

# Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* and Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men* : Aesthetics Applied to the Debate on Manners

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## Introduction

This essay<sup>1)</sup> discusses Edmund Burke's early aesthetic work, *Philosophical Enquiry*<sup>2)</sup> and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men*.<sup>3)</sup> Although the *Rights of Men* is a critical response to Burke's most famous work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,<sup>4)</sup> it deserves particular attention that she also discusses Burke's aesthetics. Actually, the *Rights of Men* was the first published work to discuss the *Enquiry* and *Reflections* simultaneously, as well as the earliest published response to *Reflections*. The present essay will argue that the *Enquiry* might have been put into the eighteenth-century debate on manners, especially forming a part of Wollstonecraft's view of manners by her reading of Burke's aesthetics, although the intention of Burke in the *Enquiry* was scarcely linked to such a debate. In order to demonstrate this argument, we will consider I) what Burke intended in the *Enquiry*, and II) Wollstonecraft's reception of the *Enquiry*. Although this paper considers the present particular case, what is important is that the analysis should be closely related to the more general phenomenon of intellectual history, which will briefly be discussed in the final section.

## I . Intellectual Contexts of Burke's Aesthetics and Politics

### (a) *Philosophical Enquiry*

Burke had speculated on the subject of *Enquiry* since he was in college.<sup>5)</sup> As he

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2) Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757-9), edited with an Introduction by J.T. Boulton (London, 1958). Hereafter, *Enquiry*. About Boulton's introduction in this book, hereafter, Boulton (1958).

3) Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Marilyn Butler and Janet Todd (London, 1989), V. Hereafter, *VRM*.

4) Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, eds., Paul Langford and others (Oxford, 1981-), VIII. Hereafter, *Reflections*, *WS*.

mentions in the 1757 preface of *Enquiry*, ‘it is four years now since this enquiry was finished’: he had completed his treatise as the most ambitious literary project of his early days in 1753.<sup>6)</sup> In general, Burke was rooted in his empirical age, in which the Newtonian tradition and John Locke’s philosophy were influential.<sup>7)</sup> In particular, the *Enquiry* belongs to the philosophical tradition of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).<sup>8)</sup> What has often been pointed out is that the introductory section ‘On Taste’, which was added to the second edition of the *Enquiry*, may be intended to oppose David Hume’s view on taste in his *Dissertation on Taste*.<sup>9)</sup> His discussion on ‘sympathy’ also suggests Hume’s influence, although we must take account of a general increasing interest in the significance of sympathy in this period.<sup>10)</sup> However, Burke was under the influence not only of Hume, but also the earlier philosophers such as Locke, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson. For instance, the pleasure-pain principle had been a theme discussed by several previous philosophers. Burke may have referred to Hutcheson in his comments on the emotion of sex.<sup>11)</sup> Besides, when he discusses the qualities of beautiful objects, his emphasis on sight suggests that he follows the tradition of Aristotle, Locke and Joseph Addison.<sup>12)</sup>

While sharing a lot of themes of philosophy and aesthetics with his predecessors, Burke criticized or tried to overcome their theories. He criticizes the theories ‘which connect beauty with proportion, with fitness (or utility), and with goodness or perfection’ supported since the time of Plato.<sup>13)</sup> Boulton concludes about Burke’s theory of beauty that although Burke agrees with his predecessors in some respects, ‘he departs from orthodoxy’.<sup>14)</sup> Burke’s theory of words, which attracts many modern researchers, also ‘represents a reaction against the distrust of language among post-Baconian writers in the previous century’. Although such writers claim that ‘words would simply be marks of things’ and ‘emotional and historical associations would be non-existent’,<sup>15)</sup>

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5) F.P. Lock, *Edmund Burke Volume I, 1730-1784* (Oxford, 1998), p.91.

6) *Enquiry*, p.2. Burke continues: ‘during which time the author found no cause to make any material alteration in his theory’. See also Lock (1998), pp.87, 92.

7) Boulton (1958), pp.xxviii, lvii.

8) Lock (1998), p.92. ‘Burke was familiar with Locke’s *Essay* from his student days’. (p.93).

9) Boulton (1958), pp.xxviii-xxix.

10) Boulton (1958), pp.xli-xlii.

11) Boulton (1958), pp.xl-xli.

