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WOLLSTONECRAFT AND THE BURGHS OF NEWINGTON GREEN

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ABSTRACT

This essay investigates the importance of Mr and Mrs James and Hannah Burgh of Newington Green for Mary Wollstonecraft's life and career during the 1780s. Newington Green was a hugely productive environment for Wollstonecraft, but the Burghs offered a particular combination of support and provocation. Hannah Burgh was Wollstonecraft's mentor and financial supporter from 1784, during her residence in Newington Green, and until she became the protégée of Joseph Johnson in 1787. Through Hannah Burgh, Wollstonecraft accessed the works of the late James Burgh, who had died in 1775. Burgh's pedagogical writings were important intertexts for Wollstonecraft's early works, especially in their account of female education, their "rational" treatments of scripture, and their responses to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Wollstonecraft builds on Burgh's writings in her pedagogical works, and he continues to be an important interlocutor even after Wollstonecraft's departure from Newington Green. Burgh's anthology *The Art of Speaking* (1761) is a model and probable source for one of Wollstonecraft's first publications for Johnson, *The Female Reader* (1789). In her own anthology, however, Wollstonecraft offers a distinct account of reading as a tool of improvement, and builds a new canon of reading texts for women and girls.

KEYWORDS Wollstonecraft; Burgh; Rousseau; female education; reading aloud; anthologies

Newington Green's Dissenting Protestant community was a powerful and productive crucible for Mary Wollstonecraft's intellectual, emotional and spiritual development, as her contemporaries and more recent commentators have noted. Mary Hays remarks in her "Memoir" of Wollstonecraft that in Newington Green "[e]very new impression or vicissitude produced on her susceptible mind important consequences: some valuable connexions which she now formed, gave a tincture to her future views and character".¹ Hays singles out Wollstonecraft's relationship with Newington Green

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resident Dr Richard Price, but in this essay I suggest that Mr James Burgh and Mrs Hannah Burgh offered distinct, complementary, but equally important support for Wollstonecraft, in her day to day life and in the formation of her “future views and character”. Kenneth Neil Cameron noted in 1961: “It is difficult to assess the influence on Mary Wollstonecraft of James Burgh or his wife”.² Little new information about the Burghs’ biography has emerged since then, but Wollstonecraft’s correspondence and her published works demonstrate their formative and enduring significance for her personal and professional life.

It was Hannah Burgh who brought Wollstonecraft to Newington Green. In 1784 she was a widow with a “competent, though not large fortune”, James Burgh having died in 1775 and left her his sole heir and executrix of his will.³ It is not clear how Hannah Burgh met Wollstonecraft, though Lyndall Gordon suggests they may have had a mutual friend in Mrs Clare, who had befriended Wollstonecraft during her teenage years living in Hoxton.⁴ Hannah Burgh sourced a house just off Newington Green for Wollstonecraft to use for a school with her sisters and Frances Blood, even arranging lodgers to supplement their income. Such friendly, capable assistance seems to have been characteristic of Hannah Burgh, and for four years she was a crucial source of professional, emotional, and financial support to Wollstonecraft. But Hannah was not the only member of the Burgh family to influence Wollstonecraft’s life and work during the 1780s. James Burgh had died nine years before Wollstonecraft’s arrival at Newington Green, but as Karen Green notes, Hannah Burgh seems to have offered access to her husband’s “considerable library”, in which she read important texts like Catharine Macaulay’s *History of England*, and James Burgh’s own publications.⁵ Access to such scholarly resources, and the example of Burgh as an author, political commentator, and pedagogue, helped to catalyse Wollstonecraft’s early writings.

James Burgh is best remembered as a political writer. He was born and educated in Scotland, and had arrived in England in the immediate aftermath of the Jacobite uprising, making his name with the pamphlet *Britain’s Remembrancer; or, The Danger Not Over* (1746), which called for the unity of the British state. He later became a member of the Club of Honest Whigs, alongside Price, Joseph Priestley, and Benjamin Franklin, and as Carla Hay notes, in the 1760s he became “an important penman and propagandist for a radical network” including Macaulay and her brother John Sawbridge, publishing pamphlets and newspaper essays calling for reform of Britain’s corrupt system of parliamentary representation, and celebrating “commonwealth” principles.⁶ His final publication *Political Disquisitions* (1774), an anthology of radical texts ancient and modern, was hugely influential among revolutionists in America and reformers at home. Burgh’s political opinions were informed by his religious identity. He had a Calvinist education, but having moved to Newington Green in the 1750s he converted to Rational Dissenting

Arianism, probably under the influence of his friend Price.⁷ The antidote to political corruption, for Burgh, was rational Christian virtue. G. J. Barker-Benfield has traced the significance of the “commonwealthman” beliefs of Burgh and Price for Wollstonecraft’s own political development, noting their importance for her economic discussion in *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), her defence of Price in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), and her critique of false refinement in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).⁸ Here I focus on the period before Wollstonecraft produced her political *Vindications*, to assess Burgh’s importance for her pedagogical works.

