Introduction
Mary Wollstonecraft and Eighteenth-Century Political Economy

to commerce every thing must give way[1]

When Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was first published in 1792, it was classified by Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review* (a periodical to which she herself contributed regularly) as a work of political economy.[2] This book takes its cue from this original – and overlooked – categorisation, to explore the relationship between Wollstonecraft and the political economic thought of her time, both in the *Vindication* and throughout the varied body of writing produced by her over the course of an extraordinary, if brief, writing career which lasted from the late 1780s to her untimely death, ten days after childbirth, aged 38 in 1797. Since then, the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft's most well-known work, has been read in many ways – as a piece of political theory, as moral philosophical and religious writing, as a tract on education – and it is certainly all of these, and more. Little attempt has been made, however, to read it as a work of political economy, or to think seriously both about why it was so categorised, and what such a categorisation might mean for our understanding of Wollstonecraft's thinking and writing, both in this text and beyond. Relatively little attention has been paid to Wollstonecraft's relationship to the shifting and diverse body of thought named as 'political economy', even though Wollstonecraft was writing at a time when political economy and the nature and problems of commercial society were at the forefront of many radical writers' minds, and even though Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), was, along with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Catharine Macaulay, and the conduct writer John Gregory, one of the authorities with whom Wollstonecraft engages in the course of her work. Equally, Wollstonecraft's work as a whole has been approached through many of the disciplinary frames of the modern academy: literary criticism, intellectual history, the history of political thought, philosophy, feminist

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theory, and gender studies. Yet none of these fits her perfectly, able to do justice to the extraordinary range of her thinking and writing, or to provide an account of the recurring intellectual interests which, even across a markedly brief writing career, link Enlightenment philosophy and revolutionary politics, travel-writing and fiction, history writing, literary reviews, and an important essay on poetry. In particular, no existing monograph study on Wollstonecraft fully addresses what I argue in this book to be a crucial aspect of her intellectual formation: her persistent engagement, over the course of her career, with the emergent discourse of political economy, whose means of understanding and modelling human nature and human behaviour, as well as the relation of individuals to society and to morality, was becoming increasingly influential in the last decade of the eighteenth century, precisely the time of her writing.

What exactly was political economy in the last decade of the eighteenth century? Sylvana Tomaselli has observed that political economy in this period might address any of the following: money, bullion, national wealth, manufacturing, balance of trade, agriculture, consumption, population, war, taxation, tariffs, and levies. But equally, many of these were recurring concerns in policy debates which might be traced back to earlier periods: Tomaselli notes that the term 'political economy' was first coined in 1615 by Antoine de Montchrétien.[3] For Michel Foucault, eighteenth-century political economy was distinguished from an earlier 'classical analysis of wealth' by virtue of its innovative account of production, and the roles of the division of labour, capital, and the market.[4] Certainly, this period was one of self-consciously innovative thought addressing the area of human behaviour which we now identify as economic activity, but we need to be wary of retrospectively identifying eighteenth-century political economy through the language of present-day economics, a practice whose 'teleological straightjacket' can obscure the nature and specificity of the political economy of another time.[5] Descriptions of their endeavours by prominent thinkers in the field of eighteenth-century political economy are notable both for the capaciousness and ambition of what political economy might encompass and for the difference of its language from that of economics of today. At its heart was nothing less than understanding the shape and operation of society in its modern commercial form (and potentially also its reformation), and specifically how it met the needs, comforts, and even happiness of the population.[6] Here, then, was a project likely to interest Wollstonecraft, concerned as she is with the shape of human lives, and the limits on happiness, under the social conditions of commercial modernity.

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This 'science' of public happiness, as Anne Robert Jacques Turgot described it in a letter to Wollstonecraft's early mentor, Richard Price, included what we would recognise as economic concerns, but these were located within a broader field of political, moral, psychological, and historical study.[7] Tomaselli notes that Adam Smith's achievement, as the most notable political economic thinker of the age, took place within a set of questions which addressed 'substantial moral, political, historical, theological, psychological and epistemic issues' from which it should not be severed.[8] The context for such questions was the on-going attempt to understand what was perceived as the relatively novel, or emergent commercial society of the age, identified as quite distinct from older feudal models, or the slave-owning classical past. Commerce defined and shaped this modern present in ways which went far beyond its role in previous times: its growth was, Smith claimed in *The Wealth of Nations*, a 'revolution of the greatest importance to the publick happiness'.[9] Recognising this brought with it questions as to the best mode of political organisation for commercially oriented societies. Understanding commercial society also involved theorising human nature, its desires, motivations, and patterns of behaviour, and their cumulative expression and effects. It is for this reason that, above and beyond its particular modes of modelling economic activity, eighteenth-century political economy is understood as offering what Saree Makdisi describes as a 'narrative of organization': it was, as Clifford Siskin has noted, 'a primary site for the totalizing and rationalizing of the social', or (in James Thompson's words) 'the discourse that imagines or describes civil society and publicity'.[10] This perception that political economy provided the means for describing the lived conditions of commercial modernity is also present in words used by one of Smith's most astute contemporary readers, Thomas Pownall, former governor of Massachusetts, who welcomed *The Wealth of Nations* as offering above all else a 'system, that might fix some first principles in the most important of sciences, the knowledge of the human community'.[11] More than attending to matters of wealth production and financial administration, political economy can thus also be understood as the means by which the very nature of social existence and civil society in late eighteenth-century Britain was addressed and theorised. Here, this book claims, is the political economy with which Wollstonecraft engaged throughout her writing, in a struggle which included too, we shall see, an insistence that the very link between the organisation of wealth and its consequences for human lives was always in view.

If eighteenth-century political economy was a 'site for rationalizing the social', offering 'knowledge of the human community', our understanding

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of Wollstonecraft's engagement with it must recognise that she is involved in more than a critique of commerce or property ideology – although such moments in her writing are not difficult to identify. Equally, it is to do more than assert that her widely recognised political radicalism needs to be recognised as economic radicalism too. Certainly, such claims are part of what follows in the remaining chapters, but I am equally concerned to explore Wollstonecraft's engagement with late eighteenth-century political economic thought in its largest sense. I argue that Wollstonecraft's remarkably diverse body of work can be read as an ongoing effort to think through – and critique – the connected material, economic, moral, psychological, and social conditions of modern commercial contemporaneity. It thus constituted an early point of resistance to what political economy would very shortly become: a formalised, technical, and specialised science of wealth and finance detached from larger moral and political questions of human improvement and happiness. Engaging as she does with the writings and thought of Smith, Edmund Burke and others, precisely at the moment when certain political economic orthodoxies were forming, Wollstonecraft parries, counters, and debates, to offer political and moral critique of the world that commerce threatens to build, showing its human cost (not least to female lives), and arguing fiercely for alternative means of arriving at improvement, both at the individual and societal level, offering, further, an alternative vision of what improvement might indeed be.