12) Boulton (1958), pp.lxxii-lxxiii. According to Lock, the lectures given by the oculist John Taylor, which Burke attended in 1745, ‘could have started him thinking about the physiology of perception, and about the experiences of the blind, which provide important evidence for his theory’. See Lock (1998), p.91.

13) Boulton (1958), p.lx. See also pp.lxii-lxiii. For example, Addison accepted the proportionist theory in the *Spectator*, and the theory which links beauty with moral perfection was supported by Plato, Aquinas and Shaftesbury.

14) Boulton (1958), p.lxxii.

15) Boulton (1958), p.lxxvii.

Burke asserts that words can excite and convey emotion or ideas.<sup>16)</sup> While the younger Burke relied on inherited ideas, he also tried to overcome them. For the discussion of the present paper, it is significant that the early Burke read Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Addison because they were the writers who discussed (male) manners being reformed in the eighteenth century. To what extent would Burke's aesthetics be linked to contemporary debate on manners? To answer this question, we need to grasp the intention of his book.

Lock argues that the purpose of *Enquiry* is 'to explain how the mind receives and responds to the categories of ideas that he calls 'the sublime' and 'the beautiful': to find out the laws of the operations of human mind.'<sup>17)</sup> According to Bullard, the particular polemical purpose was to demonstrate the incompatibility of the aesthetic categories of the sublime and beautiful.<sup>18)</sup> In other words, the aim of the *Enquiry* was 'to refute those writers who treated them as synonyms, or at least, to caution those who combined them as a collocation'.<sup>19)</sup> While the topic of 'sublimity' was, as well as 'beauty', popular among eighteenth-century critics and aestheticians, only Shaftesbury, before Burke, had brought the two words into the single collocation 'sublime and beautiful'.<sup>20)</sup> Burke tried to distinguish the sublime from the beautiful, attacking Shaftesbury's view of aesthetics. Nevertheless, Bullard also argues that the purpose of the treatise is not absolutely clear. Despite the fact that the project of the *Enquiry* 'began as a rejection of Shaftesbury's moral philosophy, the later stages of its composition had shifted it into the realm of aesthetic and critical discourse'.<sup>21)</sup> Although the intention of Burke's aesthetics is not completely comprehensible, if Burke wrote the *Enquiry* to search the reaction of human mind to the aesthetic categories, or criticize critics who confuse the sublime and the beautiful, his aesthetics may not be explicitly connected to contemporary debate on manners.

#### (b) Burke's Political Writings

It is also significant to consider what intellectual traditions his political writings relied upon, in order to deepen our understanding about difference between Burke's aesthetics and politics, or about Wollstonecraft's reception of Burke, although there is no simple answer to this question.<sup>22)</sup> As we will see, the intellectual contexts of Burke's politics are not the same as those of his aesthetics.

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16) See the fifth and final part of the *Enquiry*, pp.161-177.

17) Lock (1998), pp.93, 98.

18) Paddy Bullard, 'The Meaning of the 'Sublime and Beautiful': Shaftesburian Contexts and Rhetorical Issues in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 56:224 (2005), 169-191 (p.169).

19) Bullard, p.171.

20) Bullard, p.170.

21) Bullard, p.188.

The earlier studies emphasized the ‘natural law’ tradition in Burke’s thought. The studies of Stanlis, Canavan and Wilkins are the examples of the natural law interpretation.<sup>23)</sup> In particular, Stanlis and Strauss paid attention to the similarity between Burke and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>24)</sup> However, several critics today are skeptical of the importance of natural law for Burke’s thought. For example, Lock argues that Burke’s use of the natural law ‘is closely related to his rhetorical needs’.<sup>25)</sup> Stanlis emphasizes the intellectual connection of Burke to Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas and Hooker, whereas for Lock, Burke shares the intellectual world-picture more with Montesquieu, Magna Carta, Lord Somers and the Bill of Rights than with Aristotle or Aquinas.<sup>26)</sup>

The common-law tradition has also been considered significant on Burke’s thought. Valuable studies in this regard are Pocock (1960) and Postema.<sup>27)</sup> Burke himself seemed to be conscious of this tradition,<sup>28)</sup> and drew upon Sir Edward Coke’s and Sir Matthew Hale’s defence of English common law ‘as the refined embodiment of an inarticulate collective historical experience’.<sup>29)</sup> According to Pocock, Burke’s prescriptive constitution has two features: immemorial and customary. Burke’s argument of this was used to defend the English Constitution and to oppose the reform of the representation based on the principle of natural right.<sup>30)</sup> According to Lucas, however, we should say

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22) For instance, Hampsher-Monk argues that there are six intellectual contexts for understanding Burke’s thoughts: Natural Law, Common Law, Utilitarianism, Romanticism, Old Whiggery and Political Economy. See Iain Hampsher-Monk, ‘Rhetoric and Opinion in the Politics of Edmund Burke’, *History of Political Thought*, 9:3 (1988), 455-484 (p.456). However, of these we discuss only the relatively significant contexts of Natural Law, Common Law and Political Economy.

23) Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor, 1958), p.110. As other examples of the ‘natural law’ interpretation of Burke, see Francis P. Canavan. *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke*, (Durham, N.C., 1960), and Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *The Problem of Burke’s Political Philosophy* (Oxford, 1967). But, Wilkins is more guarded.

24) Stanlis, p.298. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago Ill., 1953), p.296. But, see Paul Lucas, ‘On Edmund Burke’s doctrine of prescription: or, an appeal from the new to the old lawyers’, *The Historical Journal*, 11:1 (1968), 35-63 (p.37). Although Strauss touches on connection between Burke and the natural law tradition, ‘he finds himself unable to place Burke squarely within that tradition’.

25) F.P. Lock, *Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, 1985), p.91.

26) Lock (1985), p.91. As criticisms of the ‘natural law’ school, see also C.B. Macpherson, ‘Burke and the new conservatism’, *Science and Society*, 22:3 (1958), 231-239, Lucas, and Frank O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy* (London, 1973).

27) J.G.A Pocock, ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas’ in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago and London, 1971). This paper first appeared in *The Historical Journal*, 3:2 (1960), 125-143. Gerald.J. Postema, *Bentham and the Common Law Tradition* (Oxford, 1986).

28) J.G.A. Pocock, ‘The political economy of Burke’s analysis of the French Revolution’, in *Virtue, Commerce, and History : Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985) pp.193-194. This paper first appeared in *The Historical Journal*, 25:2 (1982), 331-49.

29) Ian Hampsher-Monk. ‘British radicalism and the anti-Jacobins’ in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge, 2006), p.675.

30) ‘Burke and the Ancient Constitution’ in Pocock (1971), p.227.

that although Burke was perhaps a common lawyer, he ‘both emerged from and rejected the intellectual womb of English legal traditionalism’. Burke’s concept of ‘prescription’ is not the same as that of the seventeenth-century common lawyers. It is extensive and historically dynamic, whereas their doctrine is somewhat static.<sup>31)</sup>

Another intellectual tradition we need to consider is ‘political economy’, whose language and its development in eighteenth-century Britain were much indebted to the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. It is interesting to examine the relationship between the development of this intellectual tradition and economic formation in eighteenth-century Britain. Burke’s defence of free trade and his other liberal portraits have traditionally confused his students : ‘How could the same man be at once the defender of a hierarchical order and the proponent of a liberal market society?’<sup>32)</sup> Here is the traditional and typical problem of Burke’s consistency. Macpherson attempts to resolve this problem by asserting that eighteenth-century English ‘traditional order was already a capitalist order’.<sup>33)</sup> Pocock agrees with Macpherson’s view that Burke is a modern, not a reactionary.<sup>34)</sup> Pocock argues that ‘comparably important passages in the *Reflections* and the *Letters* can similarly be situated in a quite distinct tradition of thought, which will be termed ‘political economy’’.<sup>35)</sup> While Burke can be read in the context of the two intellectual traditions (common law and political economy), his ‘response to revolution looks different when considered as that of a common-law constitutionalist, and as that of an exponent of political economy’.<sup>36)</sup> Traditionally, Burke has been regarded ‘as the philosopher of traditions’, but ‘we must also see him as the active exponent and defender of Whig aristocratic politics’. Then, the Whig order was far from traditional,<sup>37)</sup> which defended the rising commerce in the Britain. Burke regarded the French Revolution as a challenge to the Whig order, which defended the growth of commercial society in Britain. The language of political economy was employed to analyze and respond to the revolutionary threat by the defender of Whig aristocratic government.<sup>38)</sup> In Pocock’s model, the traditional problem of Burke’s coherence is resolved by arguing that Burke was a defender of an emerging commercial society, and that he believed the new kind of society had been born as a result of defence of tradition. Burke was influenced by, and agreed with philosophers in Scotland in many points, but he claimed that chivalry (aristocracy) and Christianity provided the basis for prosperity of commerce and

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31) Lucas, pp.57, 59. See also, p.62.