Burgh was not only a political commentator but also a teacher. He had run a successful Dissenting academy in Newington Green for 21 years, and his pedagogical publications were informed and structured by his Rational Dissenting analyses of scripture, and his celebration of reason and virtue.⁹ Vivien Jones has discussed the influence of Burgh’s *Thoughts on Education* (1747) on Wollstonecraft’s first book *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1788), written while she was living at Newington Green, and even on her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).¹⁰ Here I show how Wollstonecraft may have been in dialogue not only with *Thoughts on Education* but also with Burgh’s later publications *Youth’s Friendly Monitor* (1754) and *Crito, or Essays on Various Subjects* (1766) in her early works. And I suggest that another of Burgh’s publications demonstrates his continued influence on Wollstonecraft’s personal and professional development even after she left Newington Green in 1786. Burgh’s *The Art of Speaking* (1761) was a guide to reading aloud and an anthology of reading texts, one of many guides to elocution for young men published in the 1760s. Despite its gendered focus, *The Art of Speaking* was an important model for Wollstonecraft’s own reading anthology for young women and girls, *The Female Reader* (1789), published pseudonymously under the name of “Mr Cresswick”, who was an actor and elocutionist.¹¹ Textual evidence suggests that Wollstonecraft used *The Art of Speaking* as she constructed her own anthology, but more broadly, Burgh takes seriously the importance of reading aloud in a domestic space, and crafts the selection of texts in his anthology to form a canon of reading texts, which offers an exemplar for Wollstonecraft to build upon.

Hannah Burgh and Newington Green

Hannah Burgh was Wollstonecraft’s most important mentor during the first part of the period between 1784 when she arrived in Newington Green, and 1789 when she published *The Female Reader*. After 1786, when Wollstonecraft met her publisher Joseph Johnson, Hannah Burgh was gradually supplanted by Johnson’s influence, but she continued her active concern in Wollstonecraft’s life until her own death. William Godwin noted in his *Memoirs of*

Wollstonecraft that Hannah Burgh was “a woman universally well spoken of for the warmth and purity of her benevolence. Mary, whenever she had occasion to allude to her, to the last period of her life, paid the tribute due to her virtues”.¹² Wollstonecraft’s letters from this period track the day-to-day course of her relationship with Hannah Burgh, and do not precisely match the account offered in Godwin’s *Memoirs*. Wollstonecraft is moved by her myriad debts to her neighbour, noting to George Blood that “I shall ever have the most grateful sense of this good old woman’s kindness to me, indeed I feel an affection for her”; but after time she begins to fret at their restrictions.¹³

Wollstonecraft’s letters describe her relation to Hannah Burgh, who was childless, in quasi-parental terms.¹⁴ She notes to her sister Eliza in September 1786 that “Mrs Burgh has been as anxious about me as if I had been her daughter”.¹⁵ This anxiety expressed itself in finding jobs for Wollstonecraft and her sisters and even the family of Frances Blood, most notably Wollstonecraft’s position as governess to the aristocratic Kingsborough family in Ireland in 1786. Hannah Burgh’s generosity extended to liberal financial support; she covered a range of Wollstonecraft’s costs especially when her brother Edward Wollstonecraft withheld funds from his sisters, and she provided regular support for the Blood family.¹⁶ When Wollstonecraft travelled to Lisbon in 1785 to nurse Frances Blood, Hannah Burgh either financed the trip or engineered the support of Price, and she bankrolled Wollstonecraft when the school almost failed during her absence in Portugal.¹⁷ In addition, she offered Wollstonecraft practical and emotional advice after Frances’s death, and dealt with the vulnerable status of the school. As Wollstonecraft wrote to Eliza who by September 1786 was at a new position sourced by their patron, “You can have no conception of Mrs Burgh’s kindness”.¹⁸

But over time and perhaps with distance from Newington Green, Wollstonecraft came to feel burdened by her emotional and financial debts to Hannah Burgh and her patron’s expectations for how she would deal with them. Wollstonecraft writes to her sister Everina from Dublin in March 1787:

I know she expected that I should make my fortune here – and to pecuniary considerations, she thinks, every thing ought to give way... it is by no means pleasant to be under obligations to a person, with whose opinions I can so seldom coincide.¹⁹

In May 1787 Wollstonecraft becomes reluctant even to write to Hannah Burgh. She seems embarrassed by her debts, but her letter of 15 May also hints at the gossipy community of Newington Green of which Hannah Burgh seems to become a figurehead: “I am not in a humour to write – and yet must try to fabricate a letter to Mrs Burgh – alias the Green”.²⁰ Newington Green was formative for Wollstonecraft as she wrote and published her first book, but the community, with Hannah Burgh at its head, came to feel confining as she strove to take new personal and professional steps.