Central to my argument is the recognition that, at the very time of Wollstonecraft's writing, during the political ferment of the revolutionary decade of the 1790s, political economy was itself in flux, as object of both political and discursive struggle. A 'protean' discourse, it was undergoing the various processes of organisation and systematisation by which a disciplinary field might be formed, but such processes took place under, and were marked by, all the pressures of a revolutionary age.[12] Thus, Dugald Stewart's heralding of Smith's achievement in this new 'science of politics' sought to defuse a charge of intellectual association with French revolutionaries by separating any potential political import of Smith's work from its economic doctrine.[13] This was a time of, on the one hand, increasing acceptance of Smith's work by a range of prominent politicians and thinkers, from Burke and William Pitt to Thomas Paine: evident, for instance, in its invocation in mid-1790s Parliamentary debates over poor relief. On the other hand, however, radical and revolutionary thinkers from many different perspectives were exploring ways of critiquing the increasing dominance of commerce in the 'marketplace' of society, and challenging political economy's accounts of human nature and behaviour, and

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of society and value. Such open debate was enabled by the lack of what Matthew Sangster has described as the 'professionalising discourses' which funnel texts to distinct, specialised audiences; yet, as he also notes, the state moved from the mid-1790s to close down sites of open, radical debate and dissent, a process which coincided with the increasing specialisation, and professionalisation, of political economic discussion.[14] One such site of non-disciplinary critique and dissent was Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review*, which ceased publishing in December 1798, following Johnson's prosecution for treason. The *Analytical Review* reviewed a remarkably wide range of publications under the heading of 'political economy', as we shall see in the next chapter, and as already noted, described Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication* as one such work of political economy.

The year after Wollstonecraft's premature death, in 1797, the publication of Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* marked a new phase of political economic thinking, which brought to the fore anxieties of resource capacity and population growth. Resistance to Malthus's perceivedly miserabilist arguments galvanised the opposition of many Romantic thinkers (including Robert Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Thomas Carlyle) to political economy's 'dead science'; the imagination, the aesthetic, and culture were mobilised to counter political economy's apparently spiritless utilitarianism in a schism fundamental to modern thought.[15] But Wollstonecraft, from whom later Romantic thinkers learned so much, was already insisting on the role and value of imagination, sympathy, taste, and feeling before that later moment. She mobilised their associated literary forms (as well as political and philosophical writing) to closely track and critique a 'science of politics and finance' which, unlike her Romantic successors, she also recognised as among the most important of contemporary knowledge endeavours, concerned as it was, in her words, with the 'most important end of society, the comfort and independence of the people'.[16] In this sense, Wollstonecraft can be seen as an early resistor of the separation of the 'political' from the 'economic', and of economic from aesthetic value.[17] This book argues that Wollstonecraft's writings offer a unique perspective on the radical dialogue with political economic thought in the early and mid-1790s, one which recognised the power and importance of its analysis of commercial society whilst insisting that virtue, reason, and liberty should be central to improvement in the modern age. Political economy's failures on these fronts drew her strongest critique. The following chapters thus illuminate the discursive contests between opposing moral, cultural, economic, and political positions in the period immediately prior to both the formalising

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of political economy as a technical and disciplinary practice, and the hardening of Romantic opposition to it.

This study considers the major writings in Wollstonecraft's oeuvre, published from 1788 to 1798, within this context, presenting her as a radical thinker and writer who engaged and critiqued political economic thought at this crucial moment of political and intellectual flux. Approaching Wollstonecraft from the direction of the political economy of her time offers new insights into her writing and thinking, illuminating how her work has been informed by areas of thought whose relationship to Wollstonecraft is currently under considered, and showing how she contributes, in ways not previously noted, to the debates of her time. Wollstonecraft is shown drawing from, but also critiquing, key elements of Scottish philosophy and yoking that into radical thought on education, gender, morality, human nature, and the property system of modern society. I read her as engaging both explicitly and implicitly with the writings on such topics by Smith, Rousseau, Burke, and others, and show how concern with the problems and corruptions of commercial society, and the effects of wealth on the human personality and relations, and a restless search for some alternative, recurs across her career in writings of varying genres.

Such a perspective offers a new way of understanding the arc of Wollstonecraft's writing career, as it moves from fiction, through philosophical, political, and historical writing, to meditative travel letters and a return to the novel form. In each genre, I show Wollstonecraft repeatedly revisiting and recasting her overriding preoccupations and testing the potential of the new perspective offered by changed literary form. In this, writing itself is shown to be a crucial resource for engaging with the rise of a new discursive formation or knowledge practice. At the same time, I show how we can avoid choosing between Wollstonecraft the Enlightenment philosopher and Wollstonecraft the Romantic writer, by demonstrating how she may be approached as a crucial bridging figure between these two historical moments, who, by the time of her premature death, was increasingly confidently exploiting the resources of literary writing to counter the depredations of the commercial age, and the political economic thought that accompanied it.

The account of eighteenth-century political economy outlined above – a science of politics, happiness, and community – encompassed political and social thought which addressed society as a whole. Alongside such areas as education, morality, and personal behaviour, then, gender concerns might be understood to be within its remit. This was certainly the case in Wollstonecraft's revolutionary approach. If this book seeks to trouble

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the disciplinary boundaries of our own day, by attending to the historical emergence of the knowledge practices which gave rise to modern disciplinarity, it also offers a new take on Wollstonecraft's feminism by situating it within the larger project addressed by the book. Wollstonecraft's thinking about the situation of women is thus consistently approached as an aspect of her analysis of commercial modernity, within which women occupy a particular place. Whilst the 'miserable state' of her sex exemplifies the problems and failings of commercial society, for Wollstonecraft, their very abject status also means that they are uniquely placed to enact the very revolution of manners against property and history to which she urges them. Her return to the question of the 'wrongs of woman' in her final, unfinished novel, which combines close attention to the material, economic, affective, and psychological conditions of female lives, illustrates her perception of the connection between female lives, literary fiction, and the economic wrongs of her age.