32) C.B. Macpherson, *Burke* (Oxford, 1980), p.4.

33) Macpherson, *Burke*, p.5.

34) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), p.209.

35) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), p.194.

36) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), p.194.

37) ‘Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price: A study in the varieties of eighteenth-century conservatism’ in Pocock (1985), p.158.

38) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), pp.194-195.

letters, whereas Hume, Robertson, Smith and Millar asserted that the rise of commerce would be the cause of refined manners. Burke thought, on the relationship between manners and commerce, Scottish sociological historians mistook the effect for the cause. Therefore, for Burke, to overthrow religion and nobility meant the destruction of the possibilities of commerce. Burke ‘saw the French Revolution as a conspiracy of *gens de lettres* and monied speculators to get their hands on the lands of the church’.<sup>39)</sup> The assault upon Marie Antoinette indicates the destruction of chivalric manners.<sup>40)</sup> The Revolution also confiscated the lands of the church and made them its security for the issue of a national loan whose paper credit of *assignats* was floated.<sup>41)</sup> While Burke found an inclination to atheism among *gens de lettres*, who ‘supply an ideological justification for the speculators in the public credit’,<sup>42)</sup> he predicted a despotism of paper currency in France, which would lead to the destruction of commerce and property.<sup>43)</sup>

Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Men* discussed the *Reflections*, and her criticism was also directed to the *Enquiry*. Wollstonecraft never discussed the problem of consistency between the *Enquiry* and Burke’s political writings (especially, the *Reflections*). Rather, she seemed to take them together with ease. From the viewpoint of the history of Burke studies, Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Men* is interesting because her reading of Burke can be considered as the first attempt to connect Burke’s politics to his aesthetics, which was later developed by many modern commentators of Burke.<sup>44)</sup> We will consider her analysis of Burke in the next section.

## II. Wollstonecraft’s Reception of the *Enquiry*

### (a) *Rights of Men*

Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Men* was launched on 29 November 1790, which was the earliest published response to Burke’s *Reflections* (published on 1 November 1790).<sup>45)</sup>

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39) ‘Josiah Tucker’ in Pocock (1985), p.190.

40) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), p.199

41) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), p.197.

42) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), p.202.

43) ‘Burke’s analysis’ in Pocock (1985), p.199.

44) This kind of interpretation was introduced by Wood. Neal Wood, ‘The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke’s Political Thought’, *Journal of British Studies*, 4 (1964), 41-64. As other examples, for instance, see Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology*, (Cambridge, 1993), Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford, 1994). But, many assertions of critics may lack sufficient evidence to support them.

45) For Wollstonecraft, the *Rights of Men* was her ‘answer to Burke’. See her letter to William Godwin (October 26, 1796), in *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* ed. Ralph M. Wardle (Ithaca and London, 1979), p.358.

While the sermon delivered by Richard Price which hailed the French Revolution was a trigger for Burke to write the *Reflections*, we may find her motive for the *Rights of Men* in her allegiance to Price, because Wollstonecraft owed much to Price personally and intellectually.<sup>46)</sup> According to Barker-Benfield, her attack on Burke has two prongs: one is her references to Burke's political career, and the other is to the *Enquiry*.<sup>47)</sup> While referring to Burke's plan of economic reform, his sympathy for American Revolution, his putative Catholicism, his Irishness, and the Gordon Riots of 1780 which infuriated Burke,<sup>48)</sup> Wollstonecraft also accused Burke of his encomium on the members of the House of Commons,<sup>49)</sup> or of his contempt for the poor and his defence of hierarchical society.<sup>50)</sup> As other radicals, denouncing Burke's doctrine of prescription and the limited capacities of individual reason, she defends human reason, equality, and natural rights: 'prescription can never undermine natural rights'.<sup>51)</sup> According to Burke, there cannot be new discovery in morality, but Wollstonecraft denies his assertion, saying 'the more man discovers of the nature of his mind and body, the more clearly he is convinced, that to act according to the dictates of reason is to conform to the law of God'.<sup>52)</sup> For our discussion, Burke's passage of 'the decent drapery' is worth quoting. Describing Versailles Palace being attacked by the mob in his *Reflections*, he comments as follows:

All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order.<sup>53)</sup>

Wollstonecraft cites Burke's 'a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman...' and comments '— All true, Sir; if she is not more attentive to the duties of humanity than

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46) For the intention of the *Reflections*, for example, see Frederick, Dreyer, 'The Genesis of Burke's *Reflections*,' *The Journal of Modern History*, 50:3 (1978), 462-479. For Wollstonecraft's review of Price's sermon in the *Analytical Review*, see *Works*, VII, pp.185-187.