Wollstonecraft left Ireland in summer 1787 when she was dismissed by the Kingsborough family. On her return, as Gordon notes, her financial position was eased and she was able to clear her financial debts.²¹ But Wollstonecraft also took the opportunity to enact a decisive shift from Hannah Burgh's mentorship to that of Joseph Johnson, from the community of Newington Green to that of Johnson's shop in St Paul's Churchyard, and to work as a professional author. She writes to Everina in November 1787:

I have sent Mrs Burgh twenty pounds – and I was on [e]very account sorry to part with it ... I am my dear Girl once more thrown on the world; I *have* left Lord K[ingsborough]'s ... I *have not seen* Mrs Burgh but I have informed her of this circumstance, and at the same time mentioned to her, that I was *determined* not to see any of my friends 'till I am in a way to earn my own subsistence. And to this determination I *will* adhere. You can conceive how disagreeable pity and advice would be at this juncture – I have too, other cogent reasons ... Mr Johnson, whose uncommon kindness ... has saved me from despair ... assures me that if I exert my talents in writing I may support myself in a comfortable way. I am then going to be the first of a new genus.²²

Mrs Burgh's "pity and advice" was increasingly incompatible with Wollstonecraft's need for financial and intellectual independence, both of which Johnson appeared to offer, as she strove to establish a "new genus" of professional intellectual women. Wollstonecraft's letters record further correspondence with Hannah Burgh, but after 1787 her life and work moved out of the sphere of Newington Green, to Johnson's shop, and to new lodgings south of the river Thames, in George Street, Southwark. Hannah Burgh died in the autumn of 1788.²³

James Burgh, female education, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

I want to complicate any picture of Wollstonecraft's sharp transition from the patronage of Mrs Burgh to the mentorship of Joseph Johnson, and here the importance of the other Burgh of Newington Green comes more clearly into view. Through his publications, James Burgh was a crucial interlocutor for Wollstonecraft both during her time in Newington Green and afterwards. Wollstonecraft wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in the late spring and summer of 1786 in Newington Green, and in it she engages with the strong tradition of Dissenting writings on education and sociable reading inherent to that community. Wollstonecraft pays tribute to Anna Laetitia Barbauld, introduced as "the ingenious author of many ... proper lessons for children", but Burgh is another important predecessor.²⁴ Gordon emphasises the differences between Burgh's pedagogical theory and practice and that of Wollstonecraft both in her school and in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. She notes: "[i]t's unlikely that the Revd Mr Burgh would have approved as his successor an untrained young

woman of twenty-five".²⁵ But Burgh's account of female education in his *Thoughts on Education* has important connections with Wollstonecraft's pedagogy.

Thoughts on Education is a sixty-one-page pamphlet addressed to the "Masters" and parents of young people. For Burgh the most important aim of education is "the forming of a rational mind to virtue, religion, and happiness", and the most important guide to conduct is scripture.²⁶ Though he foregrounds his professional expertise, rather than emphasise classroom pedagogy Burgh stresses the need for moral guidance for his pupils, as they navigate urban commercial life.²⁷ This aim is supported by his later publication *Youth's Friendly Monitor*, produced for his own pupils, which repeats *Thoughts on Education's* warnings against the three "baits" of "ambition, covetousness, and love of pleasure".²⁸ Such advice applies to young men entering professional and commercial life, but Burgh does not focus exclusively on male pupils. He notes:

It may perhaps be expected that on this occasion something should be said on the subject of the female education. But being unwilling to swell this little Tract a great deal beyond the size I originally intended it, I shall say the less upon the head.²⁹

After this disclaimer, however, Burgh devotes five pages of *Thoughts on Education* to female education, proceeding from the principle that "the female part of our species are as truly rational and accountable creatures as the male sex".³⁰

Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* is a very different text from Burgh's. She does away with Burgh's scriptural framework, and her focus on female pupils means that she shares little of his advice for professional and commercial life. But as Jones and Barker-Benfield have noted, Burgh's claims for the rationality of young women as well as men perhaps serves as a model for Wollstonecraft in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and in her later work.³¹ Burgh declares that teachers succeed "[b]y treating young people ... as *rational creatures*, and teaching them to exert their reason, and to judge rightly of men and things, as they are in themselves, and as they were originally constituted by the Supreme Being".³² Wollstonecraft too stresses young people's rational potential, and makes reason a product of the divine: "our passions will not contribute much to our bliss, till they are under the dominion of reason, and till that reason is enlightened and improved. Then ... all tears will be wiped away by that Being, in whose presence there is fulness of joy".³³ Burgh declares that the superficial "accomplishments" that make up female education "should hardly be looked upon as an education sufficient to qualify them for usefulness in their proper sphere in this world, and for happiness in the world to come".³⁴ Rather than teaching a girl to "speak French ... to

scrawl, to work with a needle, to come into a room genteelly, to dress neatly, to sing or touch a spinet skilfully, and to dance gracefully”, a teacher should encourage her to “endeavour after those accomplishments of the mind, which will ... preserve the esteem of her friends and the affection of her husband”.³⁵ Burgh’s focus on young women in relation to the men in their life hints at his sense of their inferiority, but he insists:

That young Ladies ... may be made to form very clear and rational conceptions of the doctrines of the Christian religion, and to see the beauty of its precepts is what I know to be practicable, because I have seen the happy effects of such pious and worthy labours of both parents and teachers.³⁶

Though “their proper sphere in this world” is more restricted than that of his male pupils, Burgh insists that girls and women can make rational Christian subjects.

