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Mis-Education and the Crisis in Male Subjectivity: William Godwin's Middle Novels, 1799–1817

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Mis-Education and the Crisis in Male Subjectivity:

William Godwin's Middle Novels, 1799-1817

by

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In the tumultuous period of the 1790s, the English anarchist philosopher William Godwin was a seminal figure whose 1793 *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* stood as a touchstone for the reform movement in Britain. Godwin is primarily known today as the author of *Political Justice* and *Things As They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, a 1794 novel which many readers, past and present, have regarded as a fictionalized allegory of the philosophical claims outlined in *Political Justice*.

Although his fame as a novelist largely rests on this one popular novel, Godwin wrote and published five more novels after *Caleb Williams: St. Leon* (1799); *Fleetwood* (1805); *Mandeville* (1817); *Cloudesley* (1830); and, finally, *Deloraine* (1833). Other than *Caleb Williams*, however, Godwin's novels are little read today, even by specialists in the literature of the period. Moreover, relative to *Caleb Williams*, these other novels have received only marginal critical attention. The bulk of the scholarly work on Godwin still tends to focus on either his *Political Justice* or *Caleb Williams*. Furthermore, most earlier studies of Godwin's novels have placed his texts in an almost exclusive dialogue with the radical "jacobin" political climate of 1790s England, or with the philosophical rationalism of *Political Justice*.

My own examination of Godwin's fiction differs in emphasis from most of these earlier studies in its sustained focus on the development of masculine identity within the context of personal agency, language, and modes of self-expression. I take as my starting point Godwin's *Enquirer. Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, a 1797

collection of essays in which he puts forth an educational theory for the proper development of virtue, benevolence, and rational potential in the young mind. In the *Enquirer*, Godwin details the pedagogical and social conditions necessary for the creation of an “active” and “well regulated” mind committed to benevolence and reason. He also acknowledges, however, the blighting effects of “unfavourable circumstances” in childhood—the range of unpropitious pedagogical and social conditions that conspire to produce a mind that is not “well regulated.” As I argue in this study, Godwin’s educational theory carries within it a model of *mis*-education that serves as a productive framework for examining his fiction.

In this study, I provide readings of four of Godwin’s novels—*Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, *Fleetwood*, and *Mandeville*—examining how this model of “mis-education” operates in all four texts in distinctly different ways, shaping the psychological development of the protagonists in such a way that their later years are marked by crises in their experience of identity and, more specifically, in their sense of masculine authority. Although a handful of critics have briefly examined the forms of “mis-education” experienced by each of these Godwinian heroes, none has explored the effects of such mis-education within the context of identity formation—that is, on the hero’s ability to self-actualize without the experience of profound personal and social alienation.

This study thus offers a detailed examination of a cluster of interdependent themes that has received little or no critical attention in the scholarly examinations of these four novels: the central role that education, as the totalizing effect of one’s childhood lessons and experiences, has on the moral and psychological development of

the subject, and—more specifically—how unfavourable circumstances conspire, in these texts, to create forms of “mis-education” that lead to later crises in identity and subjectivity; the importance of personal agency in the development of the subject—specifically, the ability to have “authorship” over the narratives of one’s life; the roles that language, self-expression, the imagination, and social convention play in the development of such agency and in the formation of an especially masculine identity; and, finally, the mediating function of women in the development of this masculine identity. The readings offered in this study should enrich the critical discussion of Godwin’s fiction, especially as such discussion relates to themes of gender and identity formation.

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Mis-Education and the Crisis in Male Subjectivity: William Godwin's Middle Novels

For the general student of literature, William Godwin (1756-1836) is more famous for his connections to other writers of the Romantic Period than he is for his own considerable philosophical and literary achievements. As the husband of feminist philosopher and novelist Mary Wollstonecraft, the father of novelist Mary Shelley, the father-in-law of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the philosophical mentor of the young William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Godwin serves as a pivotal, yet often marginalized, figure in the network of literary relationships that gave such momentum to the intellectual and artistic energy of the Romantic Age. Godwin was not always so marginalized, however. In the tumultuous period of the 1790s—when the social and political agitation of reform-minded “radicals,” energized by the recent events of the French Revolution, threatened the conservative hegemony of Georgian England—Godwin was a seminal figure whose 1793 *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* stood as a touchstone for the reform movement in England.

With the publication of *Political Justice*, Godwin achieved an instant celebrity that won him the admiration of many leading intellectuals of the period. With its indictment of contemporary social prejudice, coupled with its reification of reason as the only way to expose such social prejudice and effect political change, Godwin's philosophy of rationalism proved, at least initially, both popular and useful to the radical cause in Britain. As William Hazlitt famously remarked in his 1825 *The Spirit of the Age*, “five-and-twenty years ago [Godwin] was in the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity; he blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was

more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after, and wherever liberty, truth, justice was the theme, his name was not far off" (31).

Godwin's fame was solidified by the publication of *Things As They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, a 1794 novel which many readers, past and present, have regarded as a fictionalized allegory of the philosophical claims outlined in *Political Justice*. In *Caleb Williams*, Godwin tells the tale of a young servant, Caleb, who is taken into the employ of a powerful local aristocrat, Falkland. After Caleb discovers an awful secret buried in Falkland's past—namely, that Falkland has committed a murder and allowed two innocent men to hang for his crime—his patron engages in a sustained persecution of his young employee that throws into relief the unjust nature of “things as they are” in Georgian England. Although his fame as a novelist largely rests on this one wildly popular novel—Hazlitt claims that “no one ever began Caleb Williams that did not read it through” (49)—Godwin wrote and published five more novels after *Caleb Williams*: *St. Leon* (1799); *Fleetwood* (1805); *Mandeville* (1817); *Cloudesley* (1830); and, finally, *Deloraine* (1833). Other than *Caleb Williams*, however, Godwin's novels are little read today, even by specialists in the literature of the period. Indeed, in his 1989 introduction to the second edition of his *William Godwin: A Biographical Study*, George Woodcock lamented that his biography, which was originally published in 1946, failed to inspire a scholarly or popular interest in the philosopher beyond *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, and that none of his other works, including his novels, had been reissued in new editions (xiii-xiv).

Moreover, relative to *Caleb Williams*, Godwin's other novels have received only marginal critical attention. The bulk of the scholarly work on Godwin still tends to focus on either his *Political Justice* or *Caleb Williams*. There is surprisingly little critical work on *St. Leon*—especially given that novel's use of the gothic form so popular at the time and its rich intertextuality with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—and even less on *Fleetwood*, *Mandeville*, *Cloudesley*, and *Deloraine*. Furthermore, most earlier studies of Godwin's later novels have placed his texts in an almost exclusive dialogue both with the radical “jacobin” political climate of 1790s England, and with the philosophical rationalism of *Political Justice*. Perhaps most notably, this is Gary Kelly's approach to *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, and *Fleetwood* in *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805*, published in 1976.

My own examination of Godwin's fiction differs in emphasis from most of these earlier studies in its sustained focus on the development of masculine identity within the context of personal agency, language, and modes of self-expression. I take as my starting point Godwin's *Enquirer. Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, a 1797 collection of essays in which he puts forth an educational theory for the proper development of virtue and rational potential in the young mind. As I argue in the next chapter, Godwin's philosophical vision of universal benevolence achieved through the gradual enlightenment of humanity was inextricably bound up with his moral philosophy of education. Education, for Godwin, was very much a “moral process” (*Enquirer* 1), and the success of “juvenile education” should be measured in terms of its ability “to provide against the age of five and twenty a mind well regulated, active, and prepared to learn” (*Enquirer* 5).

In the *Enquirer*, Godwin details the pedagogical and social conditions necessary for the creation of this “active” and “well regulated” mind. He also acknowledges, however, the “excesses of youth” which frequently “corrupt the disposition, and debase the character” (*Enquirer* 158), particularly in terms of their long-term effects on the developing mind. Although Godwin emphasizes the inherent pliability of a young mind that can be shaped and “bent in a thousand directions” to desirable ends, he nevertheless laments that this mind eventually solidifies into the permanent habits and behaviours of an entrenched character (*Enquirer* 15). The young mind, argues Godwin in the *Enquirer*, is frequently blighted in this way, its potential for virtue, benevolence, and personal happiness “frost-nipped, or stunted, or distorted in its proportions” (287).

If Godwin offers in the *Enquirer* a blueprint for a salutary educational model, he also provides, in his description of the “frost-nipped, [] stunted, or distorted” mind, a model of *mis*-education whereby unfavourable circumstances in childhood combine to create a mind that is not “well regulated.” In this study, I provide readings of four of Godwin’s novels—*Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, *Fleetwood*, and *Mandeville*—examining how this model of “mis-education” operates in all four texts in distinctly different ways, shaping the psychological development of the protagonists in such a way that their later years are marked by crises in their experience of identity and, more specifically, in their sense of masculine authority. While Godwin, as a philosopher, was focussed on the ultimate development of a utopic state effected through humanity’s unlimited potential for reason, as a novelist, he was repeatedly drawn to the creation of psychologically

troubled and irrational characters, whose later crises can be traced back to childhood mis-education.

Indeed, in most of Godwin's novels, the narrative centres on the extended and often detailed representation of a single protagonist, a man who is usually (although not always) an aristocrat, and a man who is almost always tormented by a complex psychology which alienates him from the social context around him. In his representations of these men, Godwin makes use of the *Bildungsroman* as the structuring frame for his exploration of themes relating to misanthropy, marriage, friendship, domestic happiness, ambition, envy, madness, and masculine subjectivity. Critical scholarship on the novels, moreover, has emphasized the way in which Godwin's use of the *Bildungsroman* dovetails with the psychological realism of the texts. William Brewer, for example, has argued that Godwin's novels "serve as thought-experiments in the 'science' of mental anatomy" (*Mental Anatomies* 19), case studies of the psychological development of complex characters in distress. Significantly, Godwin's psychological "experiments" are most often of a pathological nature, in that his protagonists suffer mental distress and social alienation stemming from misanthropy, neuroses, and even insanity. As Mona Scheuermann has pointed out, Godwin is fundamentally fascinated with the "mind as it *dis*functions" ("Study of Mind" 17; emphasis added).

Even the early critics of Godwin's work recognized the pathological nature of his psychological narrative style: Godwin has "proved himself intimately skilled in the perversity of the human mind, and in all the blackest and most horrible passions of the

human heart,” contends the *Quarterly Review* in an 1817 assessment of *Mandeville* (Graham 368). In his *Sketches of Modern Literature, and Eminent Literary Men, Being A Gallery of Literary Portraits* (1846), George Gilfillan similarly recognized the intensity of Godwin’s representations of “morbid” character: “He imagines a character after his own heart; a quiet, curious, prying, philosophical being, with a strong underdash of the morbid, if not of the mad; and he thickens around him circumstances, which, by making him altogether a misanthrope, and nearly a maniac, bring out all the powers and the passions of his nature” (32).

These critical responses underscore the conflicted nature of Godwin’s protagonists and their troubled relationships with the world around them. Woodcock argues that, in Godwin’s fiction, the “hero is always victim,” and he identifies the “crushing of the individual by social and moral forces” as a recurrent theme running throughout his novels (“Notes” 687). In this study, I combine an attention to the psychology of the Godwinian hero with an examination of the deleterious effects certain “social and moral forces,” as forms of mis-education, have on the childhood development of the character. Although a handful of critics have briefly examined the forms of mis-education experienced by each of these Godwinian heroes, none has explored the effects of such mis-education within the context of identity formation—that is, on the hero’s ability to self-actualize without the experience of profound personal and social alienation. In *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, *Fleetwood*, and *Mandeville*, the central characters experience a host of unfavourable circumstances in childhood: excessive isolation, exposure to destructive value systems, and unhealthy relationships with parents or parental figures (or, alternatively, the absence

of such figures). These circumstances produce in the novels toxic environments that function to corrupt the developing mind and foster later crises in identity.

Godwin's first in-depth exploration of this theme of mis-education occurs in *Caleb Williams*, a novel in which defective childhood education produces, in both Caleb and Falkland, the kind of distorted psychological state that renders each man acutely vulnerable to the destructive passions of the other. Caleb is both a victim of his own curiosity and a victimizer, a young man whose passion "for the unravelling of an adventure" (60) destroys his patron's tenuous hold on rational existence. Caleb's childhood reading in books of "narrative and romance" (60)—unsupervised by a rational "preceptor" who, in Godwin's view, helps to shape and regulate the student's "temper of mind" (*Enquirer* 144-46)—operates as a form of mis-education, exacerbating the reckless curiosity already present in his character.

Mis-education also underpins the moral development of Falkland, whose early reading in the "heroic poets of Italy" (67) inculcates a love for chivalric values at odds with benevolence and justice. Falkland's embrace of chivalry compels him to reify his reputation at the expense of all other moral considerations, and his subsequent experience of public disgrace is aggravated by a fatal sensibility which heightens his experience of dishonour and causes him to feel, too acutely, its effects. As a man of both chivalry and feeling, Falkland prefigures Godwin's next two fictional heroes—St. Leon and Fleetwood—and his significance in this study is largely as a "prototype" for the mis-education of these two later figures.

In *St. Leon*, his first novel after *Caleb Williams*, Godwin revisits the theme of chivalry, once again representing the chivalric value system as a destructive ideology that mis-educates young men by encouraging them to embrace ideals antithetical to benevolence and virtue. The narrative centres on a French aristocrat of the sixteenth century, a man who fails, in his youth, to achieve a defined sense of self independent of the social codes around him. The recipient of a childhood “education” that emphasized, above all else, a form of identity organized around the aristocratic traditions of public honour and acclaim, St. Leon develops into a man driven by a destructive desire for “fame” and social recognition. His need for public validation is symptomatic of his fractured sense of self, and becomes a central factor in his subsequent tragedies, as he falls victim to the seductive allure of the Philosopher’s Stone and finds himself increasingly alienated from the domestic and social orders. For St. Leon, his early mis-education ultimately results in a dramatic alienation of the self on both a literal and a symbolic level.

In *Fleetwood*, the interdependent themes of sensibility and misanthropy underpin Godwin’s portrait of a young man neurotically focussed on the development and operation of his own mind. As Godwin calls him in the novel’s subtitle, Fleetwood is the “New Man of Feeling,” a figure whose sensibility, like Falkland’s, ironically divorces him from the benevolence and empathy associated with traditional men of feeling like Harley, the sympathetic and charitable hero of Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771). As I argue in chapter one, emotional sensitivity, in Godwin’s view, ideally results in outward expressions of philanthropy. With Fleetwood, however, sensibility follows a

self-reflexive pattern in which emotional response stays rooted within the subject. Instead of stimulating benevolence, Fleetwood's sensibility devolves into a pathological self-absorption. This self-absorption, as I argue in chapter three, stems from a childhood mis-education characterized by excessive isolation, a childhood informed by indulgent "reveries" structured around the imaginative "consumption" of the beautiful scenes of nature surrounding him in North Wales. Fleetwood's developing sense of manhood is simultaneously staged against, and cultivated by, the natural world he genders female, and his later misanthropy stems from his realization—as he grows older and enters public and domestic life—that the social world of human interaction falls outside of his imaginative authority. Presented with a wife who refuses to submit to his transcribing hand, Fleetwood experiences marriage as a threat to his identity and masculine authority. He subsequently experiences an emotional breakdown that radically compromises his sense of self.

Although, in *Mandeville*, Godwin revisits the theme of misanthropy once again, in that novel, the misanthropy of the protagonist degenerates into a form of paranoid madness that ultimately divorces Mandeville from the social community and fractures his identity. As I argue in chapter four, Mandeville experiences, from a very young age, a crisis in self-actualization stemming from a childhood mis-education that demanded constant repression on his part. This repression takes its most notable form in the suppression of *voice* that ultimately consumes his character. Mandeville's inability to express himself in the face of crisis compromises not only his sense of masculine authority, but his very appreciation of his own identity. Unable, through self expression,

to consolidate a coherent sense of selfhood, Mandeville turns increasingly inward, ultimately sliding into a state of madness that eventually effaces his own subjectivity.

This study thus offers a detailed examination of a cluster of interdependent themes that has received little or no critical attention in the scholarly examinations of these four novels: the central role that education, as the totalizing effect of one's childhood lessons and experiences, has on the moral and psychological development of the subject, and—more specifically—how unfavourable circumstances conspire, in these texts, to create forms of “mis-education” that lead to later crises in identity and subjectivity; the importance of personal agency in the development of the subject—specifically, the ability to have “authorship” over the narratives of one's life; the role that language, self-expression, the imagination, and social convention plays in the development of such agency and in the formation of an especially masculine identity; and, finally, the mediating function of women in the development of this masculine identity. The readings offered in this study should enrich the critical discussion of Godwin's fiction, especially as such discussion relates to themes of gender and identity formation.

My study also differs from other critical examinations of Godwin's novels in its focus on the representation of women in these texts. In these novels, female characters play a central role in the identity crises suffered by the male protagonists. St. Leon experiences his marriage to Marguerite as a very specific threat to his masculine public identity, and he is partially driven to accept the Philosopher's Stone as a testament to his masculine autonomy in the face of a domestic sphere he perceives as emasculating. For Fleetwood, marriage is similarly experienced as something which threatens his masculine

authority, as his wife, Mary, becomes the last in a line of female partners who escapes the confines of his controlling hand. Finally, Mandeville's sister, Henrietta, functions as his most significant connective link to humanity, and he thus perceives her as the socializing agent through which he can assert his own voice and selfhood. His failure to achieve complete communion with her drives him into madness.

Godwin's exploration of masculine subjectivity in these four novels is resonant of wider cultural anxieties regarding the ideal and appropriate forms of behaviour for men in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British society. In his study of the changing conceptions of gender in the eighteenth century, G.J. Barker-Benfield has charted the influence of the emerging cult of sensibility on new visions of masculinity. As Barker-Benfield argues, the public sphere, throughout the eighteenth century, served as an active site for the re-negotiation of a masculine identity organized around a kind of bourgeois chivalry that emphasized honour and polite manliness as the new standards of socially ideal behaviour.

Such re-negotiations imply certain anxieties about the shifting roles of men in the political and social climates of the late eighteenth-century, anxieties which Tim Fulford examines in *Romanticism and Masculinity*. Traditional conceptions of "chivalric" masculinity, contends Fulford, were destabilized by the political turmoil of the 1790s. The war with France, the disruptive effects of revolutionary discourse, and the political and social agitation of previously marginalized groups within society (most notably, women and the working classes)—all of these cultural forces implied the perceived failure of British men (especially those in traditional positions of power) to "live up" to the

conventional ideals of chivalric manliness which were understood by some to maintain social order and political stability. These anxieties are perhaps most famously articulated in Edmund Burke's lament, in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), that the "the age of chivalry is gone" (80). Although Burke makes his declaration within the context of the French Revolution, locating chivalry's death in the French men who failed to protect their Queen from the assaults of the revolutionary mob, his lament nevertheless conveys the sense of a cautionary warning to British men who would overthrow the established codes of traditional masculine behaviour.

In Volume 2 of *Political Justice*, Godwin reframes Burke's eulogy for the passing of chivalry as an elegy for political justice instead, declaring, "indeed 'the age of chivalry is' not 'gone'! The feudal spirit still survives that reduced the great mass of mankind to the rank of slaves and cattle for the service of a few" (454-55). However, despite Godwin's dismissal of chivalry as an ideology synonymous with political oppression and social injustice, he nevertheless registered his own anxieties about the crisis in modern masculinity and the failure of modern men to achieve their psychological and intellectual potential. In the *Enquirer* essay, "Of Posthumous Fame," Godwin enters into the well-worn debate comparing the merits of ancient men with those of modern men, voting firmly on the side of the ancients, who rise far above the "miserable level of the men of modern times" (291). "One would have thought that no man could have perused the history of Rome and the history of England, without seeing that in the one was presented the substance of men, and in the other the shadow," he declares (291).

Godwin elaborates on the distinctions between modern and ancient men in “Of History and Romance,” a 1797 essay that remained unpublished in his lifetime. For Godwin, the value of a written history resides in its ability to inspire moral excellence in its readers, and he goes on to compare “modern” history unfavourably with “ancient” history on the basis of the fact that the subjects of modern histories—that is, modern men—are inferior in character and spirit to their ancient predecessors. Whereas the ancients were “men of a free and undaunted spirit,” the moderns are their “degenerate successors,” “pygmies” who are stunted, distorted and “weighed down,” unable to develop the “bold and masculine virtues” that are the product of intellectual enlightenment and political freedom (458-59). Modern men, argues Godwin, are degenerate not on account of their own inherent weaknesses, but because a corrupt political system combines with irrational social prejudice to enslave and debase them. “There is something in the nature of modern governments and institutions,” he argues in the essay, “that seems to blight in the bud every grander and more ample development of the soul” (459).

In Volume 1 of *Political Justice*, Godwin articulates his broad vision of education as a process to be understood in the “most comprehensive sense” as “including every incident that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections” (45). It is clear, therefore, that Godwin’s perception of the political—the “modern governments and institutions” which are responsible for modern man’s crisis—also includes social practices like education. The mis-education of modern man, like his exposure to political oppression, thus contributes to this crisis in masculine self-

actualization. Indeed, his description in the *Enquirer* of childhood potential corrupted by the social forces of mis-education deploys the same gardening metaphor used to convey the political debasement of modern man: whereas “every grander and more ample development of the soul” is “blight[ed] in the bud” by the political injustice of “modern governments and institutions” (“Of History and Romance” 459), genius is “almost constantly frost-nipped” by the mis-education of unfavourable circumstances in childhood (*Enquirer* 287).

Within Godwin’s theory of education, therefore, is a concern for the potential crisis of masculinity experienced by modern men, a crisis that can be traced back to childhood mis-education grounded in a host of pedagogical, social, and political forces. If Godwin turned to ancient men to find the “bold and masculine virtues” he felt were lacking in modern British men, the British nation, argues Fulford, symbolically looked to the naval hero Lord Horatio Nelson to articulate a powerful image of a vigorous masculinity worthy of emulation. Nelson conveyed a vision of manliness organized around the chivalric ideals of self-sacrifice, duty, and courage in the face of danger:

Nelson was revered for defeating Napoleon, for his adherence to duty, for his gentlemanly conduct towards his men, and for his bravery. His body, mutilated by many battles in which he had exposed himself to fire, was proof of a manliness defined by the ability to command himself and others. He was resolute rather than vainglorious, a hero who redefined chivalric duty and courtesy in terms of a self-controlled and self-sacrificial patriotism. Dying to ensure victory, Nelson then became subject to a

popular cult which immortalised him in monuments and mementoes. And his heroism was made available to all through the fictional heroes in the romances of Sir Walter Scott, heroes who resembled him in their courage, courtesy and defeat of foreign invasion. (Fulford 6-7)

Literature, as Fulford here recognizes, has the potential to both celebrate and interrogate this image of idealized masculinity. Moreover, the image of Nelson, as described by Fulford in this passage, is a productive starting point for considering how Godwin engages with this idealized model of chivalric manliness. As I argue in chapters one and two, Godwin was quite critical of chivalry and the way in which apologists for the status quo like Burke yoked chivalric ideals with benevolence, honour, and the maintenance of a stable social order. Indeed, in both Falkland and St. Leon, Godwin creates protagonists whose embrace of chivalric values results not in benevolence but in dishonourable and self-interested behaviour that completely alienates them from society and robs them of their happiness.

Although Godwin clearly resists the image of chivalric manliness represented by Nelson, in other ways, he engages with many of the central values underpinning this idealized model of manhood. Within such a model, ideal masculinity is equated with honour, duty, and self-sacrifice. Perhaps more importantly, this ideal man, to use Fulford's terminology, is "resolute," "self-controlled," and "able to command himself and others." He is, in other words, the picture of uncompromised masculine authority—self-assured, successful militarily and socially, and confident both in himself and with his place and role in society. With his personal self-assurance and social success, this ideal

man serves as a compelling foil to the Godwinian heroes, who are all experiencing profound crises of identity and masculine authority. Driven by a curiosity which takes “possession of [his] soul” (60), Caleb is the very anti-thesis of the “self-controlled” man; his failure in this regard is even more significant given that one of the primary purposes of “juvenile education,” according to Godwin, was the creation of a “well regulated” mind (*Enquirer* 5). Falkland, as well, with his “paroxysms” of anguish and rage (63), and his self-interested obsession with reputation, is far from the controlled and self-sacrificing vision of heroic manliness.