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One way to trace Wollstonecraft's relationship with the political economic thought of her day is to examine the few moments in her writing where she references Smith, the most prominent political economic authority in the 1790s.[18] Wollstonecraft was undoubtedly familiar with Smith's work, referencing both *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* in a number of her writings. She was also familiar with Rousseau, the leading counter-critic of European commercial modernity, and admired Montesquieu, an early theorist of commercial society. As this book shows in detail, Wollstonecraft's understanding of contemporary modernity stemmed from the theorisation of commercial society provided by the Scottish Enlightenment tradition of moral philosophy and conjectural history in which Smith worked. This combined two important elements: a post-Lockean, post-Newtonian empirical science of man and society, which, through David Hume and Smith, offered a theory of moral sensibility and sociality via sympathy; and a stadial history of the progress of human civilisation, which attended to the material and economic conditions of human society from early society onwards, and understood contemporary commercial modernity as civilisation's culminating stage.

Smith is most explicitly present in Wollstonecraft's work in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where he is quoted, at times at considerable length, on four separate occasions. Described as a 'cool reasoner', Smith figures in the *Vindication* as a moral and philosophical authority whose thinking can both shore up Wollstonecraft's own arguments,

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but also be critiqued and extended. Thus, in perhaps Wollstonecraft's most famous use of Smith, his observation (from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*), that wealthy or great men do not require virtue to receive public admiration, but rather attract it through the display of more superficial appearances and accomplishments, is extended by Wollstonecraft to women, in an analysis of the morally corrosive politics of display and self-objectification in 'the female world'.[19] But Wollstonecraft far from passively accepts Smith: she points to personal or cultural prejudice to question Smith's central theoretical construct of the impartial spectator, which grounds his account of moral judgement produced through multiple acts of social observation. She considers the implications of his thought for women, suggesting that 'it is not sufficient to view ourselves as we suppose that we are viewed by others': women are expected to surpass, not conform to, existing societal moral and behavioural ideals.[20] Rhetorically, the presence in her work of 'Dr. Smith', as she respectfully names him, helps to buttress Wollstonecraft's authority, but her ability to critique and extend his thinking signals a critical independence from him.

It is Smith the moralist, rather than Smith the theorist of commerce, with whom the *Vindication* engages most explicitly. As a guide to the complexity of her engagement with political economic thought then, these moments are something of a red herring. Smith is in fact a more complex, if less overt, presence elsewhere in Wollstonecraft's writing, including in her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794) and her *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796). Both works address, in markedly different ways, the problems and possible futures of modern European commercial society. *Short Residence*, as Chapter 5 further shows, draws extensively, although not uncritically, on a Smithian vocabulary and analysis, identifying 'improvements' of industry whilst also attacking the 'principle of convenience' imputed as the cause motivating economic activity. But the *Historical and Moral View*, the most understudied of Wollstonecraft's works, is probably the place where these issues are given the most comprehensive treatment. As Chapter 4 explores, this work – a philosophical or moral history in the Scottish Enlightenment tradition – weighs the progress and possibility of improvement and liberty against the early events of the French Revolution; and it also gives prominent space to the granting by the National Assembly of a free trade in grain. Liberating the grain trade was a key policy of the Girondin faction with whom Wollstonecraft associated during her stay in France between late 1792 and 1795; it was also a prominent measure in a Smithian enactment of 'natural liberty' in economic matters. Attention to the grain trade

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within her history shows how Wollstonecraft folds questions of economic liberty into a larger narrative of political liberty and improvement which, whilst anticipated in the early events of the Revolution, looked increasingly less likely by the time of her writing.

Given the attention to a prominent measure of economic liberty in this work, it is a surprise to find in its final pages a number of overt jibes at famous Smithian tenets, which articulate concerns over the 'destructive influence of commerce'.[21] The 'Dr Smith' whom the *Vindication* was happy to name becomes in *View* a pointedly anonymised 'celebrated writer', whose identity as the famous theorist of the division of labour nevertheless becomes clear as Wollstonecraft attacks his account (from the first chapter of *The Wealth of Nations*) of time being 'sauntered away, in going from one part of an employment to another', asserting instead that this is 'the very time that preserves the man from degenerating into a brute'.[22] The division of labour, indeed, 'renders the mind entirely inactive', she claims, and turns 'whole knots of men' into 'machines, to enable a keen speculator to become wealthy', and there is a further tilt at Smith in her claim that 'every noble principle of nature is eradicated by making a man pass his life in stretching wire, pointing a pin, heading a nail, or spreading a sheet of paper on a plain surface'.[23] Ironically, however, whilst such criticisms can clearly be read as criticisms of Smithian political economy, they not only reveal Wollstonecraft's thorough knowledge of Smith's work, but also repeat concerns which Smith himself had already articulated, and often in more powerful terms than Wollstonecraft. Smith's observation that the 'man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations … generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become', and that 'this is the state into which the labouring poor … the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it', is arguably as powerful and disturbing as Wollstonecraft's own.[24] Similarly, Wollstonecraft's attack on the merchant who 'enters into speculations so closely bordering on fraudulency, that common straight forward minds can scarcely distinguish the devious art of selling any thing (*sic*) for a price far beyond that necessary to ensure a just profit, from sheer dishonesty, aggravated by hard-heartedness' recalls Smith's equally unflattering account of mercantile behaviour: 'People of the same trade seldom meet together […] but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices'.[25] Emma Rothschild has suggested that it was the 'most subversive parts of *The Wealth of Nations* and *Theory of Moral Sentiments* … which inspired Wollstonecraft'.[26] But whilst Wollstonecraft repeats elements of Smith's critique – such as his worries about the social

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implications of the economic world he helped to bring into being – she does not, as he does, look to law and government for redress. For her, the remedy for the ills of the commercial world lay not in institutional reform or government action, but in the collective effects of individual moral reform. There exists no starker picture of the inadequacy of existing institutions to understand the oppressions suffered by, in this instance, women, from the legal and property systems of her day, than the judge's heartless response to Maria in the final pages of *The Wrongs of Woman*.[27] In Wollstonecraft's vision, the intersecting injustices produced by the emerging worlds of money, property, and labour are not easily remedied, the flaws of the new commercial world held starkly in relief.