In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* Wollstonecraft dedicates a chapter to “Exterior Accomplishments”, discouraging superficial activities “which merely render a person attractive; and those half-learnt ones which do not improve the mind”.³⁷ Wollstonecraft aims, like Burgh, to make young women better wives, but she emphasises that this is not merely a domestic concern. Barker-Benfield notes how Burgh’s “rational marital partnership” informs Wollstonecraft’s account of female education and citizenship, in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where Wollstonecraft declares:

If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfil the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens.³⁸

While Burgh keeps women in their “proper [domestic] sphere”, Wollstonecraft connects the duties of wife and mother with a political notion of “enlightened citizenship”, through which mothers inculcate democratic principles in their children. As Wollstonecraft composed *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in the community of Newington Green, the example of Hannah Burgh and the teachings of James Burgh offered a model of such a “rational marital partnership”, which she built on and politicised in her later works.

Wollstonecraft continues to develop, and to move away from, Burgh’s influence in her next pedagogical publication, *Original Stories from Real Life*, published in 1788 after her departure from Newington Green. As Laura Kirkley has discussed, though Wollstonecraft deplores Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s gender politics in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she engages in various ways with his work throughout her career, including a positive experiment with a Rousseauvian protagonist in *Original Stories’s*

heroine Mrs Mason.³⁹ Wollstonecraft had read Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* (1762) in Ireland, and wrote to Everina on 24 March 1787, in the same letter in which she criticised Hannah Burgh's expectations: "I am now reading Rousseau's 'Emile', and love his paradoxes".⁴⁰ James Burgh had a very different response to *Emile*'s "paradoxes". The second essay of his collection *Crito* makes the case "that Mons. Rousseau's proposals ... are improper, ineffectual, or impracticable".⁴¹ Burgh declares that he too could educate

a few well-disposed and capable subjects, if I might have a few little circumstances altered in my favour; as, 1. To be myself metamorphosed into an angel ... [2.] to remove from off the premises ... some millions of the most incorrigible of the species ... I mean our tyrants, visiers, ministers, and other Leviathans of power.⁴²

Burgh notes that these angelic and revolutionary proposals might seem "romantic", but retorts: "I see not why a free British writer must be confined to possibilities, while a citizen of Geneva is admired" for publishing a work "in which almost all, that is his own, is impracticable".⁴³ Despite his light tone, Burgh offers a serious defence of his professional practice and his faith, rejecting Rousseau's suggestion that parents rather than "masters" should educate their children, decrying his godlessness, and mocking his rejection of society for domestic seclusion, because "a minor, brought up in a retired part of the country, and uninformed of everything, but what his narrow sphere of experience will have taught him, shall ... come to the gallows".⁴⁴ Burgh suggests that in urban life, Rousseau's *Emile* would fall immediate prey to the "ambition, covetousness, and love of pleasure" against which he warns his pupils.

Burgh objects to Rousseau's appropriation of the language of reason and experience. He rejects Rousseau's claim that education should not begin until the age of twelve, rather than six as he advocates in *Thoughts on Education*, asking: "Is a child of six years old a human being? Or is he a brute, till he comes to be of age? is not the faculty of reasoning ... the unalienable characteristic of every human creature ...?"⁴⁵ Burgh's response to Rousseau reveals the high stakes of any threat to the priority of reason. He notes that this may all be a game to Rousseau, who himself declares that he has no experience with "young persons"; however, Burgh cannot laugh along, because Rousseau corrupts a discourse of experiment and experience on which his work relies.⁴⁶ "What indeed was to be expected from an author, who fairly declares that he knows nothing experimentally of his subject, and that he chooses rather to be accused of broaching paradoxes, than of following prejudices?"⁴⁷ Wollstonecraft, as a professional educator and advocate of reason, may have shared Burgh's concerns. But rather than follow "prejudices", as she declares to Everina, she is happy to embrace Rousseau's "paradoxes". In the same letter she highlights the contradictions in Rousseau's

Emile, observing: “He chuses a common capacity to educate — and gives as a reason, that a genius will educate itself”.⁴⁸ But unlike Burgh she sees something of her own experience in Rousseau’s methods: “he rambles into a chimerical world into which I have too often [wand]ered”.⁴⁹ As Kirkley and others have shown, Rousseau’s “wandering” personae held enormous power for Wollstonecraft, and unlike Burgh she does not restrict herself to that which is “practicable”.⁵⁰

James Burgh and the “Art of Speaking”

Despite these important differences, the Burghs’ example did not entirely wither even when Wollstonecraft removed herself from the physical space of James Burgh’s library, and the direct support of Hannah Burgh. Wollstonecraft determined in 1787 not to return to Newington Green, and instead to “exert [her] talents in writing” under the guidance of Johnson.⁵¹ But *The Female Reader*, one of Wollstonecraft’s first commissions for Johnson, demonstrates the ongoing importance of James Burgh’s work, in particular *The Art of Speaking*, which was “by far the most influential of Burgh’s works ... concerned with education”.⁵² As commentators have noted, the most obvious model for Wollstonecraft’s *Female Reader* is a more recent anthology for reading aloud also published by Johnson, William Enfield’s *The Speaker* (1774).⁵³ In the Preface to *The Female Reader*, Wollstonecraft credits Enfield, especially his “methodical order in the arrangement of the pieces”.⁵⁴ But though she does not acknowledge Burgh in the same way, both the pedagogical prototype of *The Art of Speaking* and its commercial success were important models for *The Female Reader*, and she may have made direct use of Burgh’s anthology as she constructed her own.⁵⁵