In the three novels after *Caleb Williams*, Godwin continues to chart the mis-education of his heroes in terms evocative of this image of chivalric manliness. As a man who beggars his family through his compulsive gambling, St. Leon, for example, fails to exhibit both a sense of paternal duty and the kind of self-control for which Nelson is so celebrated; completely reliant on the social codes of aristocratic identity for any sense of selfhood, St. Leon is caught up in the “vainglorious” quest for a social acclaim that is always beyond his reach. Fleetwood is likewise mired in “vainglory,” sunk in a self-indulgent preoccupation with his own imaginative desires; whereas the chivalric man enjoys a benevolent relationship with a humanity he feels duty bound to protect, Fleetwood, with his excessive sensibility, experiences only misanthropic alienation when interacting with society. Mandeville is no doubt the furthest removed of all the Godwinian heroes from this ideal of chivalric masculinity. He feels no sense of duty or benevolence towards humanity, only alienation and hatred. Unable to express himself in the face of crisis, Mandeville is the very antithesis of the man who can “command

himself and others.” In each of these novels, childhood mis-education, itself the result of unfavourable social and familial circumstances, produces in the protagonist a crisis in identity which underscores the discrepancy between this ideal vision of masculinity and the fractured subjectivity of the hero.

In chapter one of this study, I discuss *Caleb Williams*, Godwin’s most famous and widely read novel, within this context of mis-education, limiting my examination of that text to its engagement with forms of mis-education prefiguring those of Godwin’s later fictional heroes—namely, St. Leon and Fleetwood. My analysis of *Caleb Williams*, therefore, is accordingly limited to the ways in which the characters of Caleb and Falkland stand as early examples of Godwin’s engagement with this notion of mis-education. My examination of that novel also focusses on Falkland as a kind of “prototype” for the later characterization of St. Leon and Fleetwood. The bulk of this study—chapters two, three, and four—are devoted to sustained examinations of what I am calling the three “middle” novels of Godwin’s fictional corpus—*St. Leon*, *Fleetwood*, and *Mandeville*. It is my contention that these three novels, each of which is structured around the subjective narration of the eponymous male hero, serve as Godwin’s most compelling studies of childhood mis-education culminating in crises of identity and masculine authority.¹

In limiting my focus to these four texts, I am excluding from my study the three short novels Godwin wrote and published when he was in his late twenties and in the early stages of his career as a professional writer. Although *Damon and Delia*, *Italian Letters*, and *Imogen* are of definite interest in terms of both their publication history² and

Godwin's development as a novelist, most critics, while recognizing some admirable qualities of style and sentiment in these early tales, regard the texts as minimally significant in the larger scope of the philosopher's literary achievements. To be sure, these early novels do not provide the kind of sustained study of mis-education and masculine identity in crisis that is found in Godwin's later fiction.

I am also excluding Godwin's last two novels from my examination—*Cloudesley* and *Deloraine*, which were published in 1830 and 1833, respectively. Written at the end of his career, and a decade and a half after the publication of his last novel, *Mandeville*, both *Cloudesley* and *Deloraine* are quite removed in time from the earlier phase of Godwin's career when he was, as nearly all critics agree, at the height of his imaginative powers as a novelist. In this sense, both of these later texts fail to offer up psychological studies as compelling as those found in the earlier novels.³ For the purposes of my own study, therefore, I have chosen to focus on the three novels which I feel provide the most intense and sustained examinations of mis-education and masculinity in crisis—*St. Leon*, *Fleetwood*, and *Mandeville*.

Now that I have delineated the parameters of my study, and the theoretical approach informing my analysis of Godwin's middle novels, I want to provide, in the remainder of this introduction, a brief overview of Godwin's historical reception as both a philosopher and a novelist.

* * *

As a philosopher, Godwin was influenced by the utilitarian theory that society should be governed by principles which result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The fundamental argument of Godwin's *Political Justice* was that humanity, through the sustained and intensive cultivation of reason, could reach a point of "perfectibility" in its moral conduct that would allow society to gradually shed the political and social institutions which the philosopher saw as inherently oppressive to the human condition and a testament of humanity's failure to govern itself through its rational powers alone. In this sense, Godwin is often regarded as the first "anarchist" philosopher, in that his utopian society would function without government (even a democratic one), religion, and even social institutions like marriage. "It is earnestly to be desired," argued Godwin in Volume 1 of *Political Justice*, "that each man should be wise enough to govern himself, without the intervention of any compulsory restraint; and, since government, even in its best state, is an evil, the object principally to be aimed at is, that we should have as little of it, as the general peace of human society will permit" (246).

Only the intensive application of rational thought will allow humanity to acquire the amount of wisdom necessary to govern itself in this anarchic state, and reason must therefore be the foundation of our political and social interactions. "The salutary condition of the human mind," asserted Godwin in the 1797 *Enquirer*, "is that in which it is prepared to bring every principle upon which it proceeds, within the scope of its own examination; to derive assistance from every means of information, oral or scriptory; but to admit nothing, upon the score of authority, to limit or supersede the touchstone of reason" (223).

Central to Godwin's philosophical anarchism is his notion of "universal benevolence," the argument being that the "private" or "domestic" affections of individual attachments which we may feel for family members and close friends must, in order to achieve this perfect society governed by unadulterated reason, be sacrificed for the greater good. Thus, universal benevolence must take precedence over the domestic affections, so that society can achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people, a central principle of the utilitarian philosophy that Godwin favoured. In what was perhaps the most controversial passage in *Political Justice*, Godwin constructs a hypothetical situation in which the rational man, governed by reason alone and entirely committed to this principle of universal benevolence, must make the "correct" choice for the greater good of humanity by choosing to sacrifice his brother's life to save the life of the French poet François Fénelon:

In a loose and general view I and my neighbour are both of us men; and of consequence entitled to equal attention. But, in reality, it is probable that one of us, is a being of more worth and importance than the other [. . .]

In the same manner the illustrious archbishop of Cambray [Fénelon] was of more worth than his valet, and there are few of us that would hesitate to pronounce, if his palace were in flames, and the life of only one of them could be preserved, which of the two ought to be preferred [. . .] that life ought to be preferred which will be most conducive to the general good.

In saving the life of Fenelon, suppose at the moment when he conceived the project of his immortal Telemachus [a didactic epic poem by Fénelon],

I should have been promoting the benefit of thousands, who have been cured by the perusal of that work, of some error, vice and consequent unhappiness [. . .] Suppose the valet had been my brother, my father or my benefactor. This would not alter the truth of the proposition. The life of Fenelon would still be more valuable than that of the valet; and justice, pure, unadulterated justice, would still have preferred that which was most valuable. Justice would have taught me to save the life of Fenelon at the expence of the other.⁴ (Vol. 1 of *Political Justice* 126-28)

For Hazlitt, writing a generation after the publication of *Political Justice*, the intellectual significance of Godwin's magnum opus was clear: "No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*," he declares (33). For the later Victorians, Godwin's philosophical vision was perhaps even more radical. Gilfillan, in his *Sketches of Modern Literature*, declared that "on titles and on property, on monarchy and on marriage, on commerce and on gratitude, [Godwin] trode with disdain" (29). Likewise, in his 1902 *Studies of a Biographer*, Leslie Stephen spoke of *Political Justice* as a book "crammed with intellectual explosives" (128). "It was a brilliant, but dangerous vision," Gilfillan had recognized, "one of those sun-tinted phantasmas which rose from the gulf of the French Revolution, ere it had yet become an abyss of blood" (30).

Although later generations joined Godwin's contemporaries in emphasizing the radical or "dangerous" nature of the philosopher's views, Godwin's anarchic vision was actually quite conservative in its description of political and social innovation. While

Gilfillan declared that Godwin “trode with disdain” on established institutions, the philosopher, in reality, advocated for slow, cautious, and incremental change. As he asserted in the *Enquirer*, “the rational advocate of new systems of government, would touch actual institutions with a careful hand. He would desire further changes and fresh improvements; but he would consider the task of innovation as an arduous business, nor is there any thing that would excite more the apprehensiveness of his mind, than a precipitate and headlong spirit” (322). “Innovation,” he argued, “is a measure attended with peculiar peril” and “should be entered upon with caution, and introduced in portions, small and detached” (*Enquirer* 320).

Despite Godwin’s aversion to the “precipitate and headlong spirit” that, in his view, led to irrational social upheaval, his philosophy became a touchstone for the radical cause in England, to the eventual detriment of his reputation. As the ideals of the French Revolution degenerated into the Terror (Gilfillan’s “abyss of blood”), Godwin and his philosophy became increasingly open to virulent attack from the conservative forces in England threatened by the social and political upheaval in France. By the middle of the 1790s, the ongoing war between Britain and France, combined with the images of violent excess associated with French revolutionary turmoil, had made the sort of reformist philosophy espoused by Godwin dangerously unpopular and left its adherents open to direct personal attacks from anti-jacobin conservatives like Richard Polwhele.⁵

The reformers were also targeted politically. In 1795, William Pitt’s government passed the *Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act* (informally known as the “gagging acts” by those sympathetic to the cause of reform) in an effort to suppress the voice of the

radical movement agitating for social and political change in England. The *Act*—which made it punishable by transportation to write, speak, publish, or disseminate anything that might threaten the authority of the monarchy—came just months after Godwin’s close friend, Thomas Holcroft, was indicted for high treason in the autumn of 1794. A well-known reformist who had been actively involved in the publication of Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* (1791), Holcroft was only saved from trial after Godwin penned his *Cursory Strictures on the Charge Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the Grand Jury*, a pamphlet which successfully challenged the government’s interpretation of treason as it had been applied in the charges against Holcroft and the reformers with whom he had been indicted. Indeed, it was the “sharpness of Mr. Godwin’s pen,” Hazlitt tells us, that “saved the lives of twelve innocent individuals, marked out as political victims” (52-53). Moreover, as Stephen relates in *Studies of a Biographer*, Godwin himself was likely only saved from government prosecution on account that the two-volume *Political Justice*, at a cost of three guineas, was simply too expensive for the average Englishman, and thus had little chance of encouraging wide-spread social unrest (128).

While Godwin might have been saved from formal government prosecution, he was not so lucky in the courts of public opinion, as the popularity he enjoyed in the mid 1790s gave way to an obscure existence tinged by the shadows of notoriety. Indeed, immediately after the passage in which he extols Godwin’s fame, Hazlitt laments that the philosopher now, in the year 1825, has

sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality [. . .] Mr. Godwin's person is not known, he is not pointed out in the street, his conversation is not courted, his opinions are not asked, he is at the head of no cabal, he belongs to no party in the State, he has no train of admirers, no one thinks it worth his while even to traduce and vilify him, he has scarcely friend or foe, the world make a point [. . .] of taking no more notice of him than if such an individual had never existed; he is to all ordinary intents and purposes dead and buried.

(31-32)

Godwin's obscurity was so great in the early years of the nineteenth century that his future son-in-law Shelley, in his first correspondence with the infamous philosopher he so admired in early 1812, had to register the "inconceivable emotion" he experienced upon first finding out that Godwin was in fact still alive and not yet "enrolled [. . .] in the list of the honourable dead" (qtd. in Woodcock, *Biographical Study* 208). A little more than twenty years later in 1834, two years before Godwin's death, William Maginn of *Fraser's Magazine* constructed the aged philosopher as a "strange" oddity of a bygone era, a defeated figure whose radical ideas have been rendered benign by the passage of time and by the social and political hegemony of Victorian culture (463).

The roots of Godwin's obscurity in the nineteenth century lie no doubt in the slow slide from fame to infamy which he experienced from the mid 1790s. As the conservative establishment tightened its hold on the English cultural landscape in the

wake of the French Revolution and the war with France, a backlash against the so-called “jacobins” resulted in a wide-ranging smear campaign against the more outspoken of the reformers, Godwin being a favourite target. Indeed, Godwin, describing the “fickleness of reputation and popularity” in the 1797 *Enquirer* (293), was well aware of the personal price people often pay for their commitment to ideological principles which run contrary to, or which challenge, popular opinion. “Particularly in the case of reputation,” argues Godwin, “no man can without pain realise as to himself, the facility with which partialities are discarded, friendships dissolved, and the man who was your warmest advocate, subsides into indifference or worse” (*Enquirer* 293). Kenneth W. Graham’s *William Godwin Reviewed: A Reception History, 1783-1834* charts the way in which Godwin’s reputation suffered, throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a result of reviews of his work in literary magazines increasingly committed to upholding the conservative status quo and punishing those who were not so inclined. Godwin’s ideas were “anathema to the most powerful interests during his lifetime,” points out Graham, and thus were “seldom fairly represented by reviewers sensitive to the wishes of the powerful” (8).

As the reviews collected in Graham’s book illustrate, assessments of Godwin’s work were often, especially during the polarized years of the late 1790s, not much more than simple attacks on his character and ideas. By 1798, the conservative *British Critic* readily dismissed any publication that issued from the pen of “this dangerous and extravagant author” (Graham 114), and the negative responses to Godwin’s work and character only intensified after the 1798 publication of the *Memoirs*, Godwin’s biography

of his deceased wife Mary Wollstonecraft, a text which shocked contemporary readers and reviewers with its frank discussion of her life and ideas. Godwin published his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in an attempt to “give to the public some account of the life of a person of eminent merit deceased,” an attempt meant to counter and defuse the “thoughtless calumny” that had dogged his wife in the final years of her life (*Memoirs* 43). In composing the *Memoirs*, Godwin expressed his hope that a balanced, affective, and sincere portrayal of Wollstonecraft’s “picture and story” would do much to combat the “pernicious sentiments” spread in the “malignant misrepresentation” of his late wife (*Memoirs* 43).

To be sure, Godwin must be given credit for his commitment to Wollstonecraft’s legacy: as her biographer, and as the editor of her unpublished and unfinished manuscripts, the philosopher devoted himself in the immediate wake of his wife’s death to the public preservation of her history and literary accomplishments.⁶ Godwin’s unyielding commitment to an uncensored narration of Wollstonecraft’s “picture and story,” however, meant that readers were privy to all the details of a scandalous personal history replete with such indiscretions as pre-marital sex, suicide attempts, and the birth of an illegitimate child. Mary Jacobus has characterized the *Memoirs* as “a case of published indiscretion” (274), and “indiscreet” is perhaps the most insistent adjective used—in both contemporary and later critical evaluations—to characterize the text and its author. In 1798, *The Monthly Review* expressed its shock over the narration of events that “we should have advised the author to bury in oblivion” (Graham 150), and every subsequent critic has felt compelled to foreground what Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria

Walker call the “unprecedented biographical frankness” of Godwin’s text (11). Nicola Trott points to the “double exposure” of Wollstonecraft, whereby Godwin’s commitment to biographical honesty resulted in a wave of contemporary satirical representations of the feminist philosopher as a debauched and disorderly threat to the chastity of a bourgeois feminine subjectivity cultivated for, and by, middle-class women (34). Indeed, in the index to its inaugural issue in 1798, *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* would unequivocally mark Wollstonecraft in these terms, cross-referencing her name with a superfluous notation for “Prostitution.”⁷

After enjoying literary success and tremendous social celebrity with the publications of *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* in the early to mid 1790s, Godwin became known after 1798 as the scandalous biographer who, according to the poet Robert Southey, “stripp[ed] his dead wife naked” (qtd. in Luria and Walker 11). Throughout the early years of the nineteenth century, it “became fashionable to pour [abuse] upon [Godwin’s] head,” Gilfillan tells us (50-51), and his legacy was surely not helped by Stephen’s 1890 *Dictionary of National Biography* article, in which he dwells in great length on Godwin’s financial troubles in the last decades of his life and famously characterizes the philosopher as the “venerable horseleech” who “tried to extort money from his son-in-law” (67). Ironically, in the *Enquirer*, Godwin seemed to anticipate Stephen’s prejudicial representation, calling attention to society’s intolerant attitudes towards debtors: “People in general accustom themselves to forget the anguish of the insolvent debtor, and the unwearied struggles he has perhaps made to appear in a different character,” he laments (266).

This is the image of Godwin inherited by modern readers, an image which has coloured our knowledge and perception of the man as both a philosopher and a novelist. In the 1834 *Fraser's Magazine* article already mentioned, Maginn declares *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* to be the only two of Godwin's novels "which will be remembered" (463), and even Hazlitt, while lavish in his praise of *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon*, regards *Fleetwood* as "mawkish" and *Mandeville* as "morbid" (52). By the time of *Cloudesley's* publication in 1830, the reviewers of the *Athenaeum* felt the need to lament that "the announcement of a new novel by so distinguished a writer as Mr. Godwin, was received with more indifference than we looked for by the reading world" (Graham 512). Moreover, if the reviews in Graham's collection are any indication, Godwin's last novel, *Deloraine*, received little notice in the periodical press, although the reviews it did receive were, for the most part, positive. Little was said of Godwin's work as a novelist throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, but Stephen's 1902 *Studies of a Biographer* did include an essay on "William Godwin's Novels." Curiously, however, while the title of the piece logically leads one to expect a discussion of all, or at least most, of Godwin's novels, Stephen dismisses all of the books after *St. Leon* as unworthy of any commentary. Even for *St. Leon* he has little praise, and Stephen ultimately ends his essay with the assessment that, "if any one should be prompted to push his study into [Godwin's] other novels [besides *Caleb Williams*], I fear that he is destined to disappointment" (154).

There are, no doubt, a number of reasons for this critical and readerly neglect. As Woodcock pointed out in a mid-1970s review of Godwin's work in the genre, his "novels have certainly grown less readable over the generations" ("Notes" 685). To be sure,

Godwin's rather verbose and heavily philosophical prose style can be off-putting to a modern reader—in 1955, P.N. Furbank conceded that Godwin was sometimes “painfully prosy in language” (222)—and his formal prose is often not helped by his tendency to insert, into the narratives of his stories, extended digressions on moral and philosophical matters. Combine this with what George Sherburn has deemed Godwin's “tendency to exhibit his learning” (77), in the form of lengthy historical and literary allusions, and you have a prose style that sometimes acts as an impediment to the narrative momentum of the plot.

Moreover, there are deficiencies in the narrative structure of many of his novels that also have a deleterious effect on the development of the plot. Godwin's inclination towards multiple narrators, for example, often leads him to embed lengthy sub-narratives into his novels that sometimes stall, rather than complement, the development of the main story. This is perhaps most apparent in *Fleetwood*—where Ruffigny's life story continues for ten chapters, comprising almost a fifth of the entire text—and in *Cloudesley*, where an even larger chunk of the text is given over to the life story and adventures of a character who plays no central role in the main plot. On a related note, there is sometimes very little in the way of plot in Godwin's novels, a flaw his reviewers often highlighted: very little happens in *Fleetwood* until the end of the second volume, when the narrator's marriage seems to kick start the action of the story; in *Mandeville*, there is very little action at all outside of the delusional mind of the main character. Even with *St. Leon*,

which is perhaps Godwin's most plot-driven novel after *Caleb Williams*, one reviewer complained that, "considering the length of [the tale], it is bare of incident" (Graham 158).

In addition to these issues of style and narrative structure, Godwin's novels concern themselves with themes and characters that are no doubt unappealing to some readers. Misanthropy is one of his favourite themes—most of his protagonists suffer some sort of neurotic alienation from society and the people in their lives—but, as Sherburn aptly points out, "misanthropy makes for rather doleful material for novels" (67). Indeed, in its 1817 review of *Mandeville*, the *Quarterly Review* remarks on the "morbid anatomy" informing so many of Godwin's stories and characters: "It appears to us somewhat singular, that this gloomy style should have such charms for Mr. Godwin, that it should be, in fact, the one in which he seems to feel himself most truly in his element; but so it is; all the heroes of all his novels are infected with this malady" (Graham 367). Ultimately, to read Godwin's novels is to spend a considerable amount of time in the company of what are, in many cases, some fairly unlikeable characters.

Notwithstanding such reservations, many critics have recognized the unique value of Godwin's texts and his role as a novelist. Hazlitt, of course, was effusive in his praise of *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon*, deeming both novels to be "two of the most splendid and impressive works of the imagination that have appeared in our times" (48). Indeed, Hazlitt's enthusiasm for Godwin's early fiction is reflective of the broader assessment by the more generous reviewers of the nineteenth century that regarded Godwin as the only substantial peer to Sir Walter Scott in the genre of historical fiction. At numerous points

throughout his 1846 “sketch” of Godwin, for example, Gilfillan favourably compares the philosopher with Scott (36, 47). Moreover, by the early 1830s, most of Godwin’s novels were apparently sufficiently established within the canon of British literature to warrant their inclusion in the Bentley’s Standard Novels Series, a collection of cheap editions of “classic” novels printed by the London publishers Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley. *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, and *Fleetwood* were reissued as numbers 2, 5, and 22, respectively, in the Bentley’s Series.

Twentieth-century critics, as well, have praised Godwin’s achievements as a novelist. In his 1981 *William Godwin As Novelist*, B.J. Tysdahl recognized the philosopher’s unique role as an experimentalist in narrative forms, arguing that his novels stand as “some of the most interesting technical experiments of the Romantic period” (3). Likewise, Woodcock regards Godwin as the first major British author to use fiction as a “vehicle of socio-political criticism” (“Notes” 685). On a more particular note, Ivanka Kovačević, referring to *Fleetwood*’s extended description of Ruffigny’s experiences in a silk mill at Lyons, credits Godwin with writing fiction’s first critical representation of the “factory system” (qtd. in Tysdahl 109). Indeed, Ruffigny’s narrative may very well be one of the first representations of child labour in British literature.

Fortunately, Godwin’s novels have also become increasingly available to modern readers in new editions published throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. In 1992, the *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin* was released by Pickering & Chatto, making all of Godwin’s novels available to modern readers in one complete, eight-volume scholarly collection. More recently, Broadview Press has published new

editions of many of Godwin's works, including *Caleb Williams*, in 2000; the *Memoirs* and *Fleetwood*, in 2001; and *St. Leon*, in 2006. The availability of these new editions is perhaps partially responsible for what seems to be a moderate surge of scholarly interest in Godwin's novels of late. William Brewer and A.A. Markley have both examined representations of masculinity and homosociality in the novels, and Gary Handwerk and Steven Bruhm have each put forth provocative readings of *Fleetwood*. Justine Crump and Anne Chandler, moreover, have provided their own interesting analyses of *St. Leon*. The work of these scholars has been instrumental in shaping my own critical approach to Godwin's texts, and I hope that my work will in turn encourage further scholarly enquiry into Godwin's much-neglected fiction.

The Well-Regulated Mind: Enlightenment, Education, and *Caleb Williams*

For Godwin, political justice could only be achieved through the progressive enlightenment of humanity. The progressive nature of this enlightenment means that, through the cultivation of reason and the rational faculties, humanity will one day reach the state of “perfectibility” necessary to establish the anarchic state freed from government institutions and the oppression of social prejudice. Godwin’s philosophical vision is thus fundamentally also a vision of ideal education, for the ultimate success of the anarchic state depends on the proper process of enlightenment. Indeed, Godwin’s political argument is so inextricably bound up with the educative process that Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley have described *Political Justice* as “less a theory of political institutions and processes [. . .] than a theory of political psychology and social education” (Introduction to *Caleb Williams* 21).