47) G.J. Barker-Benfield, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: Eighteenth Century Commonwealthwoman', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50:1 (1989), 95-115 (pp.104-105).

48) *VRM, Works*, V, p.13, 14, 35, 37, 38. See also Barker-Benfield, p.104.

49) *VRM, Works*, V, p.42. *Reflections, WS*, VIII, p.95.

50) *VRM, Works*, V, pp.17, 55.

51) *VRM, Works*, V, p.12.

52) *Reflections, WS*, VIII, p.137. *VRM, Works*, V, pp.32-33, 51.

53) *Reflections, WS*, VIII, p.128.

queens and fashionable ladies in general are'.<sup>54)</sup> How did (or did not) she understand the passage of 'the decent drapery'? A modern reader claims that although Burke in the *Enquiry* 'refers to the second nature as the habit which determines the character of man's natural and general state of psychological indifference or tranquility, of his sensibility to pleasure and pain', he, with the passages of 'the decent drapery' in the *Reflections*, 'evidently is referring to the socializing effect of the second nature upon the primordial nature'.<sup>55)</sup> However, if we accept Pocock's view, a different point should be emphasized. Although the passage in question is, as Wollstonecraft and every reader of the *Reflections* understand, the metaphor of collapse of the *ancien régime*, what Burke had in mind would have been not so much nostalgia for the old regime as his belief that destruction of opinions and manners would make prosperity impossible from now onward.<sup>56)</sup> Burke's intention might not have been grasped by Wollstonecraft and many modern readers. Then, against Burke's descriptions of lower-ranked women as follows:

;whilst the royal captives who followed in the train were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances, and infamous contumelies, and all the unutterable abominations of the furies of hell, in the abused shape of the vilest of women.<sup>57)</sup>

She comments that probably 'you mean women who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never had had any advantages/ of education'.<sup>58)</sup> Burke's description of 'two kinds of women' — the queen of France and the lower-ranked — attracted Wollstonecraft's attention as well as that of commentators.

#### (b) *Rights of Men* and *Philosophical Enquiry*

Although there are other contemporaries who connected the *Reflections* with the *Enquiry*,<sup>59)</sup> her criticism of the *Enquiry* deserves particular attention. Blakemore claims

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54) *VRM, Works*, V, p.25.

55) Wood, p.53.

56) Cf. Michiyo Adachi, *Kindai Feminizumu no Tanjo: Meiri Urusutonkurafuto [Birth of Modern Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft]*, (Kyoto, 2002), pp.125-126.

57) *Reflections, WS*, VIII, p.122.

58) *VRM, Works*, V, p.30.

59) Boulton (1958), p.xxv. Boulton argues that 'in his [Burke's] political career his detractors frequently accused him of trying to reproduce the terror and obscurity of the sublime in' the *Reflections*. As other contemporary works which linked the *Reflections* to the *Enquiry*, Boulton in the footnote mentions two works, [J. Courtenay], *A Poetical and Philosophical Essay on the French Revolution* (1793), and a pamphlet (advertised *St. James's Chronicle*, 19 April 1791): *The Wonderful Flights of Edmund the Rhapsodist into the Sublime and Beautiful regions of Fancy, Fiction, Extravagance, and Absurdity, exposed and laughed at*.

that ‘Wollstonecraft’s reading of the *Enquiry* is central to her reading of both Burke and the French Revolution’, and Frances Ferguson contends that Wollstonecraft ‘links Burke’s politics in the *Reflections* with his aesthetic position in the *Enquiry*’.<sup>60</sup> According to Paulson, ‘she saw that his categories were essentially his own aesthetic ones of the *Enquiry*’,<sup>61</sup> which were developed by the younger Burke thirty years previously.