Wollstonecraft had apparently planned a reading anthology for some time, even before she began her work for Johnson, which suggests that Burgh’s *Art of Speaking* was a longstanding model. While in Ireland she corresponded with Johnson about the work of Charlotte Smith, Madame (Stéphanie Félicité) de Genlis, William Cowper, and Barbauld, all of which features in *The Female Reader*.⁵⁶ But her direct work on the anthology seems to have taken place in the summer of 1788 in London, when she writes to Johnson: “Send me the *Speaker* and *Mary* ... — for I am trying to brace my nerves that I may be industrious”.⁵⁷ The anthology which resulted from her industry bore many features of Enfield’s *The Speaker*, but in its centring of female education, its focus on reading as an opportunity to “exercise the voice” but also as an intellectual activity that goes beyond mere “accomplishment”, and its curation of a canon of texts for domestic as well as public reading, *The Female Reader* drew on Burgh’s model.⁵⁸ There seems to be no place for Rousseau in *The Female Reader*, though Wollstonecraft extracts a

number of French-language works. When it comes to women's acts of voicing, she seems to find a more productive model in the work of Burgh.

The primary objective of Burgh's *Art of Speaking* is to teach the "art" of reading and speaking aloud, to train young men for professions as lawyers, actors, preachers, or parliamentarians. His introductory "Essay on the Art of Speaking" aims to correct "the *deficiencies* we so commonly observe in the *address* of our public Speakers".⁵⁹ But though he prepares male readers for professional life, Burgh allows space for domestic reading:

Suppose a youth to have no prospect either of sitting in parliament, of pleading at the *bar*, of appearing upon the *stage* or in the *pulpit*; does it follow, that he need bestow *no pains* in learning to speak properly his *native language*? Will he never have occasion to read in a company of his friends, a copy of *verses*, a *passage* of a *book* or *newspaper*?⁶⁰

Burgh conjures an image of domestic sociable reading aloud among "friends", of newspapers, poetry, and passages of prose. While his imagined reader is male, these forms of domestic reading are inclusive of women and girls, and Burgh had noted in his earlier work *The Dignity of Human Nature* (1754) that girls should be taught "Reading with propriety and life".⁶¹ Burgh offers inspiration for Wollstonecraft's more programmatic development of a collection of texts for young women and girls to read aloud in *The Female Reader*, and for her development of an elocutionary practice that moves beyond mere masculine public speech or feminine domestic accomplishment.

Though Burgh highlights the reading of "verses" in his preface, he does not foreground poetry in his anthology.⁶² His opening extracts are dominated by "simple and elegant prose" in translations of classical works by Cicero, Sallust, Pliny and Demosthenes, alongside Montaigne. The poetry in Burgh's volume is also classically inflected, with Alexander Pope's translations from Homer, and John Dryden's from Virgil, alongside extracts from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Burgh's concessions to contemporary culture come in his selections of drama, from Richard Steele, Joseph Addison and Colley Cibber alongside Shakespeare and Molière. As Barbara Benedict and others have discussed, anthologies serve to produce canons of reading texts, and though he does not demand knowledge of Latin and Greek, Burgh's canon in *The Art of Speaking* addresses those who possess or aspire to a classical education, strengthening the image of a male reader even in domestic spaces.⁶³ And in contrast to *Thoughts on Education*, which is structured by a wealth of scriptural materials, *The Art of Speaking* includes no biblical texts.

Burgh's major innovation in his "Essay on the Art of Speaking" is to make the communication of feeling the object of reading aloud. He declares: "I have often been amazed how public speakers could bring out

the *strong* and *pathetic* expressions, that they have occasion to utter, in so *cold* and *un-animated* a manner".⁶⁴ To communicate effectively, the speaker must adapt their "general manner of delivery to the *spirit* or *humour* of the ... matter".⁶⁵ This involves modulating the voice and body, because "[e]very part of the human frame *contributes* to express the passions and emotions of the *mind*".⁶⁶ In order to train the "human frame", Burgh catalogues over seventy "*passions, humours, sentiments ... which are to be expressed by speech and action*", from love and veneration to folly and intoxication, listing the appropriate vocal, facial and physical gestures for each.⁶⁷ This affective catalogue becomes the organising principle for the extracts in the anthology. Each extract showcases a "passion" or combination of passions, and Burgh annotates its margins to indicate when the reader should shift to embody a new emotion. He titles Milton's "Morning Hymn" from Book V of *Paradise Lost* "Adoration", and through its marginal notes he guides the reader through states of Veneration, Admiration, Love with Veneration, Sacred Rapture, Lowly Submission, Rapture, and Profound Submission.⁶⁸ For Burgh, reading aloud should not be merely a professional chore or a superficial accomplishment, but rather a means of communicating authentic feeling. Such delivery will enliven and improve public speeches, remarks, and sermons, and intensify the pleasures of domestic reading. As commentators have noted, Burgh's aims and his methods are in tension here, as he aims to produce authentic feeling through "mechanical" means.⁶⁹ In *The Female Reader* Wollstonecraft takes up many of Burgh's suggestions and innovations, but she offers very different accounts of authentic feeling, of devotional texts, and of the importance of reading aloud for women and girls.