In the *Enquirer. Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*—published in 1797, four years after the political treatise which made him famous—Godwin tackles the question of how best to prepare the young mind for the long process of gradual enlightenment. The key, argues Godwin, is to cultivate in the young pupil a certain frame of mind that will be well adapted for the intensive study required later in life. Godwin shows little interest in detailing the specifics of a prescribed curriculum. Instead, he asserts that the content of childhood education should be subordinate to the larger, and much more important, process of fostering a certain mental disposition. “The true object of juvenile education,” contends the philosopher, is “to teach no one thing in particular, but to provide against the age of five and twenty a mind well regulated, active, and

prepared to learn” (*Enquirer* 5). As if to stress its centrality to his theory of education, Godwin reiterates this assertion, verbatim, later in the text (78). If content is subordinate to the formation of a certain frame of mind, then the tutor—or “preceptor,” as Godwin often calls him—should assume the position of a farmer who cultivates untilled land in order that it may one day yield fruit. “The preceptor,” argues Godwin, “is like the incloser of uncultivated land; his first crops are not valued for their intrinsic excellence; they are sown that the land may brought into order” (*Enquirer* 5-6). The tutor thus functions as the force which “tames” the juvenile mind, regulating its growth and ordering its activity; in the fertile soil of such a mind, the seeds of intellectual curiosity, rational examination, and habits of industry can take proper root.

Godwin makes it clear at the beginning of the *Enquirer* that education, like “every other moral process,” benefits both the individual and society (1). “The true object of education,” he argues, “is the generation of happiness”—“happiness to the individual in the first place,” and to society in the second, for “if individuals were universally happy, the species would be happy” (*Enquirer* 1). People are happy, moreover, because they are virtuous, virtue being “essential to human happiness” (*Enquirer* 2). A well-ordered and regulated mind, a mind “prepared to learn” (*Enquirer* 5), is capable of great enlightenment through the development and use of its rational powers, and this enlightenment necessarily leads in Godwin’s view to virtuous sentiments. Godwin furthermore associates virtue with benevolence, arguing that virtue is inherently in sympathy with what is good for humanity and will inevitably encourage philanthropic behaviour: “The first object of virtue is to contribute to the welfare of mankind. The

most essential attribute of right conduct therefore is, that it shall have a beneficent and salutary tendency” (*Enquirer* 252). That which is not beneficent, argues Godwin, cannot be virtuous (*Enquirer* 252-53). We see here the utilitarian influence of Godwin’s moral theory: virtuous conduct, by his definition, is that which benefits humanity and which furthers the Godwinian ideal of universal benevolence. It is through the cultivation of virtue—itsself the product of a well-designed education—that society will reach its “perfected” state.

Godwin’s philosophy of education was shaped by what was no doubt the most influential eighteenth-century work on educational theory—Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762). Rousseau, a Swiss philosopher and novelist, combined in *Émile* theory and fiction to create his portrait of the hypothetical Émile and his education, as conducted by his enlightened tutor. Rousseau’s pedagogical approach in *Émile* was a radical departure from conventional practices of child-rearing, and his “half treatise half novel,” as P.D. Jimack calls it (vii), made practical recommendations on almost every aspect of a child’s physical, intellectual, and psychological development: he advocated against swaddling, arguing instead for loose clothing that allowed free movement of the limbs (10-11); he recommended fresh air and exercise as indispensable to proper development (26, 42); and wrote that mothers should breast feed their own children, rather than sending them out to wet nurses (11-14); if a nurse must be used, she should be healthy, of good disposition, and a vegetarian (24-26).

In Volume 1 of *Political Justice*, Godwin defines “education” in the “most comprehensive sense that can possibly be annexed to that word, including every incident

that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections” (45).

Rousseau puts forth a similarly broad vision of education as a totalizing process involving every aspect of our experience and development. “All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man’s estate, is the gift of education,” argues Rousseau at the beginning of *Émile* (6), and “we begin to learn when we begin to live” (9). The object of a good education, contends Rousseau, is to both respect and promote the child’s “natural tendencies” so that he can ward off the corrupting influences of society. According to Rousseau, the child is born into a natural state, the very primitivism of which signifies its superiority, and misguided social customs and oppressive institutions then function to destroy the inherent goodness of this “natural” child—they “stifle nature in him” and distort his natural state:

God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil. He forces one soil to yield the products of another, one tree to bear another’s fruit. He confuses and confounds time, place, and natural conditions. He mutilates his dog, his horse, and his slave. He destroys and defaces all things; he loves all that is deformed and monstrous; he will have nothing as nature made it, not even man himself, who must learn his paces like a saddle-horse, and be shaped to his master’s taste like the trees in his garden. (*Émile* 5)

This, argues Rousseau, is the tendency of dominant educational practice, as he knew it in the eighteenth century—to remove man from his “natural” state and impose on him habits and customs antithetical to his physical, psychological, and moral well-being. Through

the hypothetical *Émile*, Rousseau delineates an educational programme that would allow man to cultivate his natural tendencies so that they can be reconciled with the inevitable demands of society.

Rousseau's ideal model of education is experiential and student-centred. The teacher's primary responsibility is to cultivate an interactive learning environment whereby his student can engage in a sustained relationship with the natural world. "Nature, not man, is his schoolmaster," asserts Rousseau of his imaginary pupil (*Émile* 84). Education, moreover, should be limited to those things which are directly relevant to the student's life and experiences, and he warns the tutor not to begin the process of reasoning with his charge too soon. Instead, the enlightened tutor will emphasize activity of the body and the senses over that of the mind. The rational capacities of the mind should be developed at a later stage, when the child is more capable of reason. "Since everything that comes into the human mind," argues Rousseau, "enters through the gates of sense, man's first reason is a reason of sense-experience. It is this that serves as a foundation for the reason of the intelligence" (*Émile* 90). Childhood education, for Rousseau, is therefore predominantly an empiricist process, the student receiving all of his knowledge through a sensory exploration of the environment.

Rousseau makes it clear that the tutor plays an indispensable role in structuring this kind of interactive education. While the student must feel, at all times, that his education is an entirely self-directed and improvisational exploration of the world around him, in reality, the tutor must play a controlling role in manipulating that world to create the series of scripted lessons experienced by the student as impromptu explorations. In

order to encourage independence and self-assertion in his student, the tutor must strive to construct the appearance of equality between him and his pupil, ostensibly repudiating his role as the superior in both power and knowledge. However, while the tutor adopts the *appearance* of equality, portraying himself as a fellow explorer in the learning process, he nevertheless maintains complete control of events as they unfold. “Let [the student] always think he is master while you are really master,” advises Rousseau to the prospective tutor (*Émile* 84). This, he argues, is how the tutor tames the student and brings him fully under his controlling sway, for “there is no subjection so complete as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will itself is taken captive” (*Émile* 84). The tutor must therefore maintain the illusion of freedom, while simultaneously ensuring a complete manipulation of his student’s thoughts and actions. The tutor must actively shape his pupil’s behaviour and sentiments, but must veil that shaping influence so that the pupil experiences a sense of complete autonomy in his education. “No doubt he ought only to do what he wants,” argues Rousseau of the hypothetical pupil, “but he ought to want to do nothing but what you want him to do. He should never take a step you have not foreseen, nor utter a word you could not foretell” (*Émile* 85). In developing and delivering this Rousseauvian model of education, one which will not “stifle nature in the child” (*Émile* 5), the teacher must master the “art of controlling without precepts, and doing everything without doing anything at all” (*Émile* 84). This, contends Rousseau, is the “only road to success” (*Émile* 84).

While Godwin admired *Émile* as a “work of the highest value” (*Enquirer* 107), and Rousseau for the “magnitude and originality of his speculations” (*Enquirer* 106), he

was deeply suspicious of what he saw as the deception inherent in the philosopher's system of education. For Godwin, all education should be predicated on the intrinsic motivation of the student, on the student's desire to learn for the sake of knowledge itself, and for the self-improvement that such knowledge will inevitably foster. "The most desirable mode of education," writes Godwin in the *Enquirer*, "is that which is careful that all the acquisitions of the pupil shall be preceded and accompanied by desire. The best motive to learn, is a perception of the value of the thing learned" (78). "The boy, like the man, studies, because he desires it," continues Godwin. "He proceeds upon a plan of his own invention, or which, by adopting, he has made his own. Every thing bespeaks independence and equality" (*Enquirer* 80). It is vital that the student achieves this independence; the "preceptor" should guide the student and facilitate his learning, but should never dictate the process. "Let [the student] explore the path for himself," advises Godwin. "Without increasing his difficulties, you may venture to leave him for a moment, and suffer him to ask himself the question before he asks you, or, in other words, to ask the question before he receives the information" (*Enquirer* 82).

While the preceptor should cultivate independence in his student, and strive for a relationship of equality, he should nevertheless acknowledge his place as the instructor and should not play the part of deception by pretending to be less skilled or knowledgeable than he truly is. Such disingenuousness on the part of the tutor is Godwin's main complaint against Rousseau's educative model: "his whole system of education," laments Godwin,

is a series of tricks, a puppet-show exhibition, of which the master holds the wires, and the scholar is never to suspect in what manner they are moved. The scholar is never to imagine that his instructor is wiser than himself. They are to be companions; they are to enter upon their studies together; they are to make a similar progress; if the instructor drop a remark which facilitates their progress, it is to seem the pure effect of accident. While [the tutor] is conducting a process of the most uncommon philosophical research, and is watching every change and motion of the machine, he is to seem in the utmost degree frank, simple, ignorant and undesigning. (*Enquirer* 106)

This pedagogical approach, argues Godwin, is not much more than a “system of incessant hypocrisy and lying,” whereby an ostensibly “undesigning” tutor constructs a relationship of “fictitious equality” with his pupil in order to veil the contrived and duplicitous nature of his educational programme (*Enquirer* 120). The Rousseauvian teacher, in Godwin’s view, commits the unjustifiable error of practicing deception on his student, and his pedagogy—predicated as it is on this foundation of insincerity—becomes a programme of manipulation made that much more insidious by the fact that it masquerades as a relationship of equality. Indeed, for Godwin, this system seeks to conceal the power imbalance which he recognizes as inherent in the educational dynamic of teacher and student. “Whatever may be [the] merit [of *Émile*] as a vehicle of fundamental truths, as a guide of practice it will be found of the most pernicious tendency,” argues Godwin (*Enquirer* 107).¹

Rousseau believed in the inherent virtue of humanity in its natural state—"God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil," asserts the philosopher at the beginning of *Émile* (5). For Godwin, however, the young mind is neither good nor evil. Instead, the child enters the world as an empty space ready to receive the "impressions" of everything around him or her:

In infancy the mind is peculiarly ductile. We bring into the world with us nothing that deserves the name of habit; are neither virtuous nor vicious, active nor idle, inattentive nor curious. The infant comes into our hands a subject, capable of certain impressions and of being led on to a certain degree of improvement. (*Enquirer* 15)

In this respect, Godwin follows in the empiricist tradition of John Locke, the seventeenth-century English philosopher whose conception of the mind as a *tabula rasa* or "blank slate" is similar to Godwin's later vision of the "ductile" mind. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke argues against the existence of innate ideas in humanity, instead contending that all knowledge and understanding develops from our sensory impressions of the world. "The senses," asserts Locke,

at first let in particular *ideas*, and furnish the yet empty cabinet: and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them. Afterwards the mind proceeding farther, abstracts them, and by degrees learns the use of general names. In this manner the mind comes to be furnished with *ideas* and language, the

materials about which to exercise its discursive faculty [. . .] The knowledge of some truths, I confess, is very early in the mind; but in a way that shows them not to be innate. For, if we will observe, we shall find it still to be about *ideas*, not innate, but acquired: it being about those first, which are imprinted by external things, with which infants have earliest to do, and which make the most frequent impressions on their senses.

(11-12)

Like Locke, Godwin conceives of the mind in these non-essentialist terms, as a pliable object that can be shaped in any number of ways by sense experience and the forces of history and culture—all of which, for Godwin, qualifies as “education.” Indeed, in many ways, Godwin prefigures later twentieth-century conceptions of subjectivity in his recognition of the infant as a “subject” who comes into the world ready to receive the “impressions” of the cultural order.

Although the infant mind is initially “ductile,” it does not always remain so. Impressions will take, argues Godwin, and the initial pliability of the mind will inevitably give way to the developed habits and behaviours of an entrenched character. The child’s mind, contends Godwin, “is like his body. What at first was cartilage, gradually becomes bone. Just so the mind acquires its solidity; and what might originally have been bent in a thousand directions, becomes stiff, unmanageable, and unimpressible” (*Enquirer* 15). Godwin particularly laments this “solidity” of the mind in terms of the errors and character flaws which so often develop in youth, and which prove so difficult, if not

impossible, to ameliorate. Indeed, Rousseau had voiced a similar concern for the young pupil in *Émile*, calling the first twelve years of the boy's existence "the most dangerous period in human life" (57). This period, contends the philosopher, "is the time when errors and vices spring up, while as yet there is no means to destroy them; when the means of destruction are ready [i.e., the ability to reason], the roots have gone too deep to be pulled up" (*Émile* 57).

For Godwin, the bad habits cultivated in childhood are just as damaging to the later character of the man. "It too frequently happens that the excesses of youth, not only leave an unfavourable stain upon the reputation, but that they corrupt the disposition, and debase the character," he contends (*Enquirer* 158). "It is not every youthful folly that men shake off when they arrive at years of discretion. The wild and inconsiderate boy will often entail some of the worst features of his character on the man" (*Enquirer* 158). It is for this reason, asserts Godwin, "that we frequently meet with that mixed character in the adult over which humanity weeps. We have often occasion to observe the most admirable talents, and even the most excellent dispositions, in men, whose talents and virtues are nevertheless rendered abortive by some habitual indiscretion" (*Enquirer* 158).

Education—understood by Godwin as the totality of the child's experiences in the world, as well as the more direct pedagogical guidance he may or may not receive—is therefore essential to human development, for a sound education, as the single most important factor in the ultimate development of the subject, serves as the best way to guard against the production of such a "mixed character." As Godwin argues at the beginning of the *Enquirer*, education is a "moral process," and without a sound education

founded on the principles of reason, justice, and benevolence, there can be no happiness or virtue (1-2). A proper education is indispensable to the development of a happy, virtuous, and rational human being, and even those born with great potential still must receive the improving benefits of a salutary education:

Genius perhaps is indebted for its earliest birth to the occurrence of favourable circumstances. But, be this as it will, certain it is that it stands in need of every advantage to nurse it to perfection, and that for this reason, it is almost constantly frost-nipped, or stunted, or distorted in its proportions, and scarcely in any instance arrives at what genius is capable of being. (*Enquirer* 286-87)

While the educative process plays, for Godwin, a central role in producing the virtuous and happy subject, it is also an inherently precarious process whereby early promise and ability are easily blighted by a lack of “favourable circumstances” in childhood, a “mis-education.” For Godwin (as for Rousseau), the corrupt nature of political and social institutions contributes to the mis-education of the subject. This reality is perhaps best captured by Caleb Williams, who portrays Falkland’s fall into immorality and despair as the inevitable consequence of a corrupt social order that destroys even its most promising. “Of what use are talents and sentiments in the corrupt wilderness of human society?” asks Caleb at the end of the novel. “It is a rank and rotten soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows. All that, in a happier field and a purer air, would expand into virtue and germinate into usefulness, is thus converted into henbane and deadly nightshade” (434). Indeed, in the two central characters of this

novel—Caleb and Falkland—we encounter two separate narratives underscoring the connection between character flaws fostered by a childhood “miseducation” and later personal tragedy.

There is a tension in *Caleb Williams* between psychology and social critique. On one level, Godwin seems drawn to the troubled psychologies of his characters in documenting their moral degeneration. This is particularly true for Caleb, whose passion for the “unravelling of an adventure” (60) is at certain moments suggestive of an innate psychological failure that transcends the influence of education. Indeed, the earliest memories shared in his memoir all relate to the fundamental curiosity which Caleb presents as the primal impulse of his character. Godwin himself seemed to perceive curiosity as almost intrinsic to the human condition, calling it “one of the strongest impulses of the human heart” (*Enquirer* 131).

On another level, however, Godwin insists on having Caleb document the pedagogical conditions of his early years, a strategy which underscores the central role these educational challenges play in his process of mis-education. The limitations of Caleb’s humble upbringing are specifically highlighted by Godwin: his parents have little education beyond the utilitarian kind, and do not have the resources to offer their son supplementary guidance in the form of a tutor (59-60). As a consequence, Caleb is left to his own limited resources in cobbling together an education that ultimately makes him ill-suited for his own class position as a peasant. Of course, his education cannot make him into a gentleman either. Caleb is thus mired in the injustice of “things as they are,” and his dilemma operates as a form of social critique in the novel, an indictment of a class

system that fails to meet the educational and social needs of promising young men like Caleb. In another class milieu, Caleb's curiosity may have developed into an asset, rather than a liability. As I argue shortly, a tutor or enlightened "preceptor" might have channeled Caleb's curious energies in more fruitful directions, directions more suited to benevolence and personal happiness. Without such a resource, however, his curiosity remains unchecked, and ultimately develops into the destructive passion that forms the basis of his mis-education.

In his portrait of Falkland, Godwin similarly deploys the theme of mis-education to critique the established class system. A member of the landed gentry, Falkland has the economic power and social privilege denied Caleb, and these resources allow him to wage his campaign of persecution against his young employee. Despite his very real power, however, Falkland is also presented as a victim in the text, a man corrupted by the ideologies that underpin his class position. Falkland is not just duped into worshipping a false "idol," as he later comes to recognize (215); he is literally destroyed—psychologically, morally, and even physically—by the chivalric value system he embraces. The romance of chivalry is not just "idle and groundless," as Falkland's steward asserts (166); it is a vitiating ideology that corrupts Falkland's psychological development and blights his potential for virtue and benevolence.

For both Caleb and Falkland, therefore, childhood mis-education is rooted in the flawed nature of an established class system that oppresses one man and turns the other into his oppressor. Although it is Caleb who cries out at novel's end against the "corrupt wilderness of human society," with its "rank and rotten soil" (434), it is clearly Godwin,

as philosopher and social reformer, who makes this lament. In much of his fiction, including *Caleb Williams*, Godwin marries social critique to psychological realism through the theme of mis-education.

Habits of Mind and Meditations: *Caleb Williams*

Published in 1794, one year after *Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams* puts into narrative form the philosophical arguments of that text regarding the systemic corruption of contemporary class and social structures, or “things as they are.” A huge success, the novel solidified Godwin’s celebrity in Britain where, as William Hazlitt tells us, “he blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after, and wherever liberty, truth, justice was the theme, his name was not far off” (31). With its thematic treatment of secret histories and their exposure, as well as its chase narrative and murder plot, *Caleb Williams* was as much gothic novel as it was social critique, a fact that no doubt contributed to its success, as Godwin adeptly heightens the suspenseful tension of the narrative through a tortuous pursuit sequence that postpones the final confrontation between the protagonist and his oppressor and thus allows readers to witness the slow psychological and physical deterioration of Caleb.²

It is in *Caleb Williams* that Godwin first explores the theme of mis-education as it impacts the novel’s two central characters, Caleb and his employer, the country squire Ferdinando Falkland. The opening pages of the novel chart the physical and intellectual development of Caleb as a child, and the reader is informed at some length of Caleb’s “habits of [] mind” and “meditations” (59-60). Largely left to his own devices in terms of

his education, Caleb gravitates towards activities and books that gratify what he calls the “spring of action” informing the “whole train of [his] life”—curiosity:

The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterised the whole train of my life was curiosity [. . .] [T]his produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance. I panted for the unravelling of an adventure with an anxiety, perhaps almost equal to that of the man whose future happiness or misery depended on its issue. I read, I devoured compositions of this sort. They took possession of my soul.

(60)

As Caleb himself recognizes, his later misfortunes are rooted in this unbridled curiosity, in this propensity for the “unravelling of an adventure.” Indeed, he mentions these “habits” and “meditations” of his mind precisely because they have “influenced the history of [his] future life” (59).

Caleb constructs his curiosity as an inherent feature of his personality, something present in him from birth, and he regards the stories he “devours” as the natural means of gratifying this innate element in his psyche. In reality, however, Caleb’s curiosity and passion for adventure are as much the *products* of his reading as they are the instigating forces stimulating it. Caleb’s curiosity and thirst for adventure are no doubt satisfied by the “books of narrative and romance” he devours, but they are also simultaneously fueled by these books, his curiosity developing and growing in response to this steady diet of adventure and romance. In this sense, Caleb’s reading can be interpreted as a form of

“mis-education,” for it exacerbates the destructive propensity for curiosity already present in his character. Significantly, Caleb has no tutor or “preceptor” to act as a guiding hand in his education. “Born of humble parents,” he is “taught the rudiments of no science, except reading, writing, and arithmetic” (59). The education he receives from his parents is of the most basic, utilitarian kind, and Caleb must consequently fashion for himself an education “greater than [his] condition in life afforded room to expect” (59). With his “inquisitive mind,” he “neglected no means of information from conversation or books” (59).

As a largely self-taught student, therefore, Caleb is left to his own resources in not only choosing his reading materials, but also in evaluating the moral tendencies of these materials and in monitoring their effects on his developing character. In the *Enquirer*, Godwin argued against censoring the reading choices of the pupil—“suffer him to wander in the wilds of literature,” he advises (144). “The impression we derive from a book,” argues Godwin, “depends much less upon its real contents, than upon the temper of mind and preparation with which we read it” (*Enquirer* 144-45). Of course, that “temper of mind and preparation” is shaped by the “skilful preceptor,” whose sound judgement teaches the student to think critically and rationally. Even in cases where the pupil’s reading contains the “thickest clouds of error,” the mindful preceptor should be able to “triumph over corruption and sophistry, with the advantage of being continually at hand, of watching every change and symptom as they may arise, and more especially with the advantage of real voice, of accommodated eloquence, and of living sympathies, over a dead letter” (*Enquirer* 145-46).

Caleb, however, has no such guidance. With no preceptor available to shape his education, and to monitor the moral effects of the “books of narrative and romance” he devours, he indulges in the “excesses of youth” which Godwin warned would “corrupt the disposition, and debase the character” of the man (*Enquirer* 158). Caleb’s improvised education ultimately functions as a kind of mis-education which fails to produce the “well-regulated mind” which Godwin identified as one of the primary objects of “juvenile education” (*Enquirer* 5). Instead, Caleb’s mis-education allows for the destructive passion of curiosity to take deep root in his character. Without the guidance of an enlightened teacher, who might have channeled his student’s thirst for tales of adventure into more productive or appropriate pursuits, Caleb allows his curiosity to take “possession of [his] soul,” overwhelming his better judgment and leading him into recklessness. Indeed, even in Caleb’s assertion that his childhood curiosity was not “entirely ignoble”—“village anecdotes and scandal had no charms for me,” he claims (60)—lies his awareness of its potential indiscretion.

Once employed by Falkland, Caleb becomes a quintessential example of the man later described by Godwin in the *Enquirer*—a man whose “talents and virtues are nevertheless rendered abortive by some habitual indiscretion,” an indiscretion which takes its root in the corrupting “excesses of youth” (158). After hearing the story of Falkland’s history from the steward Collins, he allows his curiosity about his employer’s mysterious past to consume all his mental energy: “The story I had heard was for ever in my thoughts, and I was peculiarly interested to comprehend its full import. I turned it a thousand ways, and examined it in every point of view” (179). It became, writes Caleb,

“the great enquiry which drank up all the currents of my soul” (203). Indeed, his intense curiosity induces him to enter into the narrative of Falkland’s life as a psychological spy. In his relentless pursuit of Falkland’s secrets, he acts as a “watch upon [his] patron” (180), and the very recklessness of his behaviour heightens its appeal: “The instant I had chosen this employment for myself,” remarks Caleb, “I found a strange sort of pleasure in it” (180). “That there was danger in the employment, served to give an alluring pungency to the choice” (180).

Godwin had reflected, in the *Enquirer*, on the negative correlation which so often exists between curiosity and the possibility of its gratification:

Curiosity is one of the strongest impulses of the human heart. To curiosity it is peculiarly incident, to grow and expand itself under difficulties and opposition. The greater are the obstacles to its being gratified, the more it seems to swell, and labour to burst the mounds that confine it. Many an object is passed by with indifference, till it is rendered a subject of prohibition, and then it starts up into a source of inextinguishable passion.