Closing the *Historical and Moral View* with observations on commerce's 'destructive effects', Wollstonecraft's ostensible attack on Smithian principles repeats and at times reframes points originally made by Smith himself. A number of observations might be made here, beyond the immediate evidence of the extent to which Wollstonecraft was familiar with Smith's writing. Contextually, the tussle over Smith's reputation in the 1790s may help to explain why Wollstonecraft found it easier to conclude her work in cadences ostensibly critical of Smith. But arguably, a larger picture is suggested, both through the phrasings used, and in the omissions and silences which make up Wollstonecraft's depiction of Smith and her relation to it: a picture describing the mutual orientation of moral-critical discourses and political economic ones at a time of not only radical debate and political ferment, but marked discursive flux. Wollstonecraft's silent borrowing from Smith's own statements of the problematic consequences of the division of labour – her turning of his criticisms of the commercial system against him – occludes, to her rhetorical benefit, the extent to which theorists of political economy themselves worried about the social and moral implications of commercial society's pursuit of productive efficiency and wealth. Such an occlusion bolsters her own position as social and moral critic, but it also works to embed or bring into being a separation of political economic thought from moral, aesthetic, and literary critique, a separation later entrenched in Romantic characterisations of political economy as the 'Dismal Science'.[28] In 1794, we are not yet at that moment of full separation, but it is not far off, and Wollstonecraft's writing arguably anticipates its arrival. In her final paragraph, there is another unacknowledged debt to Smith's work, as Wollstonecraft deploys two crucially important metaphors which, if not deriving directly from Smith, are certainly used by him: the self-healing potential of the body politic, capable of working its own cure without intervention, and the capacity of the

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'philosophical eye' to overlook nature to discern the hidden causes of 'so many dreadful effects'.[29] If Wollstonecraft casts herself in this work as the historical critic offering a moral 'view' of modernity's unfolding events, it is clear the extent to which such a role is only made possible by inhabiting and repurposing political economy's own discourse.

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It was not only her reading which informed Wollstonecraft's engagement with the political economy of her day, however. She was also a woman whose often economically precarious life is reflected in her thinking and writing. Born into a middle-class family in London in 1759, she witnessed her family's circumstances decline through the repeated failures of her father's various schemes of business. With little formal education, she experienced firsthand the limited employment options for women of her class (lady's companion, governess, schoolteacher) and the undesirability of all of them. She struggled with legal complexities to access money for family members, and sought, throughout her life, to support her siblings, or find secure establishments for them. She ran a school for a short period, before lack of funds forced it to close; during her affair with Gilbert Imlay, she anticipated emigrating to America and living on a farmstead with him and her sisters. All of this would have been part of, in Makdisi's term, her 'psychobiological modes of existence', themselves shaped in turn by larger social, political, economic, and cultural forces and contexts.[30] The psychic and affective experience of living as (for all but the final months of her life) an unmarried woman in a society whose primary principle of economic organisation was the possession of property by men arguably informs all of Wollstonecraft's writing, but is most evident in the autofictional elements of her novels as well as her travel writing. Neither the rich, but unhappily married protagonist of the early novel *Mary*, or Maria, the 'woman of sensibility' caught in a loveless marriage to the fraudster Venables in *The Wrongs of Woman*, reflect Wollstonecraft's life circumstances directly, but both speak to the affective experience of women caught in a 'machine of society' whose economic, social, property, and legal structures operate to disempower, exclude, and oppress them.[31]

Given these circumstances, the fact that Wollstonecraft managed to find her way to be a published writer of any kind is remarkable, and attests to formidable determination, intellect, and strength of character. Yet even as what she famously termed the 'first of a new genus' – a woman who sought to live 'in a comfortable way' by the pen – she was often in financial straits, in debt through most of her life.[32] Her career as a writer was defined by her

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professional relationship with publisher Joseph Johnson, who published her works: from the early educational works of the 1780s, and her first novel *Mary* (1788) to the *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and the *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), the *Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), and the posthumous *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). She also worked as a reviewer on Johnson's monthly periodical, the *Analytical Review*, and also (Janet Todd has suggested) as *de facto* editorial assistant on the same publication.[33] Wollstonecraft undoubtedly enjoyed a warmly supportive relationship with Johnson, who provided practical and emotional support, but the fact that she was often in debt, that Johnson loaned her money, and that working for him either as a reviewer, or as a writer of books which he published, was her main source of income means that the relationship was also structured by their relative positions of economic power and dependence.[34] If it is going too far to describe Wollstonecraft's relation to Johnson as that of an indentured writer, it is nevertheless true that her writing did not always come from a place of creative freedom but economic necessity.

What does it mean to be a penniless female writer who thinks about the economic conditions and structures of her day? Discharging 'all of my obligations of a pecuniary kind' was certainly one hope of Wollstonecraft's as she wrote her *Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), a work which, whilst her 'most sustained attack upon modern commercial society', also (with an irony which Mary Favret has noted) gave her the 'financial independence she desired'.[35] For Favret, *Short Residence* is the 'work of an unmarried woman writer in need of money to support herself and her daughter', an 'enterprising writer' who, Ralph Wardle suggested, made 'capital … of what she had hitherto sought to conceal: her own personality'.[36] But whilst it is in this text that Wollstonecraft writes most explicitly about herself as a professional writer ('How few authors or artists have arrived at eminence who have not lived by their employment?'), an economic lens is not the only means of understanding Wollstonecraft's sense of the role of writing in her life.[37] Her late essay 'On Poetry' sketches the social role of the imaginative writer in entirely uneconomic terms, depicting the poet as conveying renewed and energised feeling in a modern age whose excess and sensationalism have wearied and desensitised the masses. The 'effusions of a vigorous mind', she asserts, 'will ever tell us how far the understanding has been enlarged by thought, and stored with knowledge'; 'profound thinking' mixed with 'reveries' offer affecting expressions of spontaneous feeling and deep understanding.[38] The imagination, with its