While female readers remain only marginal presences in Burgh's text, they are central to Wollstonecraft's anthology. She takes up Burgh's picture of domestic reading in *The Art of Speaking* and his remarks on the education of girls in *Thoughts on Education*, and develops them into a considered programme for female improvement through reading and acts of voicing. Like Burgh, she stresses the importance of feeling and authenticity in reading, but rather than make "passion" her organising principle she focuses on the mind, and articulates a different relation between reading and authentic emotion. Wollstonecraft's *Female Reader*, like *The Art of Speaking*, is an anthology of short reading texts, but it constructs a different canon. And in contrast to Burgh's focus on the mechanics of elocution, Wollstonecraft sets out a broader manifesto:

The main object of this work is to imprint some useful lessons on the mind, and cultivate the taste at the same time — to infuse a relish for a pure and simple style, by presenting natural and touching descriptions from the Scriptures, Shakspeare [*sic*], etc. Simplicity and sincerity generally go hand in hand, as both proceed from a love of truth.⁷⁰

Instead of focusing purely on delivery, Wollstonecraft combines “some little helps to elocution” with a broader discussion of aesthetic taste, and “improvement”, an educational aspiration which goes beyond superficial accomplishment, to propose a programme of intellectual and moral education for young women.⁷¹ Rather than set out a programmatic taxonomy of emotions and actions, Wollstonecraft makes room for “sincerity” produced through simple and spontaneous actions. She moves away from Burgh’s starkly performative elocutionary style, which despite his nod to domestic reading does not seem a good fit for reading among friends and family in a parlour. But she sustains a focus on reading aloud, and unites it in *The Female Reader* with her broader programme for female “improvement”. Wollstonecraft, does not celebrate reading aloud as a mere “accomplishment”; rather she encourages female readers to use their voices as a means of developing their intellectual and devotional faculties, along with their tastes and those of others.⁷²

Wollstonecraft’s “design” is enabled by the structure of her anthology, with texts “carefully disposed in a series that tends to make them illustrate each other”.⁷³ She produces a new programme of reading with a very different emphasis to that of Burgh. *The Female Reader* has little of the classical inflection of the *Art of Speaking*; instead Wollstonecraft prioritises women’s writing and religious texts. Her most cited sources are the Bible, Shakespeare, and Cowper, followed by Barbauld. Only one of her six books focuses on the “Narrative Pieces” which dominate Burgh’s collection, and she showcases a higher proportion of contemporary poetry, periodicals, and drama, and several examples of European literature in translation, including Genlis, Lavater, and Voltaire, though not Rousseau. In contrast to Burgh who only includes material by men, 20% of the content of *The Female Reader* is by women writers.⁷⁴ Wollstonecraft extracts from educational and conduct works for girls whose emphasis on reserve and modesty seems at odds with her stated ambitions for female “improvement”. But as Kirstin Hanley notes, she “invites her readers to take ownership of the challenging experience her textbook offers, and ... encourages the female reader to call into question and grapple with traditional representations of ideal domesticity and women’s proper sphere”.⁷⁵ *The Female Reader* has been dismissed as at worst “hack-work” or a “moneyspinner anthology”, or at best evidence of Johnson’s determination to create paying work for his protégée.⁷⁶ But Wollstonecraft’s curation of her anthology aligns *The Female Reader* with her earlier pedagogical writings, and her later *Vindications*.

Wollstonecraft’s sources in *The Female Reader* also suggest continuity with the work of James Burgh and the community of Newington Green. Her canon of texts departs from Burgh’s in the *Art of Speaking*, but there is important crossover. Wollstonecraft includes the same “Morning

Hymn” from *Paradise Lost* in her book of “Devotional Pieces” and reproduces similar extracts from Steele’s play *The Conscious Lovers* and from *Macbeth*.⁷⁷ We also have textual evidence which suggests that Wollstonecraft consulted Burgh’s *Art of Speaking* directly as she compiled *The Female Reader*. Though she rarely extracts classical sources, her book of “Narrative Pieces” includes a bizarre narrative from Roman history titled “The Filial Piety and Affection of a Daughter”, in which the life of an imprisoned woman is sustained and “supported by the milk of [her] daughter”.⁷⁸ The tale is taken from the historian Valerius Maximus and retold by Pliny the Elder, and had been popularised in early modern literature and art, often with the gender of the parent reversed to become a father to a daughter.⁷⁹ The narrative is reproduced in a multiple translations and media in the eighteenth-century, but Wollstonecraft’s extract is a perfect match for Burgh’s *Art of Speaking*.⁸⁰ As Wollstonecraft collated her materials for *The Female Reader*, at Johnson’s shop and at her lodgings in Southwark, *The Art of Speaking*, product of Newington Green, was likely one of the many texts that she held in her hands, and it constitutes her continued tribute to and celebration of the community that she found there.⁸¹ Wollstonecraft clearly outgrew Hannah Burgh’s direct support, and she came to see the limitations of James Burgh’s pedagogy and his elocutionary model, but nonetheless, the Burghs of Newington Green helped shape Wollstonecraft’s programme for women’s education, speech, and rights.