(131)

This dynamic certainly characterizes Caleb’s increasingly reckless pursuit of Falkland’s secrets. He laments the “restless propensity” of curiosity, which “often does but hurry us forward the more irresistibly, the greater is the danger that attends its indulgence” (187). Caleb’s behaviour, moreover, becomes increasingly irrational, as his desire for details turns into a need for complete omniscience regarding his patron: “I will watch him

without remission,” he vows. “I will trace all the mazes of his thought” (203). Indeed, Caleb ultimately loses control of his own capacity for self-regulation, as his judgment, reason, and instincts for self-preservation are all overwhelmed by the “demon” of curiosity: “The more impenetrable Mr. Falkland was determined to be, the more uncontrollable was my curiosity,” Caleb remarks (181); “I had a confused apprehension of what I was doing, but I could not stop myself,” he later laments (188); “I have always tried to stop myself, but the demon that possessed me was too strong for me,” he finally admits to Falkland (195). Indeed, the overwrought nature of Caleb’s mental state during these psychological exchanges with Falkland has led Peter Melville Logan to classify Caleb as a “nervous narrator” whose first-person narration, fraught with the signs of his emotional distress, is symptomatic of the sickly state of his mind and body (48-55).

Caleb is not the only character in the novel whose early reading constitutes a mis-education that proves fatal to his future happiness. Falkland is almost always analyzed in terms of the relationship he shares with Caleb, critical examinations of the novel often positioning patron and servant as either “doubles” of one another (a relationship sometimes read in erotic terms, as both Robert J. Corber and Alex Gold, Jr. do), or as representatives of opposing value systems.³ In terms of characterization, however, Falkland signifies more broadly in Godwin’s fictional corpus as a seminal figure informing the characterization of the philosopher’s later fictional heroes—namely, St. Leon and Fleetwood. Indeed, in Falkland we find a figure whose mis-education gives rise to the specific forms of moral failure characterizing these later heroes. Like St. Leon, whose childhood education in the chivalric code leads him to embrace the ideals of fame

and public honour largely to the exclusion of all else, Falkland nurses a similar passion for chivalry that compels him to regard “honour and the esteem of mankind as a good [] preferred to all others” (*Caleb Williams* 195-96). Falkland’s acute awareness of the stain of dishonour, moreover, is symptomatic of, and feeds into, an underlying sensibility that foreshadows the destructive misanthropy of Fleetwood, the “New Man of Feeling.” We find in Falkland, therefore, a prototype of sorts for Godwin’s next two fictional heroes, and his characterization in *Caleb Williams* foreshadows the later identity crises experienced by St. Leon and Fleetwood.

Godwin’s critique of chivalric ideology can be traced back to his position as the radical reformer who actively agitated throughout the 1790s against Britain’s established class structures, structures which allowed an aristocratic oligarchy made up of men like Falkland to oppress those below them in the social order. Perhaps the most famous apologist for the old order was Edmund Burke, whose impassioned response to the revolutionary turmoil in France, the 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, stood as a lightning rod for the radical movement, and which partly inspired Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin to write their own philosophical rebuttals—*A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *Political Justice* (1793). A number of critics have pointed out the way in which Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* also critiques Burke’s veneration of the old order as it is embodied in aristocratic value systems. As Marilyn Butler has argued, the novel “re-enacts and even verbally echoes the debate on the merits of the old system conducted since 1790 by Burke and his republican opponents” (252). Godwin’s story, contends Butler, particularly the first volume in which the misfortunes of Emily Melville

and the Hawkins family are recounted to Caleb by Collins, exists to illustrate the “variety and range of circumstances in which the power of the upper orders can be felt by other citizens” (245).⁴

Godwin himself was quite blunt about the political aims of his novel, arguing, in the original Preface to the text in 1794, that he “proposed, in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man” (55). In a 1795 letter to the *British Critic*, he reiterated the polemical intention of the text to “expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilized society” (451). One of these evils, of course, was the contemporary class system, and Butler is surely correct in arguing that Falkland was largely modelled on a vision of the chivalric aristocratic order venerated by Burke.

Central to Godwin’s critique is the notorious passage from the *Reflections* in which Burke paints the highly sexualized scene of Marie Antoinette’s arrest by a “band of cruel ruffians and assassins,” who, after bursting into the Queen’s chambers, “pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked” (*Reflections* 75-76). Burke laments this moment as symbolic of the fall of chivalry—the demise of a golden age in which men, actuated by gallantry and honour, would have felt compelled to react immediately and violently in the defense of a noble woman: “Little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour, and of cavaliers,” laments Burke (*Reflections* 80).

I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone [. . .] and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. (*Reflections* 80)

In Volume 2 of *Political Justice*, Godwin directly evokes Burke's language but reverses his lament. In his argument against the unequal distribution of wealth and property, Godwin contends that chivalry, unfortunately, is still alive and well in Britain, corrupting the rich and cultivating servility, moral weakness, and despair in the poor: "Indeed 'the age of chivalry is' not 'gone'!" he declares. "The feudal spirit still survives that reduced the great mass of mankind to the rank of slaves and cattle for the service of a few" (454-55). In *Caleb Williams*, this corrupting feudal spirit is best expressed through Falkland, who serves as Godwin's paradigm for the ignoble and blighting potential of chivalric ideology on those who embrace its ideals, as well as on those who are its recipients.

Falkland's passion for chivalry takes root in his youth, and his reading, like Caleb's, plays a central role in the development of the passion which will prove so destructive to his future happiness. "Among the favourite authors of his early years were the heroic poets of Italy," Caleb tells his reader. "From them he imbibed the love of chivalry and romance" (67). Caleb's use of the verb "imbibed" posits chivalric ideology

as a form of sustenance that should theoretically foster Falkland's moral development. The nourishing potential of chivalry, however, is belied by the reality of its effects on Falkland's character. Having in his youth "drunk so deeply of the fountain of chivalry" (67), Falkland finds himself poisoned, rather than nourished, by the corruption of his ideological fare. Falkland's love of chivalry is so entrenched that it shapes every aspect of his imaginative development, as evidenced by the "*Ode to the Genius of Chivalry*" he composes as a young man (84). He subsequently grows up to embrace a chivalric code that emphasizes not only benevolent and philanthropic behaviour, but also the honour attached to rank and reputation. Indeed, for Falkland, his sensibility to public reputation is a direct function of his virtue. "He believed that nothing was so well calculated to make men delicate, gallant, and humane, as a temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour," writes Caleb (67).

To be sure, Falkland's early education in the ideals of chivalry produces an accomplished young man celebrated for his honour and integrity. While in Italy, and mired in a lover's quarrel, he deftly avoids a duel while still managing to maintain the "reputation of [his] courage" (73). Even in this situation, however, Falkland's embrace of the chivalric code has a darker side: he admits to Count Malvesi, his antagonist in the quarrel, that his strict adherence to the "rigid" rules governing chivalric interactions between men might have compelled him to take the life of his challenger. "The laws of honour are in the utmost degree rigid," he tells Malvesi, "and there was reason to fear that, however anxious I were to be your friend, I might be obliged to be your murderer" (73). It is only lucky, he remarks, that Malvesi's challenge had been made privately

rather than publicly, as a public accusation would have forced him to defend his courage and honour, whatever the costs. “It would not have been in my power,” he tells Malvesi, “to have avoided the combat” (73).

Despite the ostensible beneficence of Falkland’s conduct in this situation, it is clear that he unequivocally embraces and is the proud representative of what Daniela Garofalo has called the “carefully codified and gentlemanly violence of chivalry” (238). As Falkland’s behaviour in this affair suggests, all other values—including the sanctity of human life—must ultimately be sacrificed for the protection of his good name, a sentiment which foreshadows his later tragedies. Indeed, he admits as much to Caleb: “As soon as I was capable of a choice, I chose honour and the esteem of mankind as a good I preferred to all others,” he tells his young employee (195-96). “I have sworn to preserve my reputation, whatever be the expense,” he later warns Caleb. “I love it more than the whole world and its inhabitants taken together[.]” (235).

Collins, too, recognizes Falkland’s fatal sensibility to dishonour and the way in which it threatens to overwhelm his judgment and philanthropic potential. As he recounts to Caleb the story of Falkland’s combative history with the neighbourhood bully Barnabas Tyrell, Collins characterizes his employer as “a man whom, in the pursuit of reputation, nothing could divert; who would have purchased the character of a true, gallant, and undaunted hero, at the expense of worlds, and who thought every calamity nominal but a stain upon his honour” (172). For Collins, the beating Falkland suffers at the hands of Tyrell in the rural assembly hall constitutes a public “disgrace,” an attack on his honour from which it was impossible he should ever recover: “To Mr. Falkland

disgrace was worse than death," he tells Caleb. "The slightest breath of dishonour would have stung him to the very soul. What must it have been with this complication of ignominy, base, humiliating, and public?" (164). "Every passion of his life was calculated to make him feel it more acutely" (164).

This moment, Caleb learns, marks the "crisis of Mr. Falkland's history" (166). With Tyrell mysteriously murdered immediately after this confrontation, Falkland finds himself under suspicion of having committed the crime. While Falkland must suffer the public disgrace of defending himself against a "crime, the most black that any human creature is capable of perpetrating" (170), he must also compound his psychological distress in the service of preserving his reputation. Lying to the magistrates, feigning innocence, and allowing the execution of two innocent men may be abhorrent to Falkland's sense of virtue and his philanthropic sentiments, as well as fatal to his future happiness and psychological stability, but these acts are nevertheless constructed as necessary "sacrifices" to the larger project of protecting his good name. Although Falkland claims that he has now only the "empty remains of honour" to protect—his reputation having been "blemished" beyond repair by the simple taint of suspicion—he still demands of the magistrates that they offer him the "feeble consolation" of vindicating his public image (172).

The public beating—that "complicated personal insult," as Collins calls it (168)—and the taint of public suspicion combine to create an existential crisis for Falkland. After his confrontation with Tyrell, Falkland yearns for "annihilation, to lie down in eternal oblivion" (164); after his defense, he is alienated from humanity by a

“stately coldness and reserve” punctuated only by periods “of a furious insanity” (175).

As Collins remarks, Falkland was

‘too deeply pervaded with the idle and groundless romances of chivalry, ever to forget the situation, humiliating and dishonourable according to his ideas, in which he had been placed upon this occasion. There is a mysterious sort of divinity annexed to the person of a true knight, that makes any species of brute violence committed upon it indelible and immortal.’ (166)

Collins’s language yokes the chivalric with the divine and initiates a recurrent motif in the novel whereby honour and reputation become “idols” requiring both worship and sacrifice. Falkland tells Caleb that “reputation has been the idol, the jewel of [his] life,” a “deity” he has chosen to “worship” (171-72). The public humiliation in the assembly hall, coupled with the suspicion of murder attached to his name, render the sacred—Falkland’s honour and reputation—profane, a sacrilege he experiences as irreversible. For Falkland, the divinity attached to an “unblemished reputation” can never be recovered after these events, despite his being ultimately cleared of the charge with much celebration and “every circumstance of credit” (172). It becomes a paradise forever lost to him: “It is not in the power of your decision to restore to me my unblemished reputation, to obliterate the disgrace I have suffered, or to prevent it from being remembered that I have been brought to examination upon a charge of murder,” Falkland tells the magistrates who gather to hear his defense (171). “No future lustration

could ever remove the stain” of the dishonour attached to Falkland’s name, laments Collins, continuing the religious motif (166).

While the stain of ignominy cannot be washed away, Falkland nevertheless protects the “empty remains of [his] honour” (172) by offering up his “virtue, [] honesty, [] [and] everlasting peace of mind” to the preservation of his public image (215). These, he tells Caleb, are “cheap sacrifices to be made at the shrine of this divinity” (215). Towards the end of the novel, Falkland accuses Caleb of inappropriately sacrificing benevolence, and compassion for his former master, to “barren truth” when he refuses to sign a declaration recanting his accusation against Falkland. “Perhaps you may scruple out of a regard to truth,” he tells Caleb. “Is truth then entitled to adoration for its own sake, and not for the sake of the happiness it is calculated to produce? Will a reasonable man sacrifice to barren truth, when benevolence, humanity, and every consideration that is dear to the human heart, require that it should be superseded?” (384). Caleb, however, reverses this language of sacrifice, arguing that, by signing such a declaration, he would be sacrificing “benevolence and humanity” to Falkland’s “mad and misguided love of fame,—to that passion which has been the source of all [his] miseries” (384).

That Falkland’s “love of fame” has been both misguided and the cause of his personal anguish is evident to everyone, including himself. Collins calls his employer the “fool of honour and fame” (172), a sentiment Falkland echoes later in the text (215). Caleb’s indictment of Falkland’s obsession with reputation is even more damning, and his description of his patron’s tragic history identifies Falkland’s early mis-education in

the “poison of chivalry” as the root cause of his blighted potential and later misfortunes:

Falkland! thou enteredst upon thy career with the purest and most laudable intentions. But thou imbibedst the poison of chivalry with thy earliest youth; and the base and low-minded envy that met thee on thy return to thy native seats, operated with this poison to hurry thee into madness. Soon, too soon, by this fatal coincidence, were the blooming hopes of thy youth blasted for ever. From that moment thou only continuedst to live to the phantom of departed honour. From that moment thy benevolence was, in a great part, turned into rankling jealousy and inexorable precaution. (434)

Just like Caleb, whose early education fosters a destructive propensity for curiosity that turns his later years into a “theatre of calamity” (59), Falkland also receives a youthful mis-education that blights the most promising qualities of his character. Caleb’s description of his patron’s embrace of chivalric ideals is appropriately couched in archaic language which underscores the outmoded nature of Falkland’s values, values that poison his character and its potential for benevolence.

As we see in the next chapter, Godwin returns to the theme of chivalry in his next novel, *St. Leon*, in which the eponymous hero also “live[s] to the phantom of departed honour” to similarly destructive ends. Falkland also foreshadows another Godwinian hero, however—Fleetwood, whose status as the “New Man of Feeling” evokes Falkland’s emotional turmoil and his highly developed capacity for feeling. Indeed, when Caleb first

encounters his patron, he radiates sensibility: "I found Mr. Falkland a man of small stature," remembers Caleb,

with an extreme delicacy of form and appearance. In place of the hard-favoured and inflexible visages I had been accustomed to observe, every muscle and petty line of his countenance seemed to be in an inconceivable degree pregnant with meaning. His manner was kind, attentive, and humane. His eye was full of animation; but there was a grave and sad solemnity in his air [. . .] His look bespoke the unquietness of his mind, and frequently wandered with an expression of disconsolateness and anxiety. (61)

While the delicacy of Falkland's body is perhaps reflective of his highly refined sentiments and powers of feeling, his modest stature and delicate form also belie the ferocious intensity of his inner turmoil, as expressed in the emotional outbursts frequently witnessed by Caleb. "His disposition was extremely unequal," remarks Caleb, and

the distemper which afflicted him with incessant gloom had its paroxysms. Sometimes he was hasty, peevish, and tyrannical [. . .] Sometimes he entirely lost his self-possession, and his behaviour was changed into frenzy: he would strike his forehead, his brows became knit, his features distorted, and his teeth ground one against the other. (63)

Like Audley Mandeville, the melancholic uncle of Godwin's 1817 novel, *Mandeville*, Falkland, by the time Caleb encounters him, is a broken man, reclusive and mired in

sadness. "His mode of living was in the utmost degree recluse and solitary," Caleb writes. "He had no inclination to scenes of revelry and mirth. He avoided the busy haunts of men; nor did he seem desirous to compensate for this privation by the confidence of friendship" (62). Falkland's anguish is made that much more apparent to Caleb on account of the older man's innate sensibility, which reveals itself in "every muscle and petty line of his countenance" (61).

Collins describes for Caleb a young Falkland renowned for his happiness and levity, both of which were nevertheless "chastened with reflection and sensibility" (65). The youthful Falkland had enough sensibility to give him "a spirit of the most ardent enthusiasm" (67), a "genuine hilarity of heart" which "imparted an inconceivable brilliancy to his company and conversation" (65). His "frankness, ingenuity, and unreserve" (67), however, were "always accompanied with dignity" (65), and functioned to cultivate compassion and respect for humanity. The current Falkland, Collins tells Caleb, is but the "ruin" of this younger version, and this ruin is manifested in the blighting of that dignified sensibility which so distinguished him in his youth: "The most unusual promise" of Falkland's youth is "tarnished," and the result is a sensibility "shrunk up and withered" (65).

Sensibility is initially cast as Falkland's most admirable and promising quality—a testament to his moral superiority over those with less refined feelings and sentiments. Its degeneration into the kind of emotional frenzy witnessed by Caleb is thus a reflection of Falkland's fall, of his "shrunken" and "withered" state. Collins—and later Falkland, as well—identifies his master's excessive and misguided love of chivalry as the root cause of

his emotional degeneration. In Collins's view, the "idle and groundless romances of chivalry" (166) served to create in the young Falkland a "mind [] fraught with all the rhapsodies of visionary honour" (65-66). The perceived dishonour he subsequently experiences proves too much for Falkland's pride, argues Collins.

However, sensibility itself can also be read as the reason for Falkland's moral deterioration: as a man "impatien[t] of stain or dishonour" (73), he feels *too* acutely the taint of ignominy; his feelings are *too* attuned to the allure of chivalry, rank, and reputation, and threaten to subsume the more dignified and reflective aspects of his character. Indeed, Mr. Clare, the famous poet who comes to reside in the county and who befriends Falkland, ultimately characterizes the younger man as "too passionate, too acutely sensible of injury" (94). Celebrated as much for his moral excellence and sagacity as for his imaginative powers, Clare recognizes Falkland's dangerous flaw as one of excessive sensibility that may overwhelm his benevolent potential. "I am acquainted with your weakness as well as your strength," Clare, on his deathbed, tells Falkland. "You have an impetuosity, and an impatience of imagined dishonour, that, if once set wrong, may make you as eminently mischievous as you will otherwise be useful" (94).

As a man of sensibility, Falkland follows in a long cultural and literary tradition featuring men with highly developed capacities for emotional response. As Janet Todd has pointed out, the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility was both reflected in, and grew out of, a spate of sentimental novels featuring hyperbolic portrayals of distress, suffering, and emotion. Sentimental novels, argues Todd, served a "pedagogical function" (4) by yoking the affective power of literature to its didactic potential for the moral purpose of

shaping the emotional responses of the reader. A primary goal of the sentimental novel was to teach readers how to respond, both emotionally and behaviourally, to life and the people around them. The reading of such novels would show readers *how* to feel—that is, how to properly respond to another’s suffering with their own appropriate emotional responses—and also instruct them in *what* to feel, by inculcating the virtues of sympathy, compassion, and empathy. Seeing literary displays of sentimental feeling in fictional characters would, theoretically, inspire such sensibility in the reader, whose new-found capacity for strong and refined emotion leads him or her to embrace the moral virtues of benevolence, philanthropism, sympathy, and empathy.⁵

Sensibility, therefore, is constructed as an outward process, in that a highly developed capacity for feeling should ultimately result in philanthropic behaviour and acts of benevolence. Sensibility within the subject properly manifests itself in outward action: although the feeling is generated and experienced from within, it is channeled outward in the form of compassion and empathy for others, as well as through virtuous acts of charity and kindness. This is certainly true for Harley, the hero in what Todd calls “one of the great blockbusters of sentiment” (90), Henry Mackenzie’s 1771 novel, *The Man of Feeling*. The novel, as Mackenzie describes in a 1769 letter, grew out of the premise of ““introducing a man of sensibility into different scenes where his feelings might be seen in their effects”” (qtd. in Vickers xii). Indeed, Mackenzie’s emphasis on the *effects* of Harley’s feelings underscores this causal link between sensibility and external action. As perhaps the quintessential figure of feeling in the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, Harley combines virtue with emotion, moving through numerous

episodic encounters with a variety of formulaic victims of worldly injustice, all of which allow him to reveal his sentimental virtues and overwrought capacity for emotional response—the tears he copiously sheds throughout the text.

Harley is the proper Man of Feeling in that the sensibility activated by his exposure to scenes and stories of misfortune moves him to virtuous acts. While visiting Bedlam, for example, he encounters a woman reduced to madness after her lover dies in the West Indies. Harley gives the keeper's cursory explanation of her history the "tribute of some tears," but first-hand exposure to her grief compels him to take her hand in his and "bathe it with his tears" (34); standing "fixed in astonishment and pity," he then gives the keeper two guineas, advising him to "be kind to that unfortunate" (35). Similarly, after witnessing first-hand the effects of starvation in the repentant prostitute Miss Atkins, Harley gives her a half-guinea to relieve her immediate distress (49-50); after hearing her extended story of seduction and subsequent abandonment by the eldest son of a country squire, he is so moved by the woman's story of misfortune, and by her father's display of grief, that he "undert[akes] her cause," wins her father's forgiveness, and accommodates them both at his lodging (67-69).

For Godwin, sensibility was similarly perceived as something which leads to outward expressions of sympathy and benevolence. In his *Enquirer* essay, "Of Politeness," the philosopher speaks of sensibility in external, public terms as a concern and appreciation for the feelings of others, and as an awareness of how one's behaviour affects the emotions of others. Sensibility, for Godwin, is much less about the indulgence in overwrought feeling, and more about how aware and empathetic one is regarding the

feelings of others—and, by extension, how solicitous one is in trying to alleviate the emotional distresses of another. “That man knows little of human nature,” argues Godwin, “and is either endued with a very small portion of sensibility, or is seldom in the habit of putting himself in the place of another; who is not forward in the practice of minute attentions” (*Enquirer* 333-34). “When a modest and unassured person enters a room,” he continues, “he is anxious about his gestures, and feels the disposition of every limb and feature as a sort of weight upon his mind. A supercilious look, a dubious smile, an unceremonious accost, from one of the company, pierces him to the soul” (*Enquirer* 334). While a man of sensibility may be “pierced” by the slights and vagaries he experiences in social intercourse, he is perhaps more attentive to the “piercing” experienced by others. Indeed, for Godwin, it is the “practice of minute attentions” towards this “modest and unassured person” that truly distinguishes the man of sensibility. The man of sensibility will not only perceive the anxiety, and feel empathy for the person, but will also act in such a way as to minimize the discomfort, for, argues Godwin, “in proportion to the acuteness of any man’s feelings, will be, in a majority of cases, his attention and deference to the feelings of others” (*Enquirer* 336).

It is this “attention and deference” which underpins all civilized behaviour, contends Godwin. While reason still plays the central role in the philosopher’s theory of progressive enlightenment, the feelings increasingly serve a complementary function in cultivating universal benevolence. The polite rituals of civilization both demonstrate our emotional capacity for empathy and foster the happiness of others: “The silent communication of the eye, the lively attention that marks every shade of gradation in

another's pleasure or pain, the nameless kindnesses that persuade the receiver more forcibly, or, at least, more cordially, of the attachment of the performer, than great services are ever enabled to do"—these, asserts Godwin, are the "great circumstances distinguishing between the civilised and the savage state" (*Enquirer* 332). Sensibility is thus inextricably bound up with "civilization" for Godwin, and sensibility itself is seen as inseparable from benevolence: "Where-ever civilization exists, sensibility will be its attendant; a sensibility, which cannot be satisfied without much kindness, nor without a kindness of that condescending nature, that considers the whole chain of our feelings, and is desirous, out of petty materials, to compose the sum of our happiness" (*Enquirer* 334-35).

For Godwin, individuals with the greatest potential for benevolence—those who "promise to be, in more than an ordinary degree, useful members of the commonwealth" (*Enquirer* 333)—are almost invariably also creatures of sensibility: "it is inconceivable how numerous and delicate are their sensations," he writes, "and how exquisite is their feeling of pleasure or pain" (*Enquirer* 333). To the extent that such individuals are sensible of their own "sensations" and impressions of "pleasure or pain," they are perhaps more perceptive of the subtle emotional reactions in the people around them: for these creatures of sensibility, argues Godwin, "the slightest circumstances, imperceptible to a common eye, and scarcely adverted to by the agent, often produce an indelible impression" (*Enquirer* 333). Furthermore, while those with great potential for benevolence may be inherent creatures of feeling (as Godwin seems to argue), sensibility itself also directly facilitates benevolent tendencies in others. As Godwin contends, "it is

rarely that the opportunity occurs for a man to confer on me a striking benefit. But, every time that I meet him, he may demonstrate his kindness, his sympathy, and, by attentions almost too minute for calculation, add new vigour to the stream of complacency and philanthropy that circulates in my veins” (*Enquirer* 329).