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links to virtue, and capacity for cohesion and unity, is the faculty through which a fractured modernity might begin to be mended. Although not a poet, this description might speak to Wollstonecraft's sense of her own resources and methods as a writer, and certainly suggests that she can articulate the role of imagination and writing in the commercial world in terms entirely distinct from the categorisations of labour offered by political economy.[39]

Wollstonecraft's writing is a reminder of how literary activity in this period doesn't always conform neatly to fixed categories. Stephen C. Behrendt has illuminated the 'discontinuities, the dissonances, the failure to "fit"' that characterised the 'literary landscape of Romantic-era Britain'.[40] It may be more useful to pay attention to the ways in which Wollstonecraft doesn't fit existing models of authorship or discipline, contemporary or otherwise, than to the ways that she does.[41] Miranda Burgess notes that the relative marginality of Wollstonecraft's position, largely outside formal systems of knowledge and excluded from many spheres of political economic debate, and further decentred as a woman writer, enables her to resist the 'economic-historical logic' of contemporary political economy.[42] But that outsider status also shapes the specific, writerly forms in which her resistance was manifested. Wollstonecraft's career originated in low-status contributions to print culture, compiling anthologies and educational works for children, and writing reviews, and that role as analytic, often caustic, reviewer informs the persona she adopts in responding to Burke's *Reflection on the French Revolution* in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, her first major work.[43] Writing like a critical reviewer enables Wollstonecraft to attend to and mobilise the very components of writing itself – including style, genre, persona, narrative, and the *ad hominem* attacks which Sangster has noted were newly commonplace in the periodical culture of the day – in the denunciation of Burkean political economy, as Chapter 2 shows in detail.[44] Our understanding of Wollstonecraft's take on political economy needs, then, to be informed by all this: by the particular situations which she experienced in her life and which conditioned her writing; and by attention to the consequent contexts, modes, styles, and genres of the writing she produced.

Wollstonecraft's is not always the voice of a philosopher; she rarely writes as a theorist or system maker, but as an observer, critic, thinker, and woman. By the same token, her views are not to be found in focused expositions or treatises, but are often conveyed through digressive discussion, or spread piecemeal across her writing. Each of her works is inflected with the particular concerns of its moment, differentiated as they are by

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the fast-moving political and personal events of the 1790s, a tumultuous decade on both fronts. At a time of conscious philosophical system-making, Wollstonecraft recognised how systems imprisoned women; she sought to disrupt them by whatever means necessary, and especially by mobilising different patterns of writing and thought against them.[45] Arguably, Wollstonecraft's expression of the psychic and affective experience of living as a woman in property society, in non-expert language, in literary writing, is a key part of her resistance to specialised disciplinary knowledge on such topics. If political economy collectively produced an account of the socioeconomic order and its functioning, including a role for women defined by their exclusion from property in a world in hoc to property, Wollstonecraft's writing, across a range of generic interventions, challenges such systematisations of the social whole. And equally, if political economic thinking attended to women by regarding their status as denoting the larger state of civilisational development, Wollstonecraft's innovation was to wrest 'woman' free of that symbolic role and to insist instead on the evidence of women's actual lived conditions in commercial modernity, using in part her own embodied experience to that end.[46]

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Wollstonecraft's relationship to eighteenth-century political economy manifests in different configurations in each of her major works, coming in and out of focus across the highly varied writing of her short but productive career. At the same time, as the next chapter explores in detail, the term 'political economy' might name quite a diffuse set of questions and concerns. This included the defining debate of the time, on the moral status of commercial society, framed by Montesquieu and addressed in the Scottish philosophical tradition which Wollstonecraft knew well; as well as critiques of the mercantile system and its dependence on taxation, war, and empire; potential socioeconomic alternatives, including agrarian republicanism; and the role of property in commercial society.[47] Such questions, in fluid, on-going, interconnected debates, were an important part of the intellectual context in which Wollstonecraft was writing and thinking, as subsequent chapters demonstrate.

These debates preoccupied many of the philosophers and radical thinkers of Wollstonecraft's circle, yet few critics or historians have considered Wollstonecraft extensively in their light.[48] As Carol Kay has commented, any study of Wollstonecraft poses the problem or question of disciplinarity, and work on Wollstonecraft tends to follow the disciplinary divisions of our own time, reflected in the specialisms of modern scholarly subjects

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and institutional identities.[49] My exploration of Wollstonecraft through the lens of political economy deploys a term which arguably had more valency in her time than our own; this allows us to trace the shape of her thought through a perspective derived from her time, rather than ours. The fact that the political economy of her day does not always correlate to our own is in this sense a benefit: a difficulty worth grappling with for what it might reveal.[50] This book is not, therefore, an attempt to insert Wollstonecraft into a historical canon of late eighteenth-century thinkers and theorists on political economic matters; nor is it a work of intellectual history. Rather, in asserting that Wollstonecraft's engagement with a series of interconnected debates about the nature and future of commercial society was a crucial part of her intellectual preoccupations, it seeks to be as little confined by discourse or discipline as those debates – which ranged across works of moral philosophy, history writing, political tracts, travel letters, philosophical treatises, essays, and even fiction – themselves were. Whilst I read Wollstonecraft's writings against a series of broad and interconnected historical and intellectual contexts, I seek especially to attend to Wollstonecraft's texts as writing: not as records of 'flat' systems of thought but as complex, ambivalent, at times contradictory, and often engaging with multiple questions or trains of thought within a single text or textual passage or moment. It is this which adds to the richness, as well as the difficulty, of reading Wollstonecraft, and it entails attending in particular to questions of genre, style, language, and form – matters of textuality, in sum – alongside the content of her writing.