Notes

1. Mary Hays, “Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft”, *The Annual Necrology, for 1797–8* (London, 1800), 415–16.
2. Kenneth Neill Cameron, ed., *Shelley and his Circle, 1773–1822*, 10 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, 1961), 1: 58.
3. Andrew Kippis, “James Burgh”, *Biographia Britannica*, ed. Andrew Kippis, 2nd ed. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1974), 3: 15. James Burgh’s will does not state the value of his estate, but Hannah Burgh was a widow with her own fortune when they married. Carla Hay notes that she left “specific bequests totalling £920” to family, friends and servants in her 1788 will, with the “residue” going to her nephew. Wollstonecraft was not a named beneficiary. Carla Hay, “Burgh, James (1714–1775), educationist and author”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3992>. Will of James Burgh, PROB 11/1011/102 National Archives; Will of Hannah Burgh, PROB 11/1171/295 National Archives.
4. Lyndall Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), p. 40.
5. Karen Green, “Reassessing the Impact of the ‘Republican Virago’”, *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, 19.1 (2016): 29–48 (39); G. J. Barker-Benfield “Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthwoman”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50.1 (1989): 95–115 (100).

6. Hay, "Burgh, James"; Carla Hay "The Making of a Radical: The Case of James Burgh", *Journal of British Studies*, 18.2 (1979): 90–117; Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 209–57.
7. Hay, "The Making", 97; Carla H. Hay, *James Burgh, Spokesman for Reform in Hanoverian England* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979), p. 17, 52.
8. Barker-Benfield, "Commonwealthwoman", 101–15.
9. On Newtoning Green as a convivial site for Burgh's academy, see Hay, *James Burgh*, p. 21.
10. Vivien Jones, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Literature of Advice and Instruction", *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 119–40 (125); Jones, "Conduct Literature", *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 238–45 (242).
11. Janet Todd notes the connection between Wollstonecraft and Burgh but does not discuss it in detail, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), p. 136. Moira Ferguson notes that Wollstonecraft's use of Cresswick's name suggests "that Wollstonecraft ... viewed the *Reader* as an elocution guide as well as a more general guide to female education". Moira Ferguson, "Mary Wollstonecraft and Mr. Cresswick", *Philological Quarterly*, 62.4 (1983): 459–75 (464).
12. William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Printed for J. Johnson, G. G. and J. Robinson, London, 1798), p. 36.
13. To George Blood, 4 September 1785, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 62.
14. Hay, *James Burgh*, p. 21.
15. To Eliza Bishop, 23 September 1786, *Collected Letters*, p. 78.
16. Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 64, 69.
17. To George Blood, 4 September 1785, *Collected Letters*, p. 62; Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, pp. 64–65.
18. To Eliza Bishop, 23 September 1786, *Collected Letters*, p. 79.
19. To Everina Wollstonecraft, 24 March 1787, *Collected Letters*, p. 114.
20. To Everina Wollstonecraft, 15 May 1787, *Collected Letters*, p. 127.
21. Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, pp. 120–21; To Eliza Bishop, 27 June 1787, *Collected Letters*, p. 128.
22. To Everina Wollstonecraft, 7 November 1787, *Collected Letters*, pp. 138–39.
23. Todd, *Revolutionary Life*, p. 130.
24. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life* (Printed for Joseph Johnson, London, 1787), pp. 16–17.
25. Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 46.
26. James Burgh, *Thoughts on Education* (Printed for G. Freer, London, 1747), p. 5.
27. Burgh outlines a curriculum including grammar, orthography, Latin, Greek, French, writing, drawing, music, numbers, keeping accounts, geography, and history, *Thoughts*, pp. 8–12.
28. Burgh, *Thoughts*, p. 13; James Burgh, *Youth's Friendly Monitor: being a set of directions, prudential, moral, religious, and scientific* (Printed for M. Cooper,