It is clear that, far from viewing sensibility as an overwrought indulgence in one’s own emotional responses, Godwin perceives sensibility in reciprocal terms—as a dynamic relationship between the feeling subject and the world around him or her. Sensibility, as originally modeled by archetypal men of feeling like Harley, and as theorized by Godwin in the *Enquirer*, is as much an outward extension of sympathetic feeling and kind behaviour as it is an internal acuteness of feeling. For Godwin, sensibility, if properly cultivated in the subject, should naturally lead to benevolence and virtue. In short, it should make one a more humane person, and the world around the feeling subject should be made better on account of his or her sensibility.

Godwin’s portrait of Falkland, therefore, is so compelling precisely because it departs from this model of sensibility outlined in the *Enquirer*. To be sure, in Falkland, sensibility is initially yoked with benevolence and virtue. Collins, in his narrative to Caleb, continually returns to the theme of his master’s moral superiority and capacity for philanthropic behaviour, both of which still exist, in the steward’s eyes, despite the “poison of chivalry” contaminating his character. As Mr. Clare recognizes, however, Falkland feels perhaps *too* much—he is “too passionate, too acutely sensible of injury” (94), particularly where his much-valued honour and public reputation are involved. Indeed, while his sensibility endows him with the potential for great benevolence, it is

also dangerously self-reflexive and mired in an overwhelming sensitivity to his *own* feelings—his own “impatience of imagined dishonour” (94), as Mr. Clare deems it.

For Godwin, sensibility is only healthy for the subject (and beneficial for society) so long as it functions along reciprocal lines: the subject’s strong capacity for refined feeling and emotional response should ultimately be projected outward in the form of sensitivity to the feelings of others, empathy for their suffering, and virtuous acts of kindness. Falkland’s sensibility, however, is perverted in that feeling, for the most part, stays within the subject, devolving into a paranoid and obsessive self-absorption that alienates him from both the world and his own philanthropic tendencies. As Isabelle Bour has aptly recognized, Falkland “exemplifies the deleterious solipsistic potential of sensibility” (815). His strong capacity for feeling thus functions as a kind of “inverted” sensibility: emotional response which should be channeled into benevolent, external action instead feeds Falkland’s inner demons—his obsession with honour and the preservation of his public image, as well as his guilt over the immoral acts he has committed in the service of preserving these things. When Falkland’s sensibility is projected outward, it results not in acts of benevolence or kindness, but in quite the opposite—in dishonest acts of persecution against a young man his inferior in social rank and power. Falkland’s “inverted” sensibility is thus a liability, rather than an asset, to his well-being, and the world is rendered a worse, rather than better, place because of it.

Just as we can read Falkland’s destructive love of chivalry as prefiguring St. Leon’s similar embrace of fatal chivalric ideals, Falkland’s brand of inverted sensibility resurfaces in Godwin’s portrait of Fleetwood—the “New Man of Feeling,” as that novel’s

subtitle characterizes him. Like Falkland, Fleetwood is governed by a perverted form of sensibility: unlike Harley, the “old” man of feeling, whose sensibility results in benevolent compassion and acts of charity and kindness, Fleetwood—in his role as this new, perverse man of feeling—is marked by a sensibility at odds with compassion and benevolence. Fleetwood’s specific form of “inverted” sensibility will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 3.

In *Caleb Williams*, therefore, Godwin creates two characters whose childhood reading and experiences combine to create a form of mis-education which proves fatal to their own personal development and, especially in the case of Falkland, to their potential for benevolent action. If Godwin was concerned in the *Enquirer* with detailing the salutary educational conditions necessary for the personal happiness which leads to virtuous enlightenment and universal benevolence, in the earlier *Caleb Williams*, he seemed preoccupied with what could potentially go wrong in the educational and moral development of the young mind. This preoccupation, moreover, also marks Godwin’s next three novels, as all three of his fictional “heroes”—St. Leon, Fleetwood, and Mandeville—similarly experience a distinct form of mis-education that manifests itself in later crises of identity and masculine authority.

In the Circle of the Hearth: *St. Leon's* Domestic Threats to Masculine Identity

As Godwin records in his diary, he began his second novel, *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, on December 31, 1797, in the immediate wake of Wollstonecraft's death and his subsequent composition of the *Memoirs*. In his preface to the original edition, published on December 2, 1799, Godwin voiced his hopes that the novel's "boldness and irregularity of [] design" would be excused by the "impressive and interesting" combination of "human feelings and passions with incredible situations" (51-52). *St. Leon* is, indeed, bold in conception and sweeping in design: the tale follows the forced "travels" of Reginald de St. Leon, a sixteenth-century French aristocrat who, having been given the alchemical gifts of the Philosopher's Stone and the *elixir vitae* from a mysterious stranger, is persecuted from one European state or kingdom to another and ultimately driven into a resigned isolation.¹ Godwin's gamble, however, seemed to pay off, for the novel proved quite successful. The author would live to witness four English editions published in his lifetime, as well as Irish and American issues and French and German translations (Tysdahl 184, n. 15).

Moreover, despite numerous reviews which censured parts of the novel as irreligious, *St. Leon* won some significant critical praise: *The Dublin Magazine and Irish Monthly Register* appreciated the novel's "variety of interesting matter" and declared it the "work of a man of genius and learning" (Graham 161); even Godwin's old nemesis, the *Antijacobin Review*, praised a number of "good symptoms" in the tale, conceding that the "evil it contains is little" (Graham 157-58). According to William Maginn, one of the story's biggest fans was apparently Lord Byron, who, in response to Godwin's declaration

that writing another novel would “kill” him, reportedly replied, “and what matter [. . .] we should have another “St Leon”” (qtd. in Clemit, Introduction vii). If the highest form of flattery is indeed imitation, then the popularity of the tale is perhaps best signaled by a satirical homage to the novel published one year later in 1800—Edward Dubois’s *St. Godwin: A Tale of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries by Count Reginald de St. Leon*. In Dubois’s text, St. Leon is replaced by a profligate Godwin, who experiences three centuries of hyperbolic adventures before settling in England and writing *Political Justice* (Brewer, Introduction 35-36).²

St. Leon closely aligns with the *Bildungsroman*: the text traces the physical, psychological, and moral development of the protagonist from childhood into middle age. In accordance with the characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*, and in keeping with *Caleb Williams* and his later novels, Godwin highlights the central role that “education” plays in the development of his protagonist. In Volume 1 of *Political Justice*, Godwin had argued that “the characters of men are determined in all their most essential circumstances by education” (45), and we see this argument illustrated in *St. Leon*, where the hero’s “education,” like the educations of so many of Godwin’s protagonists, is deeply flawed, planting the seeds for his later personal failures in life. Indeed, we find in the figure of St. Leon, as we found in Falkland, a man whose obsessive devotion to personal reputation initiates a tragic series of events that culminate in his complete alienation.

St. Leon, like Falkland, finds himself dangerously absorbed in the cultivation and protection of his public image, an image organized around a noble identity defined by the ideologies of chivalry and honour and sustained through wealth and aristocratic power.

Raised in an environment that emphasized these public codes of identity, St. Leon fails to achieve a defined sense of self independent of the social codes around him. Instead of cultivating an independence of character, St. Leon's childhood instead produces a young man with a "passion for splendour and distinction" (56) that can only be satiated through active participation in the formalized social codes of the aristocratic tradition. Unable to consolidate a clear sense of his own identity independent of the codes and narratives underpinning his social position as aristocratic knight, St. Leon is driven to seek out public validation as the only way to achieve any sense of his own value or worth, any sense of selfhood. As we shall see, his weak hold on his identity comes to be the instigating factor in his future tragedies: it leads to his embrace of gambling and his subsequent fall from aristocratic prosperity, his increasing alienation from his family, and the ultimate loss of his identity in both a literal and symbolic sense.

"The Theatre of Glory"

Whereas *Caleb Williams* derived its suspense through a relatively focused plot organized around one man's relentless pursuit of another, *St. Leon* is a sprawling narrative covering over fifty years of the protagonist's life as he wanders across Europe in the midst of the political, religious, and cultural turmoil brought about by the Reformation. Critics have long recognized that *St. Leon*, like *Caleb Williams* before it, stands in some measure as a fictionalized allegory of the philosophical tenets outlined in *Political Justice*. Indeed, at times, Godwin is quite explicit about the topicality of the novel's narrative to political events in his own time, as when St. Leon, while detained in the prisons of the Spanish Inquisition, anachronistically connects the religious persecution

he is currently experiencing to the contemporary persecution of radicals in 1790s England: “human affairs, like the waves of the ocean, are merely in a state of ebb and flow,” philosophizes St. Leon. “Men shall learn over again to persecute each other for conscience sake; other anabaptists or levellers shall furnish pretexts for new persecutions; other inquisitors shall arise in the most enlightened tracts of Europe” (334).

Although this passage stands as the only explicit reference in the text to Godwin’s own age, the entire narrative is often read allegorically as a novelistic depiction of the larger societal injustice and human prejudice which Godwin saw as impeding progress and rational development. The novel’s allegory, as Pamela Clemit argues, is even more specifically interpreted as a coded critique of a post-jacobin English society that hunts and persecutes radicals who seek to disseminate political views and social knowledge. In Clemit’s opinion,

Godwin’s distinctive mode of historical fiction [in *St. Leon*] is best understood as an extension of the narrative model developed in *Caleb Williams*. Godwin exploits the increased range of historical narrative for a figurative rendering of contemporary concerns, expanding his earlier blend of confessional narrative and symbolic Gothic themes to include a sweeping survey of European history that bears directly on the situation of beleaguered radicals in the mid 1790s. (*Godwinian Novel* 88)

Gregory Maertz joins George Woodcock in positioning St. Leon as an allegorical figure for Godwin as the “beleaguered” rationalist philosopher, and his magna opera—the Philosopher’s Stone and the *elixir vitae*—as symbols for the progressive knowledge

encoded in the philosophy of *Political Justice*. “The philosophical novelist is, like St. Leon, a reluctant sorcerer,” argues Maertz. “As agents of inexplicable powers the radical thinker and the alchemist suffer persecution—the latter because he cannot explain to anyone’s satisfaction how he suddenly becomes rich; the former because in *Political Justice* he challenges the arbitrary power of government with the divine authority of reason” (220). For Woodcock, St. Leon’s troubles—most notably, his domestic tragedies and the social and political persecution he experiences—represent Godwin the philosopher’s own experience of trying to help a stubbornly ignorant and ungrateful humanity. In Woodcock’s interpretation of the text, the gold which the Philosopher’s Stone yields St. Leon symbolizes wisdom and, more importantly, the opportunity to use that wisdom to improve the lot of humanity: *St. Leon* thus “conveys the teaching that a man who gains power through wisdom and seeks to use it for the general good must expect to forego the comforts of ordinary life, the benefits of domestic affection, even the support of friendship. Every hand will be against him, and men will understand and hate the good he seeks to bestow on them” (“Notes” 691). This scenario, argues Woodcock, echoes “Godwin’s own experience as a result of telling men how they can become happy and free” (“Notes” 691).

However, while *St. Leon* may in some respects evoke the potential of Godwin’s rationalist philosophy, in other respects, the text critiques his earlier celebration of rationalism as the panacea for all of humanity’s ills. As David Collings has argued, Godwin was quite often “his own most searching and perceptive critic” (848), and *St. Leon* stands as a text in which he re-examines some of the central tenets of his philosophy

as outlined in *Political Justice*. Indeed, as Collings demonstrates, Godwin in fact deconstructs in *St. Leon* the very utopian possibilities he had attached in *Political Justice* to an “immutable reason” detached from all social constraints or political contexts. As Collings argues, Godwin’s theory of an “immutable reason” independent of historical or cultural constraints is ultimately realized in the figure of St. Leon with his “impossible knowledge,” that is, his possession of the Philosopher’s Stone—which frees him from not only poverty, but the constraints of all economic activity—and the *elixir vitae*, which liberates him from the most fundamental constraint experienced by humanity—death (863-71). However, St. Leon’s possession of these “impossible” secrets, this incredible knowledge which should theoretically lead to the most perfect human existence imaginable, fails to yield utopia, and instead only produces tragedy for both himself and his family. “The promise of total abundance leads to wholesale destruction,” asserts Collings (865).

Indeed, at points in the novel, Godwin has his characters voice sentiments clearly out of step with the argument, put forth in *Political Justice*, that humanity is potentially “perfectible.” For example, when the enlightened marchese Filoanto—“a man universally admired for subtlety of reasoning” (285)—witnesses the destruction of St. Leon’s Pisan residence at the hands of an angry mob driven by superstitious frenzy, he is overwhelmed by a “transport of misanthropy” against a humanity incapable of transcending ignorance: “He saw that there was a principle in the human mind destined to be eternally at war with improvement and science” (293). *St. Leon* ultimately offers up a much more pessimistic

vision of humanity's potential to achieve perfectibility through the acquisition of knowledge.

In addition to its sprawling narrative structure and complex engagement with the philosophical themes of *Political Justice*, *St. Leon* is also marked by tremendous generic diversity. As Maertz has demonstrated in his study of the novel's "generic fusion," the text incorporates elements of political allegory, travel writing, and psychological realism, as well as qualities of the *Bildungsroman*, the romance, and the gothic and historical novels. The gothic, in particular, has seemed to many critics and readers a particularly odd choice of genre for the philosopher who continued to advocate the power of enlightened thinking to dispel the enslaving effects of superstitious beliefs and practice. B.J. Tysdahl, for example, argues that the gothic for Godwin was a "hazardous" choice (90), in that the genre, with its supernatural trappings and often conservative affirmation of the dominant social and economic codes of society, was a "danger to something quite fundamental to the intellectual system of the calm, rational radical" (82).³ Tysdahl joins Wallace Austin Flanders, however, in emphasizing the financial and literary benefits associated with the gothic as a genre in the late eighteenth century, a period in which the popularity of novelists like Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis revealed the extent of the reading public's hunger for novels which married the sentimental with the supernatural. *St. Leon*, argues Tysdahl, could thus be read as Godwin's "deliberate attempt to win a prize in the Gothic race which promised such substantial rewards" (81). Indeed, Woodcock remarks that the £400 *St. Leon* earned Godwin rescued him from "immediate financial disaster" (*Biographical Study* 160).⁴

However, despite the prevalence of supernatural imagery and subject matter in the novel, Godwin primarily uses the gothic in *St. Leon* as a hook upon which to hang his larger arguments regarding the importance of shared human experience founded on meaningful social connections. For Flanders, Godwin employs gothic tropes and conventions to put forth a moral condemnation of St. Leon's acceptance of supernatural powers, an acceptance which forever cuts him off from the community of humanity. This moral condemnation, argues Flanders, is Godwin's primary motivation in making use of the gothic for his tale. For both Flanders and Mona Scheuermann, St. Leon's greatest failure as a moral being lies in his acceptance of "secrets" which forever alienate him from family and society. Indeed, as Scheuermann notes, "it is repeatedly observed [in the novel] that the gifts of the stranger are destructive not because they are immoral but because they set a man apart from his fellows" (*Novels of William Godwin* 153). Flanders, moreover, foregrounds how St. Leon's social and familial alienation contributes to his tragic history: "Every step St. Leon takes toward freeing himself from the common hazards and necessities of human life takes away as well a portion of the potential happiness resulting from his common humanity and leaves him more unnatural and miserable" (538).

Significantly, St. Leon's childhood, a childhood spent in seclusion with his widowed mother, foreshadows in a way his later social isolation. For Godwin, the social and educative experiences of childhood played an essential role in shaping future character, and in all of his novels much narrative space is devoted to lengthy descriptions of the formative years of his protagonists. In *Political Justice*, Godwin had argued that

character is a product of external social influences, that the forces of society—history, politics, culture, and education—operate on the young mind to shape temperament, intellectual aptitude, and morality. “The actions and dispositions of mankind,” asserts Godwin, “are the offspring of circumstances and events, and not of any original determination that they bring into the world” (Vol. 1 of *Political Justice* 26). Thus, education, in the broadest sense of what one learns about the world and how one learns it, was for Godwin one of the primary influences in the development of moral character. “The characters of men,” asserted Godwin, “are determined in all their most essential circumstances by education. By education in this place I would be understood to convey the most comprehensive sense that can possibly be annexed to that word, including every incident that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections” (Vol. 1 of *Political Justice* 45).

Raised by his mother on the paternal estate situated on the banks of the Garonne, St. Leon receives a “mis-education” defined by a social isolation not unlike that experienced by two of Godwin’s later male protagonists, Fleetwood and Mandeville. However, unlike Fleetwood and Mandeville, whose childhood isolation results from the inclinations of distant and melancholy paternal figures, St. Leon is kept from society by a strong-willed mother intensely involved in the education of her young son. Indeed, the shaping force of young St. Leon’s mis-education is undoubtedly his mother, who, in her overt manipulation of his emotional, psychological, and physical development, is suggestive of the phallic mother who usurps the literal and symbolic authority of the Father. From the later vantage point from which he is writing his memoirs, St. Leon

remembers his mother as a “woman of rather a masculine understanding” (55), a woman heavily invested in the historical narratives of the traditional class structure and the social power and authority of the family’s aristocratic lineage. She was “full of the prejudices of nobility and magnificence,” writes St. Leon (55). “Her whole soul was in a manner concentrated in the ambition to render me the worthy successor of the counts de St. Leon” (55). Literature, for Falkland, was the source of his early love of honour and fame, the “heroic poets of Italy” serving as the means through which he “imbibed the love of chivalry and romance” (67). For St. Leon, however, the source is much more immediate and forceful, residing in the overwhelming ambitions of his mother.

Of course, as a woman, St. Leon’s mother is circumscribed by a patriarchal ideology that only allows her to achieve familial and social honour by cultivating it in a male relative, namely her son. St. Leon thus becomes, for his mother, the recipient of all her hopes and ambitions. “Inflamed with the greatness of [the family’s] ancestors,” she “indefatigably sought to kindle in [her son’s] bosom a similar flame” (55). The result of this passionate embrace of “greatness” is a woman who lives vicariously through her son’s achievements and future expectations. As St. Leon tells his reader, “my mother loved me to the very utmost limits perhaps of human affection. I was her darling and her pride, her waking study, and her nightly dream” (55). As he rightly suspects, however, his mother’s love affair with the chivalric displays of honour associated with her aristocratic heritage compromises her ability to forge a truly nurturing and loving relationship with her son. “My mother,” laments St. Leon, “loved my honour and my fame more than she loved my person” (56).

It is St. Leon's *potential* honour and fame, however, that his mother most loves, and she guides her son's educative processes in such a way as to maximize his future ambitions. In order to foster her son's desire for social prestige and glory, St. Leon's mother keeps the family in the "most sequestered retirement" (56), delaying her son's entrance into public life out of a calculating desire to increase his lust for social recognition. St. Leon briefly encounters the glories of chivalry and sociality in 1520, when, at the impressionable age of 15, he witnesses the celebrated meeting between Francis I of France and Henry VIII of England at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. After allowing her son this brief indulgence in courtly life, however, St. Leon's mother ensures that his desire for social renown is further inflamed by deliberately denying him that which he most craves—entrance into public life. As St. Leon recalls,

she did not wish for the present that my eye should be satiated with public scenes, or that the public should grow too familiarly acquainted with my person. She rightly judged that my passion for the theatre of glory would grow more impetuous, by being withheld for some time from the gratifications for which it panted. (58)

This strategy works: St. Leon, from this point on, is consumed with a restless desire for public distinction, for scenes of glory "acted in the midst of a vast amphitheatre of spectators" (57). Moreover, his brief encounter with chivalric glory helps to cultivate the seed of reverie that has taken shallow root in his mind. "I had before formed some conceptions of the career of honour from the books I had read," recalls St. Leon, "but my reveries were impotent and little, compared with what I had now seen [. . .] I never shut

my eyes without viewing in imagination the combats of knights and the train of ladies” (59). Like Falkland, who had “drunk so deeply of the fountain of chivalry” that notions of honour and fame became the sole sustenance of his being (67), St. Leon indulges in romantic visions which become the foundation for his personal identity. From this early age, St. Leon’s sense of self takes its cue from the social codes and narratives of aristocratic identity, such codes and narratives ultimately becoming the only reference point by which St. Leon is able to measure himself.

The parting farewell of St. Leon’s mother, given on her deathbed to her eighteen-year-old son, is thus ironic and speaks to the way in which she is blinded to the consequences of her manipulative guidance of her son’s aristocratic ambition. She remains confident that the nature of her son’s education has been successful in fostering an appreciation of social rank *within* a larger independence of character. As she tells St. Leon,

‘You must now, my son, stand by yourself, and be the arbitrator of your own actions [. . .] You have been taught to know your rank in society, and to respect yourself. You have been instructed in every thing that might most effectually forward you in the career of glory [. . .] When I am gone, you will be compelled more vividly to feel that singleness and self-dependence which are the source of all virtue.’ (59-60)

The deathbed speech of St. Leon’s mother contains numerous sentiments not easily reconciled with one another. Although St. Leon has been “taught to know [his] rank in

society,” and therefore theoretically already knows “every thing that might most effectually forward [him] in the career of glory,” he must nevertheless rely on a “singleness and self-dependence” in life, an independence of character that which seems to lie outside of social class and chivalric ideology. Madame de St. Leon seems blind to the fact that her educative emphasis on social rank, combined with the various manipulations she has engaged in to further her son’s desire for social acclaim, has actually robbed her son of any sense of “singleness and self-dependence” he might have otherwise developed. Far from being able to “stand by [him]self” and “serve as the arbitrator of [his] own actions,” the youthful St. Leon is entirely dependent on the social framework of the courtly tradition for any sense of identity. Instead of cultivating an independence of character, the sequestered nature of St. Leon’s childhood instead produces a young man with a “passion for splendour and distinction” (56) that can only be satiated through active participation in the formalized social codes of the aristocratic tradition.

There is a striking irony, however, in the fact that St. Leon’s desire for social recognition precludes him from engaging in truly meaningful social relationships, relationships that go beyond the ritualized conventions of class and social status. As St. Leon relates to the reader, his youthful imagination revolved around “fairy fields of visionary greatness” that rendered him “more than indifferent to the major part of the objects around [him]” (56). Upon the death of Madame de St. Leon, we witness the extent to which St. Leon’s commitment to “visionary greatness” is bound up with a developing sense of manhood that demands the suppression of familial love. Early on

for St. Leon grief over the loss of familial and domestic ties is cast as emasculating and detrimental to the cultivation of masculine character. After his mother's death, St. Leon is visited by his uncle, the Marquis de Villeroy, who constructs his grief over his dead mother as an "effeminacy of sorrow" that must be "throw[n] off" in order for St. Leon to "prove [him]self a true soldier of the standard of France" (61). As a young man whose ambitious thirst for glory has rendered him "indifferent" to the real value of interpersonal relationships, St. Leon is quick to respond to the Marquis on these terms, declaring himself eager to join in the French military resistance arming against Charles V, King of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor. Disavowing his grief for his dead mother, he thus "shook off the inglorious softness of [] melancholy, and was all activity and animation" (62), his endeavours eventually leading him to Italy and the ill-fated siege of Pavia.

