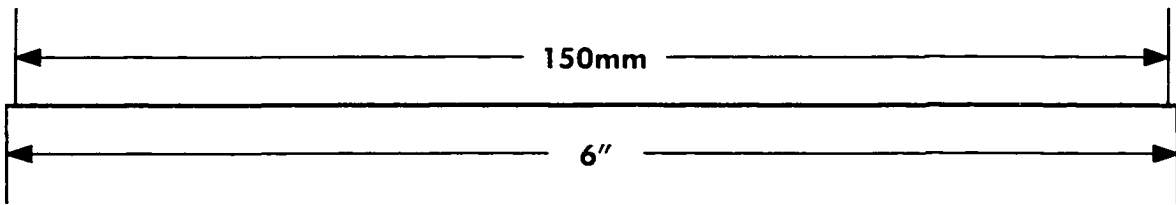
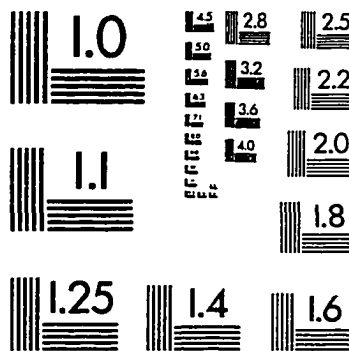
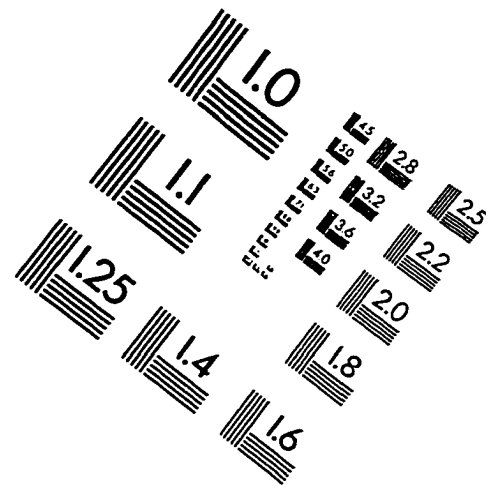
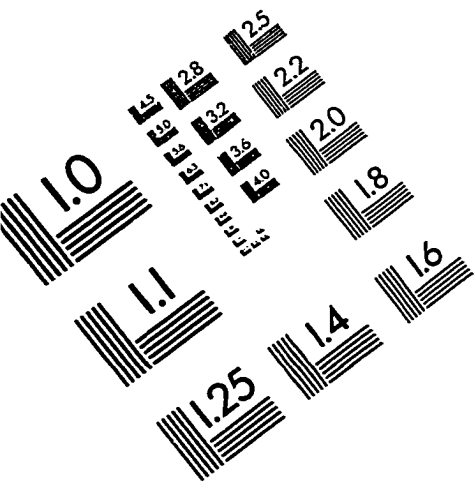
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