- London, 1754), p. 14. Burgh intended this text for his pupils, but when it was pirated, he published it more widely, *ibid.*, pp. iv–vii.
29. Burgh, *Thoughts*, pp. 51–52.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 52. See also James Burgh, *The Dignity of Human Nature* (Printed by W. B. and sold by J. and P. Knapton; J. Ward; J. Whiston and B. White; A. Millar; and R. and J. Dodsley, London, 1754), p. 65.
 31. Jones, “Advice and Instruction”, 125–26; Jones, “Conduct Literature”, 242; Barker-Benfield, “Commonwealthwoman”, 100–1.
 32. Burgh, *Thoughts*, p. 21.
 33. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, p. 116. Wollstonecraft and Burgh both take a dim view of deists: Burgh, *Thoughts*, p. 26, Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, p. 132.
 34. Burgh, *Thoughts*, p. 52.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
 37. Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts*, p. 24.
 38. Barker-Benfield, “Commonwealthwoman”, p. 101; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Printed for Joseph Johnson, London, 1792), p. 380.
 39. Laura Kirkley, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Cosmopolitan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2022), p. 22, 26; see also Laura Kirkley, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau”, *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context*, ed. Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 155–63.
 40. To Everina Wollstonecraft, 24 March 1787, *Collected Letters*, p. 114.
 41. Kippis, “James Burgh”, 15.
 42. James Burgh, “Essay II”, *Crito, or, essays on various subjects*, 2 vols. (Printed for Messrs. Dodsley, Becket and de Hondt, White, Payne, and Cooke, London, 1766), 1: 68–71.
 43. *Ibid.*, 71–72.
 44. *Ibid.*, 74–75, 133, 131–32.
 45. *Ibid.*, 125–26.
 46. *Ibid.*, 94.
 47. *Ibid.*, 134–35.
 48. To Everina Wollstonecraft, 24 March 1787, *Collected Letters*, p. 114.
 49. *Ibid.*
 50. Christopher Brooke, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau”, *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, eds. Sandrine Bergès, Eileen Hunt Botting, Alan Coffee (London: Routledge, 2020), 297–310 (161–70); Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 73–74.
 51. To Everina Wollstonecraft, 7 November 1787, *Collected Letters*, pp. 138–39.
 52. Mary Hurley Moran, “James Burgh”, *Eighteenth-Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources*, ed. Michael G. Moran (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 37.
 53. Don Paul Abbott, “‘A New Genus’: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminization of Elocution”, *Rhetorica*, 36.3 (2018): 269–95 (274); Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 67–68; Moira Ferguson, “Introduction”, in Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Female Reader*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1980), p. xv. Enfield’s text forms part of a broader set of conversational Dissenting educational practices; see Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University

- Press, 2011), p. 121; Michèle Cohen, “The Pedagogy of Conversation in the Home: ‘Familiar Conversation’ as a Pedagogical Tool in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century England”, *Oxford Review of Education*, 41.4 (2005): 447–63.
54. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Female Reader; or Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse; Selected from the Best Writers, and Disposed under Proper Heads; for the Improvement of Young Women. By Mr. Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution* (Printed for J. Johnson, London, 1789), p. iii.
 55. Kippis notes that Burgh’s *Art of Speaking* “is now considerably superseded by Dr Enfield’s *Speaker*”, “James Burgh”, 14–15.
 56. To Joseph Johnson 5 December 1786, To Everina Wollstonecraft 15 January 1787, Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, pp. 95–96, 98; Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, p. 102.
 57. To Joseph Johnson c. July 1788, *Collected Letters*, p. 157.
 58. “[T]o exercise the voice, many dialogues have been selected”. Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader*, p. v.
 59. James Burgh, *The Art of Speaking* (Printed for T. Longman, J. Buckland, W. Fenner, J. Waugh, E. Dilly, T. Field, London, 1761), p. 1.
 60. Burgh, *Art of Speaking*, p. 2, italics in original.
 61. Burgh, *Dignity*, p. 66.
 62. Out of eighty-one extracts “[t]wenty-one are from classical Greek and Roman sources; thirteen each are from Shakespeare and Pope, nine from Milton, seven from Steele, and three each from Moliere and Swift.” Donald Hargis, “James Burgh and *The Art of Speaking*”, *Speech*, 24.4 (1957): 275–84 (283).
 63. Barbara M. Benedict *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* Rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 17; Clare Bucknell, *The Treasuries: Poetry Anthologies and the Making of British Culture* (London; Head of Zeus, 2023), pp. 1–11.
 64. Burgh, *Art of Speaking*, p. 11.
 65. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
 66. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 67. *Ibid.*, p. 14; 14–26.
 68. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–96.
 69. Ferguson, “Mary Wollstonecraft”, 465; Peter De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics, and the Subject* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 159–63.
 70. Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader*, p. iv.
 71. *Ibid.*, p. vi.
 72. I discuss the devotional force of reading aloud for Wollstonecraft in a research project in progress, funded by the Leverhulme Trust: “Devotional Voices: women writers, religion, and print culture 1770–1820”.
 73. *Ibid.*, p. iv.
 74. William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 501.
 75. Kirstin Hanley, *Mary Wollstonecraft, Pedagogy, and the Practice of Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 40–1.
 76. Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism*, p. 73; Jones, “Literature of Advice”, 130, 132.
 77. Wollstonecraft, *Female Reader*, pp. 204–207, 236–40.
 78. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
 79. Mary Beagon, trans., *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History Book 7* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 85; Jutta Gisela Sperling,

Roman Charity: Queer Lactations in Early Modern Visual Culture (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2016), pp. 9–10.

80. Burgh, *Art of Speaking*, pp. 52–54, referenced “Val. Max. Plin”. The same extract is also included in Vicesimus Knox, *Elegant Extracts: or Useful and Entertaining Passages in Prose, Selected for the Improvement of Scholars at Classical & other Schools in the Art of Speaking, in Reading; Thinking, Composing; and in the Conduct of Life* (Printed for Charles Dilly, London, 1784), pp. 291–92. It is likely that Knox also took his text from *The Art of Speaking*.
81. Godwin, *Memoirs*, pp. 62–63.

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