Defeat at Pavia, however—a defeat that, in St. Leon's view, delivered a "deadly wound to the reign of chivalry" (74)—robs him of this clearly articulated purpose. He consequently gravitates to Paris, where a young and newly disenfranchised French aristocracy assuages its blighted ambitions through various forms of profligacy, one of the most notable being gambling, which, in St. Leon's words, "drew multitudes into its destructive vortex" (75). "The nobility of France," recalls St. Leon, "exchanged the activity of the field for the indulgences of the table: that concentrated spirit which had sought to expand itself upon the widest stage, now found vent in the exhibition of individual expense" (75). As St. Leon suggests, the aristocratic value system that privileged recklessness on the battlefield implicitly sanctions the risky behaviour

associated with gambling. Indeed, Justine Crump, in a particularly provocative recent reading of the novel, argues that the nobility's embrace of gambling in the Renaissance can be read as a specific strategy used to consolidate an aristocratic identity threatened by certain cultural and economic shifts in Europe. As Crump contends, the representation of gambling in *St. Leon* speaks to the larger cultural and economic shift away from the value systems of an older aristocratic order towards those of a commercial and capitalist ethos associated with the emerging bourgeois classes, for whom money was valuable capital in and of itself, something not to be squandered in an ostentatious display of chivalry or social class. Faced with such threats to its existence, the chivalric order to which *St. Leon* so clearly belongs thus embraces gambling as a highly symbolic act. It is in gaming—with its associations of risk, heightened emotion, and expendable wealth—that a fledgling nobility struggles to assert an aristocratic identity structured around, in Crump's terms, a "willingness to confront risk with equanimity" (397).⁵

Even before *St. Leon*, Godwin had made a number of reflections on the nature of gambling and on the moral character of debtors. "Gaming," argued Godwin in the 1797 *Enquirer*, "accustoms [a man] to the worst habits of mind, induces him to seek, and to rejoice in, the misfortunes of others" (270). Gambling is thus antithetical to the philanthropism which should inform the conduct of the rational man committed to the principles of justice and universal benevolence. Moreover, the "conduct" of the gambler, whose behaviour so often results in a "continual accumulation of debt," is destructive to his own moral character and psychological state (*Enquirer* 170). The debtor is "drive[n] [] to the perpetual practice of subterfuges" and experiences "an ever gnawing anxiety that

poisons all his pleasures,” argues Godwin (*Enquirer* 170). “He is altogether a stranger to that genuine lightness of heart, which characterizes the man at ease, and the man of virtue. Care has placed her brand conspicuous on his brow. He is subject to occasional paroxysms of anguish which no luxuries or splendour can compensate” (*Enquirer* 170). These remarks form a compelling description of St. Leon’s descent into ignominy and deception, and foreshadow the mental despair and personal alienation that indirectly result from his love of fame and social distinction.

St. Leon’s attitude towards gambling is marked by a deep ambivalence. On one hand, he fears the dangers inherent in a habit that “drew multitudes into its destructive vortex” (75). The dangers—as St. Leon recognizes, and as Godwin had emphasized in the *Enquirer*—are not just financial, but also moral: there is something ignoble—“base and sordid” (76)—about a habit that leads a man to “rob[], perhaps, his brother, his friend, the partner of his bosom” (77). Writing from the vantage point of middle age, St. Leon is of course better able to appreciate the “bitter anguish” brought on by his gaming (77). As a young man, however, his anxieties about the habit are decidedly overwhelmed by his “restless desire [for] distinction” in a vice which he ultimately constructs as reflective of aristocratic notions about money and risk (76).

St. Leon certainly sees gambling as quite compatible with the ideological assumptions underpinning aristocratic identity. To be a man of rank entails having a laissez-faire attitude towards money in general and one’s own wealth in particular. “The possession of some degree of wealth I regarded, indeed, as indispensable to a man who would fill a lofty and respectable character in the world,” writes St. Leon. “But, in the

picture I drew of this man in my mind, I considered wealth as an accident, the attendant on his birth, to be dispensed with dignity, not to be adverted to with minuteness of attention" (76-77). St. Leon is thus able to reconcile aristocratic honour with his passion for gaming, but, ironically, his desire for distinction amongst his peers only serves to further drive his profligacy and exacerbates his fall from honour: "The whole tendency of my education had been to inspire me with a proud and restless desire of distinction; and I was not content to play a second part in the career of my vices, as I should not have been content to play a second part in the genuine theatre of honour and fame" (76).

For St. Leon, then, the moral distinction between vice and virtue is subsumed within his larger, all-consuming desire for public recognition. He thus "plays his part" in his own "theatre of glory"—gambling—in such a way as to outstrip the recklessness of his peers. "In all that was thoughtlessly spirited and gaily profligate," recalls St. Leon, "I led the way to my compeers, and was constantly held up by them as an example" (76). St. Leon's gains and losses on the gaming table appear less important than the social eclat he receives from the "compeers" who marvel at his extravagance and easy assumption of extreme risk. The destructive need for social acclaim thus drives his compulsive gambling: just as St. Leon had been "in the foremost rank"—both literally and figuratively—at the siege of Pavia (64), he also leads the way in profligacy during his youthful years in Paris.

Significantly, St. Leon is quick to point out that his "sordid and inglorious passion for gaming" (75), while financially deleterious to his estate, did not compromise his public image or "good name":

My expenses of all kinds, during this period of self-desertion, drained my resources, but did not tarnish my good name. My excesses were regarded by some as ornamental and becoming, but by all were admitted as venial. The laurels I had won in the field of military honour were not obscured by my subsequent conduct. I was universally ranked among the most promising and honourable of the young noblemen of France. (80)

Writing from a later vantage point, and reflecting on his youth, St. Leon posits that “a very young man rather takes the tone of his passions from those about him, than forms one that is properly his own” (78). As St. Leon’s history unfolds, we see the extent to which this statement foreshadows the tragedy of his life: unable to cultivate a clear sense of his own identity independent of the social codes and narratives underpinning his social position as an aristocratic knight, St. Leon is driven to seek out public validation from his peers as the only way to consolidate any sense of his own value or worth, any sense of selfhood. Robbed, by the forces of history and politics, of the one clear avenue by which he could validate and shape his developing manhood—military triumph—he turns instead to the act of gaming, finding in gambling an alternative way to achieve the social recognition and acclaim he so desperately craves. Although the “theatre of glory” has shifted to the gaming table from the battlefield, identity and honour for St. Leon still remain very much the function of public display and social performance. It is only upon meeting Marguerite Louise Isabeau de Damville, the future “partner of [his] life” (80) and the “unhappy partner of [his] fortunes” (112), that St. Leon encounters the possible satisfactions found within the private spaces of the domestic realm.

“The Unhappy Partner of My Fortunes”

Godwin wrote *St. Leon* in the wake of Wollstonecraft's sudden death in childbirth, and critics have long recognized the traces of Mary's influence on the text. This is most obvious in the character of Marguerite, St. Leon's long-suffering wife, whom Woodcock identifies as “the first of a series of fictional portraits” of Wollstonecraft (“Notes” 691). Similarly, Clemit regards *St. Leon* as Godwin's attempt to fictionally rework the austere rationalism of *Political Justice* into a philosophy for living that could accommodate Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the value of love and the domestic affections (*Godwinian Novel* 73-74). In its review of the novel, the *Antijacobin Review* was “delighted to find the social and domestic virtues placed in their proper rank” (Graham 158) and speculated that the author “would not be sorry to have an opportunity of retracting many of the opinions advanced in his former works” (Graham 157).

Indeed, in the Preface to the original 1799 edition of the novel, Godwin goes on guard against those readers of his “graver productions” who might “accuse [him] of inconsistency; the affections and charities of private life being every where in this publication a topic of the warmest eulogium, while in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice they seemed to be treated with no great degree of indulgence and favour” (52). To these potential charges of inconsistency, Godwin declares that *St. Leon* stands as a refinement of his earlier political philosophy which, while consistent with its original fundamental principles, now recognizes the central place of love and personal affections in the evolution of moral and rational character. “I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of man,” writes Godwin in his 1799 Preface, “and

from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind of him that cherishes them" (52).⁶

In *St. Leon*, sensibility and the domestic affections are repeatedly celebrated and set in contrast to the detached rationalism for which Godwin had advocated in *Political Justice*. When St. Leon is reunited with his son, Charles, after an estrangement of fifteen years, he marvels at the strength of "natural affection," which "winds itself in so many folds about the heart, and is the parent of so complicated, so various and exquisite emotions, that he who should attempt to divest himself of it, will find that he is divesting himself of all that is most to be coveted in existence" (413). Likewise, when St. Leon reflects on the death of his faithful dog, Charon, he justifies his grief on the basis that emotional response functions independently of the processes of reason. "A morose and fastidious reader perhaps will ask me why I lay so great a stress upon so petty and insignificant an incident as the death of a dog," writes St. Leon, but "feeling does not stay to calculate with weights and a balance the importance and magnitude of every object that excites it; it flows impetuously from the heart, without consulting the cooler responses of the understanding" (280).

Indeed, William D. Brewer points out that affect shapes the very conditions of St. Leon's composition: at numerous points in the text, St. Leon acknowledges the disruptive influence of painful memories on the physical act of writing, and such "melodramatic gestures," Brewer argues, foreground the "subjectivity of St. Leon's narrative," a narrative which is a "record of feelings [. . .] as well as events" (Introduction 25). As a

“record of feelings,” *St. Leon* clearly stands as a testament to Godwin’s initiation into Wollstonecraft’s “culture of the heart.” As Elton Edward Smith and Esther Greenwell Smith describe it, *St. Leon*

marks a long step forward in Godwin’s recognition of the importance of emotion as a motive for conduct and as a basis of relationship. The novel expresses his hard-won conviction that the experience of family affection is essential to the complete development of the individual personality, and can, in its turn, act as a stepping stone toward universal benevolence.

(91-92)

When *St. Leon* meets the nineteen-year-old Marguerite, he is certainly in need of the moral reformation which she provides. Having been for “two years in habits of life and a mode of expense extremely injurious to [his] patrimony,” *St. Leon* is only delivered from the “ruinous consequences of [his] own folly” through his introduction and subsequent marriage to Marguerite (80). Indeed, Marguerite seems to function in the text primarily as a vehicle for her husband’s moral and financial reformation. Although beautiful as well as artistically and intellectually accomplished, she is most notably constructed as a paragon of moral virtue whose most significant gift is the ameliorative effect she has on her husband’s profligate ways. “Amidst the singular assemblage of her intellectual accomplishments,” writes *St. Leon*, “there was nothing by which she was so much distinguished, as the uncommon prudence of her judgments, and the unalterable amiableness of her manners” (81).

Like Fleetwood, the protagonist of Godwin's next novel, St. Leon develops an appreciation of his future wife's virtuous superiority to the other women with whom he has been romantically and sexually involved. As he tells the reader,

I was like one, who, after his eyes had grown imperceptibly dim till at length every object appeared indistinct and of a gloomy general hue, has his sight instantaneously restored, and beholds the fabric of the universe in its genuine clearness, brilliancy, and truth [. . .] I could not endure the comparison between the showy, unsubstantial attractions of the women I had hitherto frequented, and the charms of the adorable Marguerite. The purity of her mind seemed to give a celestial brilliance and softness to the beauties of her person. (82)

Also, like Fleetwood, St. Leon is introduced to his wife via the bond of friendship he forges with her father, the Marquis de Damville, a man who, like Fleetwood's father-in-law Macneil, was "one of the most benevolent and enlightened of mankind" (81). And, just as Macneil does with Fleetwood, the Marquis bestows his daughter in marriage almost as a commodity meant for the moral reformation of his future son-in-law.

Macneil encourages Fleetwood's courtship of his daughter, Mary, out of an expressed belief that marriage to an amiable, uncorrupted young woman will cure Fleetwood's misanthropy. Likewise, the Marquis is willing to "bestow" his daughter on St. Leon—to "commit[] her happiness to the risk" (84)—in a bid to renovate the younger man's profligate behaviour—to cure his passion for the vices of public, courtly life in general and for gaming in particular. "She is a treasure, the equal of which perhaps the

world does not hold,” the Marquis tells St. Leon of Marguerite:

‘In understanding, accomplishments, and virtue, I firmly believe no woman living can compare with her. In possessing her, you will be blessed beyond the lot of princes [. . .] Her portion will redeem the injury which your patrimony has suffered from your excesses [. . .] I cannot believe that, with such a deposit intrusted to you, you will consent to bring her to misery and ruin.’ (84)

Regarding St. Leon as a “man in the high road to ruin” (82), and “determined on [his] reform” (83), the Marquis “bestows” his daughter on St. Leon for the purpose of alleviating his financial distress through Marguerite’s dowry. More importantly, however, he offers her as the ideal exemplar of virtuous sentiment and behaviour which will act as the regulator of St. Leon’s own moral conduct. In one significant sense, then, it is Marguerite—and not the Philosopher’s Stone or the *elixir vitae*—who functions as St. Leon’s first “gift.” Like the two others he will receive later in life, this gift is conferred upon him by an elderly man who only bestows his present after extracting a promise from the recipient. Marguerite is thus given to St. Leon on one “condition”: “break off your present modes of life,” the Marquis tells St. Leon, and “separate yourself from your connections” (84). In essence, what the Marquis requires of St. Leon amounts to a divorce of the self for the young aristocrat, for it is only through his “connections”—the social conventions coded into his relationships with his peers—that he assumes any sense of selfhood at all.

Initially, St. Leon experiences great salutary benefits from marriage and rural retirement. Indeed, he constructs the pleasures of domestic affection as the one panacea for all of life's inevitable disappointments and tribulations, lavishing praise on the joys of private life: "To judge from my own experience in this situation," writes St. Leon of his marriage with Marguerite, "I should say that nature has atoned for all the disasters and miseries she so copiously and incessantly pours upon her sons, by this one gift, the transcendent enjoyment and nameless delights which, wherever the heart is pure and the soul is refined, wait on the attachment of two persons of opposite sexes" (85). Residing at St. Leon's paternal estate, the couple lives in relative retirement, enjoying literary pursuits, outdoor activities, and occasional travel. St. Leon constructs a picture of marital complementarity that develops out of both solitude and shared experience. Of their marital bliss, he recalls that

ours was a sober and dignified happiness, and its very sobriety served to give it additional voluptuousness. We had each our separate pursuits, whether for the cultivation of our minds, or the promotion of our mutual interests. Separation gave us respectability in each other's eyes, while it prepared us to enter with fresh ardour into society and conversation.⁷ (85)

However, despite the personal satisfactions he experiences in the retirement and tranquility of the domestic realm, St. Leon still yearns for the social validation afforded by public life. Domestic enjoyments, as delightfully satisfying as they are for St. Leon on one level, are not enough to grant a complete sense of fulfillment in himself as a person or as a man of rank. Thus, he still yearns for the public recognition and acclaim of his

peers, an acclaim and recognition which he can only achieve within the social spaces of urban courtly life. While Marguerite has “all the simplicity of genuine taste” (88), “deriv[ing] her happiness from the tone of her own mind, and [standing] in no need of the gaping admiration and stupid wonder of others to make her feel herself happy” (88), St. Leon’s personal fulfillment and very sense of identity rely on the codes of social exchange in the public “theatre” of life. As he laments to his reader, “I retained the original vice of my mind. The gestures of worship and the voice of applause were necessary to me. I did not suffice to myself. I was not satisfied with the tranquil and inglorious fruition of genuine pleasures, forgetting the vain and anxious tumult of the world, and forgotten by those who figured on its theatre” (88).

While the “theatre” of public life may be “vain and anxious,” St. Leon is still destructively drawn to it, despite his better intentions and the measure of happiness he experiences in rural retirement with Marguerite. Still drawn to the “theatre of glory,” and still in desperate need of the “gestures of worship and the voice of applause” that validate his own sense of self-worth and consolidate his own sense of selfhood, St. Leon is tormented by his inability to “suffice to [him]self.” Clearly gesturing to his wife’s implicit function as his moral regulator, St. Leon laments that not even Marguerite, despite her superiority of sentiment in these matters, was able to “root[] out this disease of [his] mind” (88). Indeed, as Crump has argued, the sequestered and secluded nature of the domestic realm actually exacerbates St. Leon’s desire for public life by withholding opportunities for the social recognition he so desperately craves: “In rural retirement [St. Leon] is debarred from participation in the economy of symbolic exchange with his peers

in which his concepts of prestige have currency as real value [. . .] The domestic, individualizing world of [] marriage threatens St. Leon's sense of self because it isolates him from that social continuum in which he had an assigned and an assured place" (399).

Initially, St. Leon is able to satiate his desire for public recognition through ostentatious displays of wealth that signify the superiority and power of his social position. He maintains a large retinue of servants and surrounds himself with all the accoutrements of luxury (88). St. Leon's tenuous hold on his social ambition, however, is broken when at the age of 32 he travels to Paris with his nine-year-old son, Charles, for the express purpose of settling him into university. St. Leon's commitment to domestic seclusion had been reinforced four years earlier when, upon visiting his father-in-law on his deathbed in Paris, he had been warned yet again by the Marquis against being "drawn aside by ambition" or "dazzled by the glitter of idle pomp and decoration" (93). "Live in the midst of your family," the Marquis admonished on the occasion, and "cultivate domestic affection" (93). Struck by these "last advices" of his father-in-law, St. Leon had then "small inclination to enter into any species of society" and promptly left Paris immediately following the Marquis's decease (93). Without the spectre of the Marquis, however—and without the guiding judgment of Marguerite, who, feeling a "repugnance" to life in the metropolis, had declined to accompany him (92)—St. Leon quickly surrenders to the same corrupting vices of courtly life that had seduced him years prior.

Having lived for the past ten years a life of "contemplation and letters" (94), St. Leon is awestruck by the activity and energy of urban life and its myriad opportunities for ostentatious social interaction. Recalls St. Leon, "I was like a man who had suffered long

calamity in a famished vessel or a town besieged, and is immediately after introduced into the midst of luxury, to a table loaded with the most costly dainties” (94). Seduced by the charms of urban life—the “dainties” of social intercourse that had so long been denied him in his domestic married life—St. Leon is quickly drawn back into the “destructive vortex” of the gaming table. Significantly, his fevered embrace of gambling only increases upon his realization that success at the gaming table will allow him to sustain an extravagant lifestyle that had long ago outstripped his financial means to support it. St. Leon’s behaviour at this point in the text is no doubt informed by the irrationality that characterizes all addictive behaviour. His reflections, however, also display a keen awareness of the fundamental role ostentatious displays of social rank play in his sense of identity and self worth, and of his inability to continue such displays without some fortification of his finances. As Scheuermann aptly recognizes, “part of St. Leon’s need for wealth stems from his self-image as an aristocrat; he feels that without his material resources he would not receive the public gestures of acknowledgment which are so necessary to him” (*Novels of William Godwin* 146). After a significant win at the gaming table, St. Leon surrenders to his “fatal and irresistible” need for social extravagance (95), and decides upon gambling as the only way to finance the pomp and glitter of a public lifestyle that is so central to his very identity (97-98).

St. Leon’s gambling relapse corresponds with an increasing alienation from his family, as he withdraws from the affections of his son, Charles, and from open communication with Marguerite. When Marguerite unexpectedly arrives in Paris, St. Leon is forced to choose between a night of gambling and an evening spent in domestic

tranquillity with his family. It is significant that Marguerite's presence serves not to dampen her husband's passion for gambling, but rather to inflame it. As St. Leon tells the reader, "instead of being weaned, by the presence of this admirable woman, from my passion for gaming, it became stronger than ever" (107). Indeed, while about to embrace his wife, and upon the entrance of his son into the room, St. Leon betrays the extent of his alienation from the domestic order which he seems to perceive as both threatening and stifling: "The arms of my wife, that were about to embrace me, suddenly became to me a nest of scorpions," laments St. Leon. "I could as soon have rested and enjoyed myself upon the top of Vesuvius, when it flamed" (107).

It is difficult to determine the exact reason for St. Leon's hostile response in this scene, why he so violently repudiates the charms of domestic life he claims so much to value. While he is no doubt largely motivated by the impulses of addiction at this point, his response is also suggestive of a latent discontent with a domesticity he finds stifling and which denies him access to the public "theatre of glory" he so craves. Thus, Marguerite's arms become a "nest of scorpions" that threatens to trap, immobilize, and ultimately destroy him. As perceived by St. Leon, gambling is the vehicle by which he will be able to sustain the extravagance of a public life organized around the social signifiers of courtly culture and aristocratic identity. Marguerite's presence in Paris thus becomes an impediment both to St. Leon's gambling activities and to his larger goal of sustaining this public image. Marguerite (and the domesticity she so powerfully represents) threatens St. Leon's consolidation of his public identity, and he thus comes to regard her embraces as a kind of symbolic death—a "nest of scorpions," or a burning

volcano, which he must escape. Indeed, in a metaphor foreshadowing a later episode in his tragic history, St. Leon is relieved when he is finally able to withdraw himself from Marguerite's presence and "escape[] the inquisition of her eye" (109).

St. Leon's fall from aristocratic prosperity is swift, as he loses his entire fortune in a twenty-four-hour gambling spree and subsequently descends into a debilitating depression. Reduced to beggary, Marguerite orchestrates the family's retirement into "virtuous obscurity"—in this case, a humble cottage in rural Switzerland (112). Marguerite gracefully accepts the family's loss of fortune and status, to the point where she indulges in a Wordsworthian language of celebration regarding the moral and spiritual benefits of a humble rustic life. For Marguerite, rural retirement, divorced from the "artificial tastes, and idle and visionary pursuits" of sophisticated urban or courtly life, is more closely aligned with the "genuine principles of [human] nature" (123), and she entreats St. Leon to take solace in domestic affections and in the moral benefits of their reduced station in life.⁸

St. Leon, however, feels too acutely the debasement of his impoverished state, and he struggles to reconcile himself to his lowly station. His loss of fortune and rank strikes at the very foundations upon which his sense of identity and selfhood rests, and he thus recognizes the gravity of his "fall": "I had been formed, by every accident of my life, to the love of splendour," he declares. "High heroic feats, and not the tranquillity of rural retirement [. . .] had been the food of my imagination, ever since the faculty of imagination was unfolded in my mind" (120). As St. Leon remarks later in his narrative, he had been "brought up from [] infancy in the opinion that fame was the first of all

Godwin, however, constructs Marguerite's emotional response to their sudden impoverishment as symptomatic of her greater strength of character, and her virtuous superiority in this instance throws into relief St. Leon's personal weaknesses. In the *Enquirer*, Godwin had cautioned against an excessive reliance on luxury, arguing that care should be taken in the education of the young not to encourage an adverse dependence on certain "gratifications" in life. "The man of true courage," contends Godwin, "is he who, when duty and public good demand it, can cheerfully dispense with innumerable gratifications. The coward is he who, wedded to particular indulgences and a certain mode of life, is not able so much as to think with equanimity of the being deprived of them" (*Enquirer* 248). "Genuine virtue," such as that displayed by Marguerite,

teaches us to look upon events, not absolutely with indifference, but at least with tranquillity. It instructs us to enjoy the benefits which we have, and prepares us for what is to follow. It smiles upon us in the midst of poverty and adverse circumstances. It enables us to collect and combine the comforts which a just observer may extract from the most untoward situation, and to be content. (*Enquirer* 249)

Marguerite—whose emotional response is surely emblematic of the "genuine virtue" which allows one to experience tranquillity in the face of misfortune—is juxtaposed with the "cowardly" St. Leon and his unhealthy reliance on "indulgence" and a "certain mode of life," a reliance that is in itself suggestive of a weak sense of personal autonomy.

St. Leon's "bitterness of soul" (125) is only interrupted by a storm that destroys his Swiss cottage and devastates the region of Switzerland in which he and his family were residing. Forced off their land by Swiss authorities, St. Leon and his family travel to Constance, Germany. Although initially cheated of the money from the sale of their humble Swiss estate, the family, after a brief but severe spell of poverty, eventually settles in another cottage on Lake Constance. Although his family's misfortunes in the wake of the storm initially engender in St. Leon an appreciation for the consolations of domestic affection, he finds himself unable to sustain a more positive outlook on his situation in life. As he recalls, "the virtue I had so recently adopted was a strenuous effort. I rather resolved to be happy, than could strictly be said to be happy [. . .] [V]anity and ostentation were habits wrought into my soul, and might be said to form part of its essence" (135). St. Leon's need for wealth and fame still consumes him, and he comes to regard his attempts at finding happiness in his humble existence as contrary to the natural state of his soul.