A further challenge to such a reading is posed by the recognition that, across her work as a whole, and even within particular texts, Wollstonecraft is not always complete or systematic. That is not to say that she is either eclectic or wilfully contradictory; rather, it is to suggest that to look for systematicity may not be the best approach to a thinker whose strengths and insight often rely on making links (at times leaps) between otherwise separate areas or patterns of thought, on working synchronously and connectively, and who worked in genres where digression or the conversational, episodic or anecdotal, would be tolerated or carry rhetorical weight.[51] System had its own history and fate in this period; it was also the focus of political attack, in its association with French revolutionary thought.[52] I offer a Wollstonecraft who works broadly and synthetically across and between traditions of debate and thought to produce strikingly original insights with powerful reach and significance, and to recast established patterns of thought, writing, and language in creative and innovative ways. It is certainly possible to find paradoxes within her oeuvre: to contrast,

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for instance, her reported admiration of the French communist Gracchus Babeuf, with her support for Girondist free grain trade; to note her admiration of the agrarian independence of farmers in northern Norway alongside, within the same text, her acceptance that economic progress brings freedom.[53] Rather than indict her for inconsistency, this book attends to the specific conditions and moments of her writing career, during the approximately ten years in which Wollstonecraft developed from a self-educated writer of tiny review pieces to a fully developed thinker of extraordinary power, maturity, and range, capable of working in multiple contexts and genres, and whose speed of development from one project to the next was often astonishing. Where else can we point to a writer who wrote two important philosophical polemics which shaped contemporary political debate, followed up with a ringside history of the most important European event of her day, then wrote a genre-breaking travelogue which anticipated and influenced the aesthetics of the next major literary movement, and finally set to work on a fiction which attempted to transform and rework the novel genre? Or to a thinker who is at once a moralist, a historian, a self-styled Enlightenment observer, a travel-writer and memoirist as well as a philosopher, social critic, political polemicist, and cultural theorist, who also moves increasingly in the direction of literary modes of production?[54] The range and breadth of Wollstonecraft's production are not without parallel – perhaps matching, in terms of capaciousness and variety (if not in terms of volume of output), the work of Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, or Coleridge – but the lives and careers of these formally educated men far outspanned the few short years of Wollstonecraft's writing life.

Crucial to my reading of Wollstonecraft is attention to the specificity of the kinds of writing she produced: travel writing, fiction, philosophical history, as well as two *Vindications* which combine philosophical writing with social criticism and political invective. Wollstonecraft refuses any attempt to contain her work within our contemporary disciplinary boundaries, and, whilst my title might be read (mistakenly) as an attempt to yoke her work to another field, that of political economy, the book rather seeks to read her *against* the historical emergence of political economy as a discipline. Disciplinary or discursive formation is not simply a passive background or context, however, but rather is often actively at stake, in play and under negotiation in her writing. Wollstonecraft repeatedly deployed writing of various kinds, in an age of proliferating print media, to contest the emerging patterns and verities of political economic discourse. Thus, as I argue in Chapter 2, not only is Wollstonecraft's much-studied response to Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) to be understood as

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a take-down of his defence of Whig political economy, but also as a tussle over its genre, in which the nature and purpose of writing itself are central. Ralph Cohen, pioneer in the study of the historical politics of genre, has shown how written form manifests larger social change; we know too how Wollstonecraft, a conscious innovator in writing and (through her review work) an acute and uncompromising critic of the writings of others, was critical of certain literary forms, such as the novel, because of their cultural baggage – associated as they were with particular modes of social formation, identity, and behaviour (female identity, romance, and the marriage plot).[55] She was alert to the 'co-mingling and morphing of genre' which comprised the fluid and open conditions of late eighteenth-century print culture, and in which, as Wollstonecraft herself observed, patterns of language usage themselves slipped from printed text to spoken word, from 'essays into novels, and … into familiar letters and conversation'.[56] Part of the constant reinvention of Wollstonecraft's writing must then be understood as a restless seeking for an appropriate form adequate to the complex and shifting preoccupations she sought to address. What genre of writing could both do justice to the critique of commercial modernity and body forth the possibility of an alternative vision? How could writing itself be remade so that it might both document the oppressions of her age, and attack its political and economic structures, whilst striking forcefully at the affections of her readers and perhaps voicing too her own sufferings and wishes?

Something of this story about a Wollstonecraft caught between different modes or genres of literary performance is embedded in a well-established (even outmoded) dichotomy in secondary literature on Wollstonecraft which distinguishes between an early, rationalist Wollstonecraft and a later, more 'Romantic' one. Variations of this narrative appear in criticism which attempts to manage or mediate between apparent oppositions in early and late Wollstonecraft: between the critiques of sensibility present in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the invocations of sensibility present in *A Short Residence,* or *The Wrongs of Woman*; or between a sex-averse, puritanical Wollstonecraft identified in the *Vindication*, and the sensuality at times present in her later writings.[57] Often these differences are explained by evoking personal biography (Wollstonecraft's sexual maturation following her affair with Imlay) or some broader shift from the Enlightenment to the rise of Romanticism. This study situates these evident differences – between Wollstonecraft the rationalist and the Wollstonecraft whose writing investigates and deploys feeling as part of her account of living in commercial modernity – within another,

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larger historical mapping, in which thinking and writing about feeling, once at the heart of the Enlightenment investigation into human nature, which gave birth to political economy, gets extruded from it at this time of discursive separation. Thus, the pre-disciplinary projects of the high Enlightenment (including the Scottish Enlightenment 'science of man') with their attempts to address ambitiously arching questions of human nature and society split into more local, fragmented, and separated discourses and textual practices, including both the literary ones now understood as marking the Romantic practice of 'Literature', and political economy itself. A story about the late-eighteenth century emergence of discipline, in short, brings with it one about the genres and textual spaces within which feeling gets written, as a concern with passion, affect, sympathy, and the rest is transferred from moral philosophy, and the political economy to which it gives birth, to literary writing at the century's end. This means that the consistent concern with sentiments and feeling in Wollstonecraft's texts is both an inheritance of that moral philosophical tradition and an attempt to redirect it. Wollstonecraft sought to use writing, and to mobilise feeling, as a means to politically agitate, shape public culture, and grapple with the emergent conditions of life in commercial society. Her reflection, in an aside in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, on the powers and limits of persuasive writing to alter fixed beliefs, is one indication of her self-awareness of this practice in her writing.[58]

The trajectory of Wollstonecraft's career, towards increasingly 'literary' modes of writing, can be read then not simply in terms of a Romantic turn to affect and lyric subjectivity, but as part of an experiment in the capacities and resources of writing to challenge the emergent conditions and structures of commercial society. A concern with expressive emotionality is present across her works, from the rhapsodies on sensibility and suffusions of religiosity in the early novel, *Mary*, or the fictional fragment 'Cave of Fancy' to the theory of poetic sentiment in 'On Poetry'. In one perspective, such concern with subjective emotionality might seem at odds with an engagement with political economy and the problems of commercial society, but what Daniel White terms 'affective spontaneity' or Mitzi Myers names an 'aesthetic of spontaneity' is an integral part of an examination of the affective and psychic conditions of commercial modernity.[59] That Wollstonecraft is looking beyond a rationalist solution to social and political problems becomes explicit by her last work, where rational argument falls on deaf ears in Maria's plea to the judge, and human feeling – whether that which binds Maria to Jemima and her daughter and saves her from death in one of the text's endings, or in the social sympathy enabled

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by sensibility at other moments in the text – is the only resource that remains in a broken world. Indeed, if, in choosing the genre of the novel, Wollstonecraft sought, as Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) did, to use fiction to show 'things as they are', *The Wrongs of Woman* emerges not only as a demonstration of the effects of the existing organisation of property and wealth on female lives, not least through the institutions of marriage and law, but also as an account of the consequent social alienation of the feeling subject, and an attempt to mobilise readerly sentiments against it all.