If these views are correct, we can find here the first historical example for the application of the *Enquiry* to the *Reflections*, which many modern critics have attempted. In the opening pages of her first *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft redefines the categories of the sublime and beautiful: ‘truth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful’.<sup>62</sup> While the *Enquiry* describes women as those who ‘learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness’ in order to demonstrate that the cause of beauty is derived from imperfection and weakness rather than perfection,<sup>63</sup> Wollstonecraft asserts that his beautiful woman is a social artifice. She writes:

But these ladies may have read your Enquiry concerning the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, and, convinced by your arguments, /may have laboured to be pretty, by counterfeiting weakness.

You may have convinced them that *littleness* and *weakness* are the very essence of beauty; and that the Sublime Being, in giving women beauty in the most supereminent degree, seemed to command them, by the powerful voice of Nature, not to cultivate the moral virtues that might chance to excite respect, and interfere with the pleasing sensations they were created to inspire.<sup>64</sup>

According to Wollstonecraft, Burke has ‘clearly proved that one half of the human species, at least, have not souls; and that Nature, by making women *little, smooth, delicate, fair* creatures, never designed that they should exercise their reason to acquire the virtues that produce opposite, if not contradictory, feelings’.<sup>65</sup> She continues as follows:

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60) Steven Blakemore, *Intertextual War: Edmund Burke and the French Revolution in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and James Mackintosh* (London, 1997), pp.23, 82.

61) Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution, 1789-1820* (New Haven [Conn.], 1983), p.81. Blakemore quotes this sentence and continues: ‘but it remains to be shown precisely how Wollstonecraft’s textual war against Burke’s *Reflections* is a simultaneous effort to invert the patriarchal values of the *Enquiry*’. Blakemore (1997), p.26. See also Steven Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language: The French Revolution as Linguistic Event* (Hanover, NH, 1988), p.52.

62) *VRM, Works*, V, p.7. See also, pp.8, 56: ‘but truly sublime is the character that acts from principle, and governs the inferior springs of activity without slackening their vigour’; ‘to contribute to the happiness of man, is the most sublime of all enjoyments’.

63) *Enquiry*, p.110.

64) *VRM, Works*, V, p.45.

65) *VRM, Works*, V, p.45.

If beautiful weakness be interwoven in a woman's frame, if the chief business of her life be (as you insinuate) to inspire love, and Nature has made an eternal distinction between the qualities that dignify a rational being and this animal perfection, her duty and happiness in this life must clash with any preparation for a more exalted state.<sup>66)</sup>

Paulson comments that the queen of France 'remains only a passive image of beauty, threatened by the irrational force of other women that is now unleashed', whereas women readers of the *Enquiry* 'are the Marie Antoinette of the greater world, convinced by Burke's aesthetic that "littleness and weakness are the very essence of beauty"'.<sup>67)</sup> Wollstonecraft argues, however, that 'the love of the Deity, which is mixed with the most profound reverence, must be love of perfection, and not compassion for weakness', and that 'if we really wish to render men more virtuous, we must endeavour to banish all enervating modifications of beauty from civil society'.<sup>68)</sup> According to Paulson, the 'underlying insight of Wollstonecraft's writings on the French Revolution is that the beautiful is no longer a viable aesthetic category'.<sup>69)</sup>

Wollstonecraft criticizes Burke for his portrait of the beautiful, but she is still influenced by his aesthetics.<sup>70)</sup> According to Furniss, she not only points out the mismatch between 'the sexual politics' of his aesthetics and his politics in 1790, but 'she finds in the aesthetics a powerful articulation of her own political philosophy'.<sup>71)</sup> Blakemore also argues that 'Burke's language in the *Enquiry* and *Reflections* permeates *The Rights of Men*, where many of his arguments reappear in a new revolutionary context'.<sup>72)</sup> In other words, like Rousseau in her *Rights of Women*, 'Burke is an equally powerful interlocutor whose texts paradoxically empower her thought even as she seeks to refute them.'<sup>73)</sup>

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66) *VRM, Works*, V, p.46.

67) Paulson, p.82.

68) *VRM, Works*, V, p.46.

69) Paulson, p.86.

70) Virginia Sapiro, *A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Chicago, London, 1992), p.282. Wollstonecraft often mentions the category of the sublime and beautiful in her *Rights of Men*, pp.7, 10, 33-34, 46, 55. See also her *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796).