Despite St. Leon's latent dissatisfaction with his state in life, he does manage to achieve a measure of "peace and tranquillity" while residing for six years with his family in the cottage on Lake Constance (155). However, this six-year moratorium on discontent comes to an abrupt end with the arrival of the stranger bearing the magna opera of the Philosopher's Stone and the *elixir vitae*. Calling himself Francesco Zampieri, the stranger arrives at St. Leon's cottage in late summer, and his presence—coupled with the seductive gifts he offers—reignites in St. Leon his repressed desire for wealth and "fame." Moreover, the arrival of the stranger serves to reveal the

responds to St. Leon's initial refusal with "ineffable contempt":

'Feeble and effeminate mortal! You are neither a knight nor a Frenchman!
Or rather, having been both, you have forgotten in inglorious obscurity
every thing worthy of either! Was ever gallant action achieved by him who
was incapable of separating himself from a woman? [. . .] In vain might
honour, worth, and immortal renown proffer their favours to him who has
made himself the basest of all sublunary things—the puppet of a woman,
the plaything of her pleasure, wasting an inglorious life in the
gratifications of her wishes and the performance of her commands!' (157)

Zampieri attacks St. Leon on multiple levels: lacking the reckless valour needed for "gallant action," he is marked as a failure relative to the aristocratic codes of behaviour governing the courtly tradition of sixteenth-century France. Furthermore, by aligning himself so completely with Marguerite that she becomes "a part of [him]self," St. Leon has allowed himself to be subsumed by a domestic order that should only complement—but never overwhelm—him. The inevitable result, argues the stranger, of a man unable to "separat[e] himself from a woman" is a "puppet," a "plaything" emasculated by the feminine sphere. Such a man can never achieve greatness, and is instead destined to live out life in "inglorious obscurity." Zampieri is unequivocal in his attack on St. Leon's manhood, but he also appeals to the younger man's social vanity by holding out a hope of "redemption" for himself and for his children, who become, in both Zampieri's and St. Leon's eyes, not much more than future representations of St. Leon's image. As the stranger tells St. Leon, "you are degraded from the rank you once

held among mankind; your children are destined to live in the inglorious condition of peasants. This day you might have redeemed all your misfortunes, and raised yourself to a station more illustrious than that to which you were born” (158).

It is this last speech of the stranger that perhaps plays the central role in seducing St. Leon into accepting Zampieri’s offer, for St. Leon’s masculine identity—and, indeed, his very sense of self—is inextricably bound up with the outward signifiers of wealth and social rank. Being able to transcend the ““inglorious obscurity”” of his lowly station, and once again assume an elevated public image, would indeed be a kind of “redemption” for St. Leon, as he has experienced his fall from aristocratic prosperity as a “degradation” of not only his body, but also his spirit. St. Leon immediately senses the relevance of the stranger’s words to his own character. “The stranger touched upon the first and foremost passions of my soul,” he writes, “passions the operation of which had long been suspended, but which were by no means extinguished in my bosom” (157).

St. Leon rightly recognizes that the appeal of the stranger’s offer rests in his own addiction to “fame” and the “theatre of glory,” an addiction cultivated in adolescence through the lessons taught by his mother, and nurtured by an adulthood spent conforming to the social codes of chivalric culture: “The youthful passions of my soul, which my early years had written there in characters so deep, were by no means effaced. I could not contemplate the splendour of rank with an impartial eye. I could not think of the alternative of distinction or obscurity for my children with indifference” (160).

St. Leon’s conception of his character is strikingly suggestive of the image of the palimpsest, which, although it may be inscribed many times over, never loses the “marks”

of its original script. Indeed, the early lessons of St. Leon's childhood had instilled in him a deep desire for "fame"—public glory and social acclaim—and these "youthful passions" had made such an indelible impression on his "soul" (were "written there in characters so deep") that they became the fundamental foundations in the construction of his selfhood, to the extent that, without "fame," he was nothing—he ceased to exist in any meaningful way. His years with Marguerite, years in which she had attempted to instill in her husband an appreciation of domestic retirement removed from the public eye, might have tempered or even "suspended" these "foremost passions," but they in no way "effaced" them. Marguerite's lessons were simply "written over" those primary lessons of his childhood, which serve as the original and most fundamental text of St. Leon's existence.

The stranger is a skilled reader of that text, easily manipulating the "first and foremost passions of [St. Leon's] soul." Indeed, it is Zampieri's acute perception of that text—those "first and foremost passions"—that allows him to bring St. Leon under his sway. A dependence on wealth and luxury, for Godwin, was not only the sign of a weak and "cowardly" character; it also threatened a man's autonomy. "The weakness which too many are subject to in regard to the goods of fortune," argued Godwin in the *Enquirer*, "puts them to a certain degree in every man's power" (249). A man "inordinately sensible to the presence or absence of the accommodations and luxuries of life" is easily enslaved by another: "This man is not his own master [. . .] He is truly a slave. Any man, possessing the command of a certain portion of the goods of life, may order him this way or that at his pleasure" (*Enquirer* 249).

With his unlimited “command” of the “goods of life”—money and longevity—Zampieri is ideally poised to act as St. Leon’s “master,” subjugating him to forbidden knowledge and alienating secrets. It is therefore ironic that St. Leon ultimately comes to appreciate the stranger’s offer as the means through which he can reestablish not only his social rank, but also his personal autonomy and masculine authority. “Shall I shut upon myself the gate of knowledge and information?” he asks himself, pondering the stranger’s offer of disclosure and echoing the very language used to attack him and his masculinity. “Is it not the part of a feeble and effeminate mind to refuse instruction, because he is not at liberty to communicate that instruction to another—to a wife?” (159). The stranger’s gift thus becomes a sort of moral “instruction,” a “gate of knowledge” through which St. Leon must courageously pass in order to redeem himself and his family from their fallen state. Like Caleb Williams, St. Leon is motivated by an urgent need to gain access to forbidden knowledge, knowledge which carries within it the threat of his own destruction.

In succumbing to the stranger’s manipulation, St. Leon thus betrays his deep sense of shame at his perceived emasculation. “The figure I made in my own eyes was mean; I was impatient of my degradation; I believed that I had shown myself uxorious and effeminate, at a time that must have roused in me the spirit of a man, if there had been a spark of manly spirit latent in my breast” (166). In St. Leon’s eyes, he has lost his masculine authority, that “spark of manly spirit” so essential to the chivalric tradition. While poverty and obscurity have unmanned him by robbing him of the great signifiers of wealth and rank that formed the foundation for his conception of masculine identity,

domestic retirement has similarly emasculated him by denying him the separate sphere of interaction necessary for successful manhood. St. Leon, so immersed in the private sphere that it has become the “whole of [his] existence,” perceives his gendered identity as under threat. He justifies his anxiety by clinging to the ideology of separate spheres that will come to characterize later nineteenth-century conceptions of gender.⁹ Reflecting on the “singular and unprecedented confidence” he shares with Marguerite (166), St.

Leon laments that

other men have their secrets: nor do they find their domestic tranquillity broken by that circumstance. The merchant does not call his wife into consultation upon his ventures; the statesman does not unfold to her his policy and his projects; the warrior does not take her advice upon the plan of his campaign; the poet does not concert with her his flights and his episodes. To other men the domestic scene is the relaxation of their cares; when they enter it, they dismiss the business of the day, and call another cause. I only have concentrated in it the whole of my existence. By this means I have extinguished in myself the true energy of the human character. A man can never be respectable in the eyes of the world or in his own, except so far as he stands by himself and is truly independent. He may have friends; he may have domestic connections; but he must not in these connections lose his individuality. Nothing truly great was ever achieved, that was not executed or planned in solitary seclusion. (166-67)

In St. Leon's conception of this notion of separate spheres, a man should maintain a healthy distance between his public activities and his private enjoyments, moving in and out of the domestic "scene" easily, often, and at will. Within this model of interaction, masculine autonomy is never threatened, never jeopardized by the domestic sphere. The circumstances of St. Leon's fall from prosperity, however, have produced in his eyes an unnatural order of things, a perverse living arrangement in which an unbroken domestic "tranquillity" of six years has denied him any opportunities for masculine self-expression in the public sphere. With no money and no social connections to fortify his relationship with public life, St. Leon has only his interactions with Marguerite and his children with which to define himself, and the result, in his eyes, is that the "whole of [his] existence" has become "concentrated" in the domestic order. St. Leon may yearn to "stand[] by himself" and be "truly independent," but there is a definite irony to these desires. On her deathbed, St. Leon's mother had stressed the importance of "singleness and self-dependence" with no apparent awareness of how her idealization of social rank conflicted with true independence of thought or character (60). St. Leon laments his loss of individuality while being similarly blind to the fact that his desperate need for wealth and "fame" have always precluded him from achieving any true measure of independence.

The stranger's gift ultimately offers St. Leon much more than simple immortality and unlimited wealth. The Philosopher's Stone will of course give St. Leon the financial resources to re-establish his "fame"—in the form of allowing him to reassume his "rightful" rank in society—and this fame will no doubt allow St. Leon to recuperate his sense of self within the courtly tradition he so values. St. Leon's identity, however, as we

have witnessed, is largely informed by his sense of masculine authority, and it is precisely this authority which he so desperately desires to regain. This is evidenced by the stranger's keen tactics of manipulation in identifying and attacking St. Leon's biggest point of weakness—his latent sense of degradation and emasculation. The greatest “gift” of the stranger, therefore, may not be the Philosopher's Stone or the *elixir vitae* at all, but the very “condition” upon which these two “gifts” are bequeathed—that is, the code of silence that St. Leon must maintain between himself and his wife regarding all that the stranger shares with him. As St. Leon correctly suspects, the stranger's gift and its accompanying “condition” will divorce him from the “singular and unprecedented” trust he shares with Marguerite. Paradoxically, however, it seems that it is just this kind of divorce that he so craves; only by removing himself from the confines of a domestic bond that he feels has subsumed his “true energy” can he reassert his masculine autonomy and achieve greatness. Accepting the underlying condition of the stranger's gift gives St. Leon a very tangible and convenient vehicle through which to effect a “divorce” from Marguerite that is both symbolic and material.

St. Leon's feelings of emasculation are perhaps aggravated by Marguerite's assumption of characteristics and behaviours conventionally associated with the masculine. When first introduced to the reader, Marguerite is the picture of stereotypical femininity: she is mild in disposition and gentle and delicate in frame, with an “extreme juvenility of form” and a step that is “airy and light” (81). Despite her obvious feminine qualities, however, even at this early point, Marguerite displays a “strength of body and vigour of mind” that is reflected in her “bold” intellect and “firm” carriage (81). This

strength of character comes to reveal itself in St. Leon's narrative, as Marguerite's responses to misfortune are increasingly masculinized. Indeed, upon the loss of the family fortune, Marguerite assumes, in addition to her maternal role, the typically masculine position of head and protector of the family. "She determined for the present to be both a father and a mother to her children" (115), and she later serves as an essential "steward" to St. Leon when he is emotionally incapacitated to the point of being unable to manage his own estate (122).

Moreover, Marguerite's masculinization in the text occurs as a function of her husband's feminization. When St. Leon is cheated of the money from the sale of his Swiss cottage, and forced to earn a subsistence living as a manual labourer, he feels himself unmanned by his inability to withstand his misfortune: "My heart died within me," he recalls. "I did not return after the fatigues of the day [. . .] to a night of repose. I became a very woman when I looked forward, and endeavoured to picture to myself the future situation of my family. I watered my pillow with my tears" (142). Significantly, during these moments of emotional excess, it is Marguerite who must apply the guiding hand of comfort. "[She] would sometimes overhear me; and with the gentlest suggestions of her admirable mind would endeavour to soothe my thoughts to peace" (142).

St. Leon's misfortunes have thus placed him in a series of domestic arrangements that have compromised his sense of masculine authority. He therefore constructs his acceptance of the stranger's gift as a testament of his own masculine autonomy in the face of a domestic existence he now perceives as emasculating and as a threat to his self-actualization. After his sudden entrance into a new-found wealth that is never adequately

explained to Marguerite or his children, St. Leon embarks on a tour of German cities with his beloved son, Charles, but he quickly suffers an estrangement with Charles after he refuses to disclose the nature and cause of his sudden wealth. Significantly, St. Leon's sense of masculine identity, reinvigorated by his willingness to deny Marguerite entrance into the realm of his alchemical secrets, is further consolidated by what he now perceives as his strength in maintaining the stranger's confidence, regardless of the personal costs to himself or his family. St. Leon's sense of masculine autonomy thus becomes a perverse, and ultimately tragic, function of his willingness to withstand the misfortunes brought on by the Philosopher's Stone. As he reflects after his break with Charles,

I held it to be base and cowardly to surrender gifts so invaluable, upon so insufficient an experiment [. . .] I had but just entered the vast field that was opened to me. It was of the nature of all great undertakings to be attended with difficulties and obstacles in the commencement, to present a face calculated to discourage the man that is infirm of purpose. But it became my descent, my character and pretensions, to show myself serene in the midst of storms. (219)

Note how St. Leon casts his stubborn refusal to relinquish use of the Philosopher's Stone as indicative of a manliness perfectly in tune with the chivalric ideals of reckless bravery and perseverance. Using language evocative of the battlefield, St. Leon perceives himself as a determined warrior entering into the "vast field" of an "experiment" that will prove his authority, once and for all. Only by remaining committed to his "experiment"—and

therefore loyal to the stranger and his gifts—can St. Leon validate his identity as both an aristocrat and a man.

Charles's material departure from the family mirrors St. Leon's symbolic break with the familial ties and domestic affections that had so long enveloped him. Indeed, immediately after accepting the stranger's disclosure, St. Leon had begun to sense the extent to which his "experiment" had "introduced a permanent difference and separation between [him] and [his] family" (194). This "separation" is most extreme with Marguerite: "we no longer lived together as we had done," remarks St. Leon. "There was no more opening of the heart between us, no more infantine guilelessness and sincerity, no more of that unapprehensive exposure of every thought of the soul" (201). After Charles's departure, St. Leon attempts to integrate, once again, into the folds of the domestic order, most notably by placing himself back under the moral control of Marguerite. "I am come to you," he cries, upon first seeing her after his German tour, "a repenting prodigal. Take me and mould me at your pleasure! [. . .] I resign myself into your hands! [. . .] Be my director; do with me as you please!" (223-24). Although he is careful to guard his alchemical secrets, St. Leon nevertheless declares to Marguerite that, "in all things else," she may "govern [him] despotically!" (224). His attempts at re-entering the domestic order, however, are ultimately unsuccessful: St. Leon is now, in Marguerite's eyes, marked as an outsider to the family, a shadowy presence whose very unknowability threatens the domestic order. As St. Leon later comes to realize, Marguerite "regarded [him] as ambiguous, mysterious, and impenetrable, qualities from which the frankness of her nature spontaneously revolted" (257).

“An Equivocal Character”

After St. Leon returns to Constance, he is detained on suspicion of murdering the stranger and only escapes prison by bribing a money-hungry jailor. From this point on in the text, St. Leon’s adventures come to illustrate what is perhaps the ultimate paradox of his tragic history: the very wealth which should have theoretically affirmed his public image and consolidated his troubled sense of identity actually causes him to lose both of these things. As we have seen, St. Leon was driven, from childhood, by ambition, a thirst for “fame” and the “theatre of glory” that could only be satisfied in the public spaces of social life. It is this tragic flaw that alienates him from what should have been a life of unadulterated domestic affection with Marguerite. Moreover, it is this flaw that motivates him to accept the gifts offered by the stranger, despite (or because of) the fact that his acceptance will forever divorce him from the domestic order he should cherish above all else. In this sense, St. Leon chooses “fame” and public life over domestic and familial ties in a bid to both consolidate his weak sense of identity and demonstrate his masculine autonomy. However, this choice paradoxically initiates what is perhaps the most overt and compelling narrative of lost identity in the text—the literal erasure of St. Leon’s name.

St. Leon begins his experiment with the belief that it will allow him to resume his rightful “place” in chivalric courtly life. As Kate Ferguson Ellis has pointed out, St. Leon is a “firm believer in the transformative power of money” (162), and we witness how his faith in the power of gold structures his visions of the future. Immediately upon receiving the gift of the Philosopher’s Stone, St. Leon begins to actively plot his return to the life of

honour and privilege he had lost seven years earlier. He fantasizes about returning to his “native soil,” repurchasing the “property of [his] ancestors,” and witnessing the members of his family rise to positions of eminence within the French court (190-91). His daughters will marry into the highest ranks of France’s nobility, thus solidifying the position of the St. Leon name within the French aristocracy (191). In much the same way as his mother had done with him, St. Leon reserves his greatest hopes for his son, Charles, who in St. Leon’s fantasies will “burst with sudden splendour upon his countrymen, and prove in the field his noble blood and generous strain” (191). St. Leon’s visions ultimately run to the hyperbolic, as he begins to imagine himself as the financial saviour of his “adored country” in its time of need (189), “replenish[ing] with [his] treasures the empty coffers of France” (191). In St. Leon’s fantasies of self-actualization, “the exile should return from his seven years’ banishment in triumph and splendour” (190).

The reality of St. Leon’s experience, however, is that he is unable to achieve any kind of meaningful reintegration into society due to the aura of suspicion and mystery that immediately begins to haunt him upon his acceptance of the Philosopher’s Stone. St. Leon’s trouble in Constance stems from his inability, when questioned by the authorities, to give a “clear and satisfactory account” of both his wealth and of his relationship with the mysterious stranger (235). St. Leon initially seems to recognize the necessity of maintaining some measure of public transparency regarding his sudden wealth, as evidenced by the fact that he attempts to justify to his family his sudden prosperity as the result of a legacy left to him by the stranger. As St. Leon states at the time, “I was

compelled to account for appearances” (194). This notion of “accounting” for, or providing an “account” of, circumstances regarding his sudden acquisition of wealth continually resurfaces in St. Leon’s narrative, as he becomes increasingly unable to offer the sort of “account” that might dispel some of the ignoble mystery that surrounds him and which prevents him from honourably reintegrating into society.

The theme of forbidden knowledge, so prevalent in *Caleb Williams*, thus resurfaces in *St. Leon*. Unable to provide a full and transparent disclosure of all that he knows regarding both his and Falkland’s histories—having only an “imperfect and mutilated story to tell” (411)—Caleb finds himself haunted by the equivocal nature of his existence. Like Caleb, St. Leon is ensnared within the confines of a dark secret, a story he cannot tell, and he experiences complete social alienation as he is driven from place to place by rumour and scandal.

When St. Leon attempts to curry favour for himself and Charles from Gaspar de Coligny, a young French aristocrat residing at the Dresden court, he is forced to face the disheartening reality that his current circumstances could never yield an honourable explanation. ““At a loss to account”” for what he sees as this ““second revolution in [his] fortune,”” Coligny emphasizes to St. Leon the necessity of providing an honourable explanation for what seems to be inexplicable (204). ““You have not sufficiently considered the account we all owe to one another,”” Coligny tells St. Leon, ““and the clearness of proceeding we are obliged to maintain, not only to our own hearts, but in the face of the world”” (204). Unable to provide this ““clear account”” of his ““second revolution”” in fortune, St. Leon ultimately realizes that he is banished to an ignominious

existence, and that his name and public image—once his greatest boons in life—are now surrounded by mystery, speculation, and the taint of possible dishonour. Thus, the Philosopher's Stone, which was to act as the magical elixir for the regeneration of all aspects of his selfhood, ironically becomes the vehicle through which he loses even more of his social and personal identity. As St. Leon tells the reader, "I had rejoiced in the bequests of the stranger, because I regarded them as the means of restoring me to splendour, and replacing my children in the situation to which they were entitled by their birth. Was that which I had regarded as the instrument of their glory, to become the medium of their ignominy and disgrace?" (205).

Indeed, it is this aura of ignoble mystery that haunts St. Leon's wandering footsteps for the remainder of his narrative, and becomes the greatest impediment to his successful reintegration into society. While St. Leon recognizes that wherever he travels he is a "stranger, one universally unknown" (370), it is the corrupt bashaw of Hungary who more aptly characterizes the enigmatic nature of St. Leon's position: as he tell St. Leon, "'you are a man of darkness, and every thing that relates to you is enveloped in mystery'" (378). For St. Leon, it ultimately becomes clear that, instead of achieving an honourable place in the "theatre of glory," he is banished to a life of ignominious obscurity: "Mystery was the great and unconquerable bane of my situation, and from the poisonous influence of mystery, the most regular system of government was not competent to protect me" (381). Just as Falkland ultimately comes to recognize himself as the "fool of fame" (215), and "reputation" as a false "idol" the worship of which has

destroyed him (171-72), St. Leon gradually comes to appreciate the destructive nature of his gifts and the tragic consequences of his passion for fame and public acclaim.

After escaping prison in Constance, St. Leon settles himself and his family in Italy, just outside of Pisa. There, he lives an isolated and modest existence, but again his unfamiliarity to the local residents, coupled with his indiscreet participation in “chemistry and the operations of natural magic” (266), soon raises the suspicions of his superstitious Italian neighbours. After a mob kills his dog, destroys his home, and murders a loyal servant, St. Leon once again is forced to flee with his family, this time to Barcelona, where the long-suffering Marguerite—that “lovely victim of my indiscretions,” as St. Leon characterizes her (264)—succumbs to illness. With Marguerite’s death, St. Leon loses one of his last ties to the domestic order, and he immediately goes about divesting himself of his remaining familial connections—repurchasing his paternal estate in France and settling his daughters there under the guardianship of a female mentor, Mariana Chabot.

What is perhaps most striking about this period in St. Leon’s history, however, is that his removal to Italy initiates an overt loss of his public self, as measured by the family name he had so earnestly desired to preserve in all of its honour and glory. Indeed, while in Italy, St. Leon takes the name of “Monsieur Boismorand” (273), and this assumed identity is only the first of a long series of pseudonyms he uses to evade suspicion and escape into anonymity. After the death of Marguerite, he adopts the name and persona of a “monsieur Valmier, the guardian of the orphan heiresses of St Leon” (301). Ironically, contrary to his fantasies, it is as Monsieur Valmier—and not as

himself—that St. Leon repurchases his paternal property on the banks of the Garonne, and it is as Valmier that he makes the domestic arrangements with Madame Chabot.

After his release from the prison of the Spanish Inquisition, St. Leon travels to Hungary, where he adopts yet another identity as “sieur de Chatillon” (366), the wealthy, young (for he has by this point in the novel ingested the *elixir vitae* and returned to a youthful age in appearance), and mysterious benefactor of the Hungarian people. Again, as with his fantasy regarding the repurchasing of his paternal estate, it is tragically ironic that St. Leon’s dream of serving as a financial saviour to a country in need (a fantasy he expressed regarding France) is only finally fulfilled by assuming an identity other than his own. Moreover, after his release from Bethlem Gabor’s prison, and upon his reunion with his estranged son Charles, St. Leon veils his true identity (as well as the false one he had assumed upon his entrance into Hungary) under yet another pseudonym—“Henry D’Aubigny,” a young Frenchman unjustly imprisoned by Gabor (414). In this respect, St. Leon is like Caleb, who is also forced to “submit to the otherwise unmanly expedient of passing by a different name” (410-11), and who similarly disguises his identity through a number of alternative personas.

The text does not draw the reader’s attention to this process of identity loss. Indeed, we are only told of these various name changes through oddly passive constructions delivered in an offhand manner: “Monsieur Boismorand, such was the name I had assumed upon my entrance into Italy,” St. Leon tells the reader (273); after Marguerite’s death, he writes of how he “passed [him]self for monsieur Valmier” while resettling his daughters under the care of Madame Chabot (301). Likewise, after his

initial entrance into Hungary, the sieur de Chatillon “was the name [he] at this time assumed” (366). Despite the awkwardly passive manner in which these shifts in identity are revealed to the reader, they are highly significant, for they speak to the ultimate paradox of St. Leon’s experience with the Philosopher’s Stone: that which should have reconsolidated St. Leon’s sense of identity and public image, in the form of fortifying his financial situation and allowing him to reassume his elevated rank in society, actually causes him to lose both of these things—in this case, in the most obvious form of his family name. In this sense, St. Leon does not just lose his family and his moral bearings through his supernatural “experiment.” He quite literally loses a fundamental element of his selfhood—his identity as symbolized by his aristocratic name. St. Leon does not meditate on this loss. Indeed, he seems to regard such name changes as a necessary reality of his woeful situation. But, for a man so committed to the preservation of his family honour and so driven to cultivate his public image and “fame”—both for himself and for his progeny—such sacrifices of external identity must have been acutely felt.