Of course, Wollstonecraft was not alone in turning to affect, and its associated literary and aesthetic expressions, to confront and reform commercial society. Daniel White has shown how *The Enquirer* (1797) demonstrates Godwin co-opting a 'devotional language of sensibility' to construct a polite and progressive public culture.[60] Nor should we understand Wollstonecraft as wholly given over to a Romantic concern with interiority, affect, and subjectivity: *The Wrongs of Woman* (a work which, in its unfinished state, is only a third the length of what Wollstonecraft planned) is as fervently committed to exposing the material oppressions stemming from existing organisations of property and the law as it is to yoking those questions to explorations of sympathy, sensibility, subjective pleasure, and personal suffering. At the same time, Wollstonecraft's interest in sentimental subjectivity – in passions and affect as the grounds of human nature – shows how she is doing more than simply following the well-trodden path of moral critique of commercial culture, even whilst she often echoes the distaste of Rousseau, Price, Joseph Priestley, and others for contemporary luxury and manners. Her attitude to feeling in fact turns a theory of sentimental subjectivity which originates in Scottish thought *against* the property culture of that same tradition. In this way, she works with a fundamental contradiction inherent in Scottish philosophical thought: its attempt to reconcile an account of affective, sociable human nature with modern commercial society oriented to the production of wealth. Sensibility thus constitutes the means through which commercial modernity can be critiqued, beyond a mere critique of manners. As Wollstonecraft exclaims in Hamburg: 'to commerce everything must give way!'.[61] What might stop its path?

Wollstonecraft can in this way be seen as anticipating the Romantic valoration of subjective lyrical expression and the turn to art to reform corrupt modernity. As noted earlier, in retrospect, this mobilisation of the aesthetic (of art and feeling) against the market, and commercial society and values, is a deeply familiar one. It marks the split between an Enlightenment republic of letters, where 'literature' denotes 'writing' or

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knowledge, and the Romantic formulation of 'Literature', and its attendant split from 'Science' (as theorised by Wordsworth in the 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*, published within a few years of Wollstonecraft's death). Something of the fascination of reading Wollstonecraft lies in how she is situated uniquely at a hinge point where it was still possible to resist a split between these discourses, with their opposing narratives of value, and to imagine ways they might be yoked together to form the basis for an alternative future than the one which appeared to be coming into view. This, I argue, is what we might understand Wollstonecraft to be reaching towards, alongside her prescient insights into, in her eyes, the tragic unfolding of the next phase of Europe's commercial futurity and her warnings about the emerging aristocracy of commerce.[62] Her untimely death throws the hinge point where she is situated into particular relief, freeze-framing these questions in a way which might have become blurred or submerged had her life continued beyond 1797. My study shows how that abrupt cut-off uniquely foregrounds both the questions with which Wollstonecraft engaged and the experimental forms of writing and thinking with which she attempted to answer them.

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This book contends that approaching Wollstonecraft's work from the perspective of the debate over commercial society offers a new way of understanding the shape of her thought, as well as appreciating anew the particular intellectual conditions from which it arose. It attends in close detail to Wollstonecraft's engagement with such debates, to show how she tracks, contests, borrows from, and counters them, in different ways and at repeated points throughout her career, through the different lens provided by each of her major works. The book proceeds chronologically, as the most effective way to tell the story of this engagement. The first chapter, '*Political Economy and Commercial Society in the 1790s*', investigates how political economy was understood in Johnson's *Analytical Review*, to illuminate how its writings, its project, and potential was understood in Wollstonecraft's intellectual milieu. Political economy emerges as a heterogeneous discourse where political and moral ideas mixed with the economic, and where discussions of human nature, and human motivation, as well as of civil society, were often prominent. Writings reviewed as 'political economy' in the *Analytical Review* reveal how the term was used by radical and progressive thinkers as a means for collecting a range of critical perspectives on contemporary society, as well as setting out possible means of improvement. In the eyes of the *Analytical Review*, political economy

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offered the prospect of enacting reforms which might increase the happiness of ordinary people, and a means of critiquing existing injustices.

In Chapter 2, '*The Engagement with Burke: Contesting the "Natural Course of Thing"*', Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* is read as staging not merely a political argument with Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, but a political economic one. I argue that in responding to Burke, Wollstonecraft carries forward the call for liberty which had occupied radicals in the 1780s onto new ground, to attack the very economic order on which late eighteenth-century society was founded. She exhumes the obscured economic substrata of Burke's work and exposes the oppressions and injustices of the socio-economic order which he sought to naturalise. Wollstonecraft's response resists the separation of political economic concerns from questions of liberty, equality, and happiness and asserts a human nature where sympathetic feeling for others should be used to reform human community, and to motivate political actions to sustain human happiness. Wollstonecraft shows how Burke weaponises 'specious' human feeling in defence of existing structures, and how, by making rhetorical art a device to serve political and economic order, he enacts an implicit hierarchy between political economy and human feeling. As we see in subsequent chapters, Wollstonecraft sought to mobilise authentic human feeling as an alternative ground of value across her career.