71) Furniss, pp.190-191. Furniss continues that 'Wollstonecraft accepts the *Enquiry*'s basic assumptions about the virtues of 'manly' exertion and the dangers of 'feminine' luxury, but she brings to the fore the *Enquiry*'s covert politics by employing these assumptions to develop an explicitly bourgeois feminism (by drawing on the fact that the Burkean sublime is more appropriate to bourgeois enterprise than to the heroisms of the chivalric quest). In doing so, she attacks Burke for having apparently abandoned his earlier 'liberal' politics, yet she fails to allow that Burke's political conservatism in the *Reflections* might act as a 'front' for a free-market economics.'

72) Blakemore (1997), p.40.

73) Furniss, p.195.

But, why did she need to mention *Enquiry*, when her *Rights of Men* was a direct response to Burke's *Reflections*? This question has not been fully taken into consideration by critics. According to Barker-Benfield, her 'immersion in the *Enquiry* was linked to her extremely close intellectual and personal relationship with the painter, Henry Fuseli, who was deeply influenced by Burke's aesthetics'. Although Fuseli did teach her many things, it still remains unclear whether Wollstonecraft's love for Fuseli provides the full answer to this question.<sup>74)</sup>

### III. Conclusion: Text, Intention and Response in Intellectual History

Whether or not Wollstonecraft's language was republican or was rooted in the radical-Protestant Enlightenment,<sup>75)</sup> many passages in her works can be situated in the contemporary debate on manners. The *Rights of Woman* can be read 'as part of an in-house quarrel among Enlightenment thinkers about the role and status of women in modern civilisation'.<sup>76)</sup> We may pay attention to her remarks on manners, criticism of British commerce or its standing army.<sup>77)</sup> If we focus on the *Rights of Men*, her criticism of commerce and interest—seldom mentioned by researchers—in Burke's analysis of the relation between British and French manners deserve attention.<sup>78)</sup> The *Rights of Men*, which linked the *Reflection* with the *Enquiry*, was sent to Burke, but was not read by him.<sup>79)</sup> If Burke had read it, what would he have thought about Wollstonecraft's reading of the *Reflections* and the *Enquiry*? He would surely have disagreed with and have denounced her understanding of his writings and thoughts. When considering historical evidence, we may argue that for Burke 'there was no obvious link between the two works [*Enquiry* and *Reflections*]'.<sup>80)</sup>

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74) Barker-Benfield, p.105. About the fact Fuseli was influenced by the *Enquiry*, see Boulton (1958), pp.cxiv-cxvi. See also John Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli* (London, 1831), vol. I, II. See also Adachi, p.46.

75) For republican interpretation of Wollstonecraft, see Barker-Benfield; Judith A. Vega, 'Feminist Republicanism and the Political Perception of Gender', in *Republicanism: a Shared European Heritage*, ed. Quentin Skinner, vol. III (Cambridge, 2000); Anne Phillips, 'Feminism and Republicanism: Is This a Plausible Alliance?', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 8:2 (2000). However, according to Taylor, who emphasizes religious elements of Wollstonecraft's thought, 'their concern to push Wollstonecraft into the republican camp leads them to underplay or misinterpret key elements of her thought, including her natural-rights perspective and, above all, her religious commitments'. See Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge, 2003), pp.297-298.

76) Taylor, p.15. See also its chapter 5.

77) Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), *Works*, V, p.86.

78) *VRM*, *Works*, V, pp.57, 60.

79) See *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 10 vols. ed. Copeland, Thomas W. and others (Cambridge, Chicago, Illinois, 1958-78), X, p.504. See also VIII, p.304, where Burke mentions Wollstonecraft in his letter to John Crewe (posted on 11 August 1795). Hereafter, *Corr*.

80) F.P. Lock, 'Rhetoric and representation in Burke's *Reflections*' in *Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France: New interdisciplinary essays*, ed. John Whale (Manchester, New York, 2000), p.21. In 1789, Burke rejected Edmond Malone's request to revise the *Enquiry*. See also Michel Fuchs, *Edmund Burke, Ireland, and the fashioning of self*, (Oxford, 1996), p.152, Lock (1998), pp.109, 124, and *Corr*, VIII, pp.364-365.

If Lock or Bullard's view is correct, Burke's intention and purpose in writing his aesthetics was to discover the truth of man's perception, not to contribute to the debate on manners. Wollstonecraft did not seem to understand Burke's intention, whereas she developed her own view of manners by using the *Enquiry* unjustly. Although the *Rights of Men* would be a useful reminder that 'the *Enquiry* is the work of a man and sometimes reveals a patently male perspective', 'she forgets that Burke's 'beauty' is for admiration, not desire'.<sup>81)</sup> We might even argue that the *Enquiry* indirectly contributed to the debate on manners in the eighteenth century by her use.

However, what is significant is that the present example includes a critical message closely related to the methodology of intellectual history. Wollstonecraft's reading of Burke's aesthetics includes some misunderstandings in the sense that she did not grasp his intention and interpreted his claims arbitrarily in some respects. It seemed unlikely that she was conscious of her own misunderstandings (which we mean here) of Burke's intention.<sup>82)</sup> One of the reasons that Wollstonecraft was possibly led to the supposed misunderstandings would be simply that she had her different interest in contemporary society from Burke's. Burke was a politician who tried to defend the Whig order when facing the French Revolution, while Wollstonecraft was, for example, interested in social situation of contemporary women, to which Burke seemed to pay little attention. Wollstonecraft also had knowledge which was different from that of Burke, according to her interest, learning and personal experiences. Therefore, inevitable would be her insufficient sympathy with Burke's arguments. Whereas she should have been more careful of connection between Burke's aesthetics and politics, even if she had only discussed the *Reflections*, her view of society would still have remained far from Burke's. Obvious would be their different interest in society and natural her insufficient sympathy with him as its consequence, but considering what meaning her misunderstanding of Burke has is worth analysis. Despite her 'misreading' of Burke's aesthetics, it is not wrong to say that she was able to develop her intellectual thought through being stimulated by his writings.

Here two ways of reading on intellectual history deserve being taken into consideration. First, the inquiry into the author's intention should be the most basic way of reading for students of intellectual history. Any misreading of the author's intention would throw doubt on their ability as interpreters. However, we should not forget another way of reading for canon. In doing so, the scholarship of intellectual thoughts can be developed on one occasion, but can fall into crisis on another. By this the present author means the way of reading in which a person reads historical/intellectual works as a means of developing his/her own thought, rather than trying to pursue the intention of writers. Wollstonecraft was stimulated, and given imagination by Burke's writings,

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81) Lock (1998), p.111.

82) However, intellectual historians must be careful when they attempt to enter authors' mind, since it is not easy to think about what an author did not mention in his or her works.

and may even have obtained clues to solving problems in her own intellectual thoughts. Her reading of Burke may be criticized from the viewpoint of the first way of reading because of her disregard of Burke's intention, but it might not be meaningless from the viewpoint of the second.<sup>83)</sup> Wollstonecraft's reading (including misunderstanding) of Burke gave her an opportunity to advance her thought (her view of manners is its significant part, even if her arguments include some misreadings of Burke). In 1792 she published the *Rights of Women*, her most famous work, (at least partly) because of which she became an influential writer in history.<sup>84)</sup> Wollstonecraft's thought has been regarded as the origin of modern feminism, and the *Rights of Women* has been given an intellectual status as a 'canon'. If we regard her as a writer whose works are worth reading, her reading and even misunderstanding of Burke, which we have argued contributed to formation of her intellectual thought, cannot be considered futile.

Interestingly, Wollstonecraft herself might also have been misunderstood by her readers and commentators.<sup>85)</sup> As studies of Wollstonecraft have increasingly realized,<sup>86)</sup> the feminists' interpretation of Wollstonecraft paradoxically seemed to mask her real historic context. There might be a gap between her self-image as an eighteenth-century woman and an icon of modern feminism. 'An author is not necessarily read as he intended'.<sup>87)</sup> Although Wollstonecraft's reception of Burke and the critics' reception of Wollstonecraft may be criticized in some points, it would be difficult to argue that their 'misinterpretations' should be worthless, if Wollstonecraft's reading of Burke contributed to development of her thought and the readers were inspired and encouraged by Wollstonecraft to advance their thoughts. Not all misreading of intellectual history has necessarily been meaningless, which may be implied by her reading of Burke. Wollstonecraft's reading of Burke is a good example which leads students to think about the methodology and meaning of intellectual history.

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83) The assertions developed by modern critics who linked Burke's politics to his aesthetics might also be the result of this second way of reading.

84) Her life itself has also attracted commentators' attention.

85) For the reception of Wollstonecraft, for example, see Cora Kaplan, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's reception and legacies' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge, 2002). See also Sapiro, especially, chap.8.

86) For example, see Taylor, pp.9-14.

87) 'Burke's analysis' in Pocock (1985), p.211.