The next chapter, '*Property, Passions, and Manners: Political Economy and the* Vindications', shows that the 'revolution in manners' to which Wollstonecraft enjoins women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* seeks to turn manners against political economy's property order. I show Wollstonecraft deploying a fully developed philosophical account of human nature to critique the culture, behaviour, psychology, and 'manners' of commercial society. Specifically, she counters the story of human motivation and effort deeply rooted in political economic discourse with an association of property with indolence, libertinism, and immorality. She articulates an alternative moral economy which links virtue to effort, labour, and exertion in the linked spheres of mind, manners, and morals. Closely associated with such efforts, the imagination is revealed as posing a fundamental challenge to Burkean political economy, as an independent power which frees the self from the subject relations of property order. This exertive economy of the human person in turn informs the demand for a social and political world where such efforts might be realised. Wollstonecraft's philosophy of human nature is thus not an abstraction from larger political questions but a crucial foundation

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for them. In calling for a 'revolution in manners' addressed especially to women, Wollstonecraft looks to a moral revolution against the forces of history, and calls on women to save commercial society from itself, and to save themselves from it. Political economy's separation of the public world of wealth acquisition from private affect and morality is thus rejected, and whilst the 'miserable' state of the female sex is an indictment of the commercial age, women are seen as best placed to enact its reformation.

Chapter 4, '*Political Economy in Revolution: France, Free Commerce, and Wollstonecraft's History of the French Revolution*', turns to the work in which Wollstonecraft engages most explicitly with the political economic thought of her time, her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794). It addresses in particular her treatment of the liberation of the grain trade in the early years of the Revolution. The political economy of grain was at the heart of Smith's new system of 'natural liberty', but it also pitted new ideas about market distribution against traditional ideas of moral economy and community. Wollstonecraft gives particular prominence to this issue in a narrative which explores the relationship between commercial and political liberty. The chapter also explores the larger intellectual and political context for such ideas, via Wollstonecraft's links with Girondin politicians, including Jacques Pierre Brissot, and hence the Shelburne circle of the 1780s, where support for free trade and moral political economy was nurtured in the years prior to the Revolution. A discussion of the involvement of Joel Barlow and Gilbert Imlay in provisioning the French Republic in the mid-1790s offers an alternative depiction of the realities of commerce during the revolutionary war and anticipates the hostility to commerce which comes to the fore in Wollstonecraft's later works.

We turn in Chapter 5, '*Property in Political Economy: Modernity, Individuation, and Literary Form*', to address Wollstonecraft's engagement with narratives of property and property society in Smith and Rousseau, as reflected in her *Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796). Writing in the aftermath of the failure of the ideals of the French Revolution, property symbolises the necessary death of the property order of the *ancien régime*, but also stages questions of affective response and social relations, issues fundamental to political economy's own stories of social origin. Looming large in political economy's imaginary, the figure of property encapsulates and condenses the difficulties and ambivalences at the heart of late eighteenth-century modernity. Paying attention to property of many kinds, Wollstonecraft unfolds her critique of the contemporary political economic order and imagines alternatives to it, whether in

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the 'art of living' practised by 'the rational few' as witnessed in France, or in the independent, comfortable existence suggested by the farmstead or cottage.

The historical problem of commercial modernity, of which property is a visible sign, also poses questions of human personality and identity, given how the modern self is yoked to property, and individuated from others through property, especially in political economy's conjectural histories. Literary form emerges as a means through which these questions might be framed, and as a means of insisting on the 'something' more than individualism on which Wollstonecraft insists. Resisting the mediated social relations of market society's 'society of strangers', Wollstonecraft asks how the narrative of selfhood in the commercial age might be recast. Wollstonecraft's chosen epistolary form, and the unbounded, ongoing writing of self which takes place within it, troubles the finite culture of property and accumulation which she inhabits and traverses; meanwhile the novel, the form for her next piece of writing, is shown to counter the alienation, partiality, and social division which accompany the division of labour in modern commercial society.

The final chapter, '*Credit and Credulity: Political Economy, Gender, and the Sentiments in* The Wrongs of Woman', reads Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel, *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), as an investigation into political economy's production of the credit economy and the gendered narrative of feeling which accompanied it. The chapter opens by discussing the Bank Restriction Act of 1797 as marking a crisis in the British credit system which made clear political economy's relation to affect: credit depends on moral relations and social belief. This crisis in credit enables a reading of Wollstonecraft's novel as investigating the relationship of affect, belief, and credulity to the world of economic activity. Adam Smith had attempted to regulate and suppress certain troubling and potentially disruptive forms of affect, including credulity and sensibility, which were feminised and relegated to the home, away from the public world of prudent self-interest. Through her protagonist, Maria, whose 'extreme credulity' paves the way for new forms of social feeling, Wollstonecraft rewrites the usual story of irrational femininity as the binary other to masculine rationality and reconsiders the credit which underwrites contemporary political economy. Wollstonecraft's story of the woman of sensibility demonstrates, and troubles, the mutual imbrication of financial and sexual economies in late eighteenth-century commercial society, whilst challenging both the affective economy of credit on which political economy rests and the system of gender which it brings with it. Wollstonecraft is thus

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shown to seek an alternative formulation of the relations between morality and commercial society – between affect and money – and to mobilise an alternative economy of social feeling to reform a selfish, sexualised world of commerce based on self-interest, by asking what else might circulate to social advantage.

In conclusion, I consider what lessons this reading of Wollstonecraft offers us today, at a time when orthodox economic thought is being challenged, not least by those addressing its links to climate change. Wollstonecraft's battles with political economic discourse, at the moment of its instantiation, pre-empt many of the criticisms levelled at economic thinking today, including ones which are especially urgent in the current context of planetary peril driven by the economic mantra of growth. Wollstonecraft's pity for the inhabitants of the earth in a future era of constrained resources illustrates how she anticipated the challenges we face today; her resistance to a culture of luxury and consumerism, and her assertion that the 'wants of nature' might be few, looks forward to attempts by today's heterodox economic thinkers to focus on sustainability and human wellbeing rather than ever-increasing GDP. Prominent in critiques of today's economic orthodoxies is the demand to recast the relationship between economics and imagination, to reconsider the relation between humanity and economic value, and to reintegrate culture and politics: to recast the economy so that it serves society, rather than extracting value from it. This suggests in turn the need to resist, or recast, the disciplinary separation of human knowledge, especially between the humanities and the social sciences, which has been in place since the early nineteenth century. As this book will show, it is precisely such a split that Wollstonecraft contested at the very outset of this economic journey, in her refusal to compartmentalise, in her commitment to a holistic view of human nature, and in her taking its impulses and behaviour as the grounds, the very conditions of possibility, for the reform and self-betterment of human lives and community.

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