In addition to adopting various pseudonyms along his travels, St. Leon, after his escape from the Spanish Inquisitors and their planned *Auto da Fé*, visits his daughters incognito by assuming the costume and habits of a traveling Armenian merchant. Like Caleb, whose disguises also involve the adoption of “othered” identities (in Caleb’s case, those of a Jew and an Irish beggar), St. Leon assumes the position of a cultural outsider in his first significant human encounter after his escape. That St. Leon makes this visit disguised as an Eastern “other” speaks to his complete alienation both from the domestic order which his daughters inhabit and from the social and political structures of western Europe. When first settling his daughters on his estate in France, St. Leon had

emphasized to them that their parting was a final one and that “they should speak and think of [him] as dead” (303). It is during this visit, however, that St. Leon fulfills his earlier injunction and quite literally “writes” the narrative of his own death.

In his role as Armenian merchant—and “friend” of the “late” St. Leon—he informs his daughters of their father’s death two years prior. St. Leon’s tale serves a pragmatic function in allowing him to clear up unfavorable rumours regarding the family patriarch and honourably bestow on his daughters his entire estate. On another level, however, his narrative also enables him to indulge his vanity by witnessing the effects which the news of his demise produces on his two daughters. Indeed, St. Leon goes even further than simply narrating the details of his own death. He manipulates his daughter Louisa’s sensibilities by recounting the intimate details of her childhood experiences in such a way as to produce heightened emotional response. He describes his actions to the reader:

From time to time I reminded her of particulars that it was scarcely possible any one but her father should know; I conjured up past scenes; I made all the revolutions of her youth pass successively in review before her; I touched all the pulses of her soul. Sometimes she was fixed in mute astonishment at the exactness of my information, and was ready to do me homage as some aerial genius, who condescended to clothe himself in this earthly figure; at other times astonishment was swallowed up in feeling, her soul dissolved in tenderness, and she appeared ready to faint into my arms. (357)

“Urged by an irresistible impulse to practise [. . .] upon the feelings of her virtuous mind”

(356), St. Leon shapes his daughter's affections in a display that gratifies his vanity. Just as he is a conjurer of the alchemical arts, St. Leon becomes in this scene a magician of the past, an "aerial genius" "conjur[ing] up past scenes" in order to witness the effect on his daughter's sensibilities. In this way, St. Leon is able to satisfy a vain need to witness his daughter's grief for a father she believes is dead, and this manipulation of emotion proves, at least initially, to be quite fulfilling: "It is scarcely possible to depict the pleasurable sensations I drew from these intercourses [. . .] I felt sometimes as if I could have wasted ages in this sort of gratification" (357).

St. Leon's game, however, is a dangerous one, and vanity, initially appeased, soon grows dissatisfied as the passage of time tempers his daughters' emotional responses. As he confesses to the reader, "it happens to few men to witness the manner in which the story of their own deaths is received. If it did, I believe we all of us have enough of vanity and personal feeling, however sincere a grief might show itself in the demeanour of survivors, to find it falling short of our appetites and demand" (359). Although his daughters grieve him with an appropriate measure of "decorum and sensibility," St. Leon nevertheless finds it an "unpleasing reflection [. . .] thus to have occasion to gauge their love, and to say, This is the exact measure of their affection" (359). St. Leon's disappointed vanity perhaps speaks to his anxiety over the larger implications of his "death," in that this symbolic demise represents the actual demise of his social identity—his ambitions, fame, and public self. In this sense, his "death" functions as another symbol of the literal demise of his public identity, as he sacrifices not just his name in this case, but his very earthly existence.

St. Leon's "death" in this scene can thus be read as the culminating act in the "social death" which he has been experiencing since his acceptance of the stranger's gifts. As numerous critics of the novel have pointed out, St. Leon's immortality alienates him from the most fundamental experience of humanity—death—and this alienation renders him unable to forge and sustain meaningful connections with friends and family. This leads to a kind of "social death," as Collings puts it (863). Like both Caleb and Fleetwood, St. Leon yearns for the comforts of friendship (367), but he repeatedly finds that his forbidden knowledge precludes him from enjoying the benefits of meaningful sociality. After his estrangement from the Denison family, Caleb ponders the extent of his alienation from society—"how completely I was cut off from the whole human species" (408). "Solitude, separation, banishment! These are words often in the mouths of human beings," laments Caleb. "But few men except myself have felt the full latitude of their meaning" (408). It becomes clear that Godwin intended to portray in St. Leon one of those "few men" who experiences the "full latitude" of total social alienation. Moreover, while St. Leon's "social death" produces acute feelings of despair and loneliness, it also jeopardizes the very foundations of his sense of self. Organized around the social narratives of wealth, rank, and public "fame," St. Leon's very selfhood is profoundly threatened by the sort of "social death" he experiences. Whereas he had dreamed in his youth of playing a starring role in the "theatre of glory," he is now relegated to the position of "mere spectator of the busy scenes that passed around [him]" (304).

While visiting his mother's tomb, just prior to his final meeting with his daughters, St. Leon is overcome by the gravity of his failures in the light of his mother's deathbed command to cultivate public honour and glory:

Why, oh why, as it had been with my great forefathers, was it not a moment of exultation to me, when I thus feelingly saluted the shade of a parent! He that exults in such an hour, must feel that he has illustrated his birth, and honoured his progenitors. I had done nothing of this: I was an exile on the face of the earth, had acquired no trophies, and accumulated no fame. I had none to honour, none even to know me; I had no family, I had no friend! These bitter recollections started up in array before me, and cut me to the heart. The spirit of my mother frowned upon her son; and I returned along the path by which I came, disgraced and disconsolate.

(351)

As an exile, with no “trophies” or “fame,” and having proven himself an unworthy successor to his ancestors’ glory and aristocratic heritage, St. Leon is completely without the reference points around which he had always organized his sense of identity. Without these signifiers of the Symbolic Order—name, rank, “fame,” a publicly recognized place in society—St. Leon experiences a literal “Lack”—an emptiness of the self that increasingly renders him a spectral figure. His emptiness, however, had always formed a latent part of his existence, as his weak sense of self had left him unable from his earliest youth to cultivate any clear sense of his identity independent of the codes underpinning his social position as aristocratic knight.

Indeed, when later reflecting on his first encounters with the stranger, St. Leon represents his younger self as a hollow figure in need of new life. When the stranger tempted me with his “gifts,” writes St. Leon, it was as if “he breathed into me the restless

sentiment of ambition” (335). Although one can surely argue that the stranger merely stoked a fire that was always smoldering beneath the surface of St. Leon’s humble domesticity, the metaphor of animation is striking, for it speaks to the way in which the stranger grants an empty St. Leon new life, a new earthly existence founded on the possibilities of wealth and fame. The image of the stranger as giver of new life becomes increasingly complicated as St. Leon’s tragic story unfolds and his new-found identity is gradually subsumed within the narratives of the stranger’s history. St. Leon despairs that his tragic experiences increasingly seem to evoke those of the stranger. Indeed, the “dark” and “ambiguous” nature of his existence already mirrors the shroud of mystery which enveloped Zampieri. St. Leon ultimately comes to regard himself as a sort of “double” for the stranger, his own identity and sense of self completely subsumed within the stranger’s previous existence: “I understood continually more and more of the mysterious and unuttered history, of the stranger who died in the summer-house of the lake of Constance,” laments St. Leon. “I found that I was only acting over again what he had experienced before me” (335). Rather than allowing him to refine his sense of individual worth through public honour and social acclaim, the “gifts” of the stranger instead relegate him to a base communal existence of shared suffering.

The image of St. Leon as double to the stranger prefigures the more significant narrative of the *doppelgänger* which unfolds in the last chapters of St. Leon’s history. In the final pages of the text, St. Leon writes of his unlikely reunion with his long-estranged son, Charles, a reunion which reinvigorates him with a new mission in life. Released from yet another period of lengthy confinement at the hands of a cruel tormenter who

misunderstands his true nature and motives, St. Leon resolves to adopt a new self-effacing role as the “unknown benefactor” of his son (413): “I instantly resolved to devote myself to [Charles’s] service, and to place all my enjoyment in the contemplation of his happiness, and the secret consciousness of promoting it” (413). St. Leon sees his new resolution as completely selfless relative to his earlier fantasy of self-aggrandizement as the “saviour” of Hungary. “Here I pursued no delusive meteor of fame,” argues St. Leon. “The very essence of my project lay in its obscurity” (415). It is significant that for St. Leon such “obscurity” now seems to come quite easily, as if the taint of “mystery” enveloping him has erased any semblance of genuine identity. As he laments, “I considered my own existence as blasted; and I could therefore find nothing better than to forget myself in my son” (413).

Although St. Leon regards his self-effacement as an entirely selfless act—“I would forget and trample upon every personal concern, and be the victim and the sacrifice, if need were, of the happiness of my child” (413)—the language surrounding his declarations suggests a more complicated personal investment in his resolution to act as the “unknown benefactor” to his son. He seems to regard himself as an inevitable cipher in this resolution—vowing to “forget” his own identity in that of Charles, and constructing his own selfhood as the potential “sacrifice” to his son’s—but he cannot of course remain a vacuum: he must replace his “sacrificed” self with something else, and that something else quickly becomes the identity of his son. Tellingly, St. Leon decides to “lay aside the name of Chatillon,” and assume the new persona of Henry D’Aubigny, even before he is apprised of Charles’s animosity towards Chatillon, the “rich stranger of Buda” (413).

Such an act suggests a deliberate attempt at self-fashioning purely for the sake of creating a new identity. Moreover, even as he takes on the external persona of D'Aubigny, St. Leon is vowing to "forget [him]self *in* [his] son," a turn of phrase which suggests a larger process of immersing himself in the identity and subjectivity of Charles. Indeed, in the final chapters of his narrative, St. Leon becomes, in both a literal and a symbolic sense, Charles's double, his *doppelgänger*, a role which allows the embattled and world-weary alchemist to live vicariously through his son and which furnishes him with the opportunity for moral redemption.

The image of the *doppelgänger* immediately emerges in the text after St. Leon's reunion with Charles. After he is taken into the folds of his son's military encampment, St. Leon is given clothes "from the stock of [his] son," and the clothes, coupled with the uncanny similarity of their physical features, causes many in the camp to comment on the "striking resemblance" between Charles and the new arrival (414). As St. Leon himself tells the reader, "the coincidence of our features was so great, that, had we passed through a strange place in each other's company, I should infallibly have been regarded as his younger brother" (414). After "Henry D'Aubigny" represents himself as a young knight on a quest to rid Hungary of the Turks, Charles declares that a "powerful sympathy" unites them, in that they are both Frenchmen and "soldier[s] of fortune" (414). "Our fortunes [] have been in a considerable degree similar," observes Charles (416). The similarity of their situations, combined with the "fraternal resemblance" noticed by even the most "inattentive spectator" (416), produces a powerful bond of communion between the two. "We were in a manner inseparable," effuses St. Leon (416).

Although St. Leon is seen in the light of a younger “brother” to Charles, in reality, their relationship is more *paternal* than fraternal, Charles—the son—acting as the father-figure to the younger and more “vulnerable” D’Aubigny: Acting as his ““better genius”” and ““Mentor”” (416), Charles offers St. Leon both guidance and protection, “initiat[ing] [him] in the science of war” and “plac[ing] [him] immediately by his side” when facing potential danger (416). Such a paternal bond reverses the biological patterns of their relationship, so that Charles assumes the mantle of his father’s role while St. Leon adopts the identity of Charles. (One may recall that it was one of St. Leon’s earliest fantasies, immediately after acquiring the Philosopher’s Stone, to act as the “instructor of [Charles’s] youth, and his pattern in feats of war” (191).) In a passage of striking irony, Charles laments his existence as an isolated “exile,” completely oblivious to the fact that his experience and lament so strongly mirror the reality of his father’s fate: ““I am alone in the world. I have no father, no mother, and no brethren. I am an exile from my own country, and cut off for ever from those of my own lineage and blood,”” he cries to St. Leon (417).

If St. Leon is like the son in this relationship, he is also very much the father, as evidenced by the intertextual similarities between *St. Leon* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In particular, the chase sequence described at the end of St. Leon’s narrative prefigures the well-known pursuit of the Creature by Dr. Frankenstein in his daughter’s novel. In that classic gothic tale, published nineteen years after *St. Leon*, Frankenstein pursues his Creature across the arctic landscape, intent on destroying the “filthy daemon to whom [he] had given life” (103). As the “creator and source” of a “new species” (82), Frankenstein is the generative force responsible for the existence of

the Creature, and he thus assumes, in many critical readings of the novel, a parental (both maternal and paternal) role in relation to his monstrous “son.”

Moreover, in addition to acting as Frankenstein’s progeny, the Creature also functions as the Doctor’s *doppelgänger*, a motif that harks back to Godwin’s exploration of this theme in *St. Leon*. Like Frankenstein, who resolves to “trace the steps” of his elusive “son” and “double” by “follow[ing] the windings of the Rhone” (224-25), St. Leon hunts his son Charles, “pursu[ing] his steps” as his chase is similarly structured “along the course” of a major river, the Danube (440). Likewise, while Frankenstein “ever followed in [the Creature’s] track” (225), St. Leon is “continually in [the] track” of Charles, but is unable to “overtake” him (440). As the tormented (and tormenting) *doppelgänger* of Charles, St. Leon frantically pursues the son who functions as both a father to him and as his uncanny double. As the tortured, hunted wanderer, Charles again mirrors the position of his father, who has been hounded from state to state and who has never attained peace since his “exile” began.

““You haunt my steps,”” Charles accuses St. Leon when he is finally reunited with his hated rival at the end of the novel (445), and this statement aptly evokes the spectral nature of St. Leon’s position in his own text. The *doppelgänger* motif which unfolds in the final chapters of the text symbolizes St. Leon’s desire to “lose” himself—his own identity and subjective experience—in his son. “I cannot describe how my soul yearned towards this my only son,” he declares to the reader upon being reunited with Charles (412), and the rest of his history details the attempts of a father “eager to dive into [the] soul” of his son (438). Of course, St. Leon’s tragic history has made him all too aware of

the possibility of “forgetting” oneself in the identity, or “soul,” of another. In the final pages of his story, he laments that his experiences have forced him to become an “equivocal character, assuming different names, and wandering over the world with different pretences” (447). None of these names, however, or these pretences, yield St. Leon what he most craves—fame, honour, and both public and moral approbation. Indeed, his “equivocal” character has granted him nothing but dishonour, infamy, and persecution.

It is therefore ironic that the “equivocal” nature of his existence proves to be both his tragic flaw and his saving grace. St. Leon’s “equivocal” character is rooted in a childhood mis-education emphasizing the “public” at the expense of the private self, and his consequent need for public validation renders him particularly vulnerable to the seductive allure of the Philosopher’s Stone. However, in an ironic reversal, St. Leon’s weak sense of identity is perhaps precisely what allows him to “lose” himself in his son—to “dive into his soul” and achieve a sort of moral redemption by living vicariously through Charles’s honourable public image, his moral rectitude, and his domestic happiness.

Through Charles, St. Leon is thus able to construct a new “self”—a more honourable and noble self, one who succeeds where St. Leon has failed. It is thus quite fitting that the text ends with a salute to the “hero” of the tale—Charles, who in St. Leon’s estimation is “as near the climax of dignity and virtue as the frailty of our nature will admit” (449). While St. Leon seemingly consoles himself with the fact that he is the “hero’s father” (449), this consolation perhaps functions as nothing more than a red

herring: his symbolic communion with Charles has granted him both moral redemption and—more significantly—the chance to reinscribe himself back into his own history as the true “hero” of his tale.

Forming Her to His Mind: *Fleetwood's* Authorship of Consumption

In *Caleb Williams*, Caleb reflects on his authorial project as a form of masochism. After recounting a number of his initial misfortunes, the young man admits that consolation, through pain, was a primary object in choosing to record his history. "One of the motives which induced me to the penning of this narrative was to console myself in my insupportable distress," writes Caleb. "I derive a melancholy pleasure from dwelling upon the circumstances which imperceptibly paved the way to my ruin" (200).

Godwin revisits this trope in his 1805 novel, *Fleetwood: or, The New Man of Feeling*. There are a number of moments in that text when Casimir Fleetwood, the narrator and autobiographical subject of the narrative, constructs his authorship as a masochistic act. "The proper topic of the narrative I am writing is the record of my errors," he asserts at the opening of his memoir, and, "to write it, is the act of my penitence and humiliation" (59). Later, after narrating a particularly painful section detailing the sexual debaucheries of younger days spent at the Parisian court, he contrasts the catharsis often achieved by writing with the pain engendered by his own composition:

There are some kinds of writing in which the mind willingly engages, in which, while we hold the pen in our hand, we seem to unburden the sentiments of our soul, and our habitual feelings cause us to pour out on the paper a prompt and unstudied eloquence. Here, on the contrary, I have held myself to my task with difficulty, and often with my utmost effort I have scarcely written down a page a day on the ungrateful subject.

(115- 16)

Fleetwood's masochistic conception of his authorship is representative of the novel's larger discursive concern with pain and the image of the feeling body. Steven Bruhm, for example, in one of the few critical readings of the text, has explored the novel's anxious concern with the epistemological reliability of guilt that inscribes (or, in terms of the thematic development of the novel's plot, *fails* to inscribe) itself on the feeling body through torture. Indeed, a certain theme of sadism also pervades the text, in that Fleetwood's position as masochistic writer is also inextricably bound up with the sadistic tendencies of his authorship, his narration of his life story.

Most early reviews of Godwin's novel highlighted the rather vexing nature of a narrative in which the misanthropic narrator seems mired in self-absorbed introspection which does not, strictly speaking, further the development of the plot. As Sir Walter Scott complained in an 1805 review of the novel, it is only in the third volume that "something of a regular story commences," the preceding two volumes consisting of little more than "laboured extravagance of sentiment [. . .] attached to [] ordinary occurrences" (Graham 259). Although autobiography, by definition, is preoccupied with the narration of the self, Fleetwood's memoirs seem to display an almost pathological self-absorption. In his subtitle to the novel, Godwin calls Fleetwood the "New Man of Feeling," and sensibility, as we will see, is central to the narcissism that comes to inform his character. Rousseau may have regarded the solitude and isolation of country life as fundamental to the development of *Émile* as the ideal "natural" man, but Godwin seems to offer in this novel a cautionary tale depicting the dangers of excessive solitude in youth.

Indeed, social isolation is the foundation for Fleetwood's childhood "mis-education." Secluded from society, and denied the harmonizing benefits of interactions with peers, Fleetwood experiences a perversion of the sensibility that so strongly marks his character. In chapter one, we saw how Falkland's dangerous brand of inverted sensibility led to a moral degeneration in his character that destroyed his potential for benevolence. In *Fleetwood*, we encounter an even more dramatic pattern of inverted sensibility, as the protagonist's emotional sensitivity is perverted into a form of feeling at odds with the philanthropic vision of sensibility described by Godwin in the *Enquirer*. As we will see, Fleetwood's sensibility ultimately manifests itself in a particular kind of self-absorption that alienates him from society and turns him into a misanthrope.

In particular, this chapter charts how Fleetwood's earliest constructions of identity, and the masculine sense of self these constructions helped to consolidate, arose out of a destructive authorial impulse that ultimately channelled his larger misanthropic tendencies into a more focussed misogyny. Fleetwood's obsessive self-narration—his neurotic focus on the development and operation of his own mind and the process of his own identity construction—renders everything and everyone in his narrative subordinate to the demands of his own subjectivity. As we will soon see, a displacement occurs in Fleetwood's psychological development, whereby his youthful imaginative colonization of a feminized natural world initiates larger patterns of consumption and control in his adult relationships with women. Fleetwood's construction of himself as masochistic author, therefore, is ironically appropriate, for the metaphor is both the expression of the sadistic tendencies informing the text and a description of the means by which this sadism is enacted.

“Castles in the Air”

As the novel’s subtitle indicates, Fleetwood is the “New Man of Feeling,” an appellation that signals Godwin’s reliance on, as well as his significant departures from, popular eighteenth-century cultural and literary conventions of sensibility. In their introduction to the Broadview edition of the novel, Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley describe the text as a “new experiment in fiction” (9), and most critics of the novel, both contemporary and modern, have similarly emphasized the anomalous nature of the narrative, specifically its radical reformulation of the sentimental tradition. In 1805, the *Critical Review* claimed to be “at a loss to conceive why a man, who turns misanthrope from disappointment, who is most savage in jealousy without caring to ascertain the cause of it, can be called the *New Man of Feeling*, unless in absolute contradistinction to the old” (Graham 257). Similarly, Scott, in reviewing the novel for the *Edinburgh Review*, rejected Godwin’s positioning of his hero as a man of sentiment, asserting that “a man who is transported with rage, with despair, with anger, and all the furious impulses of passion, upon the most common occurrences of life, is not a man of sentiment, but a madman” (Graham 259). “Far from sympathizing with his feelings,” argues Scott, “we are only surprised at his having the liberty of indulging them beyond the precincts of Bedlam” (Graham 259).

For B.J. Tysdahl, the novel’s originality lies in this radical rejection of the conventional association between sensibility and philanthropy. As Tysdahl points out, the traditional eighteenth-century novel of sensibility assumed the benevolent nature of humanity and put forth a psychological model in which the cultivation of heightened

emotional response fosters increased moral virtue and philanthropic feeling in a suffering protagonist (100-06). Sensibility was thus constructed as a process which would make one a better person, but, as we see in *Fleetwood*, this theoretical yoking of emotional sensitivity with moral sentiment and behaviour is directly challenged. Indeed, in *Fleetwood* we encounter a man whose heightened emotional awareness renders him a self-proclaimed misanthropist ill-suited for both domestic and public life.

Godwin's depiction of Fleetwood's childhood is influenced by the Rousseauvian celebration of country life as the ideal space for the development of "natural" man. In *Émile*, Rousseau praises the salutary benefits of rural life by highlighting the degenerate effects of urban existence. Man's physical health, argues the philosopher, suffers from the unsanitary conditions of the city, and his moral and spiritual development are similarly threatened by the overcrowding and corruption inherent in this urban space:

Men are not made to be crowded together in ant-hills, but scattered over the earth to till it. The more they are massed together, the more corrupt they become. Disease and vice are the sure results of over-crowded cities. Of all creatures man is least fitted to live in herds. Huddled together like sheep, men would very soon die. Man's breath is fatal to his fellows. This is literally as well as figuratively true. (*Émile* 26)

"Men are devoured by our towns," Rousseau continues. "In a few generations the race dies out or becomes degenerate; it needs renewal, and it is always renewed from the country" (*Émile* 26).

While rural space functions as an antidote to the “foul air of [] crowded cities” (*Émile* 26), it is preferable that natural man should never need this antidote at all, that he should, from the outset, be raised and educated far from the corrupting influences of the city. In the country, the child can be isolated from the enslaving effects of social institutions, and can be taught complete independence and self-sufficiency. He will be “educated for himself alone,” asserts Rousseau (*Émile* 9), and will “live[] for himself” as a complete “unit,” a self-sustaining “whole” (*Émile* 7). Rousseau’s emphasis on the complete self-sufficiency of natural man implies a certain estrangement from society and peers. Of course, *Émile* is not completely isolated: he has a tutor who plays the dual roles of teacher and friend, and his education is structured around a series of encounters with other individuals, like the gardener (*Émile* 62-63) and the conjuror (*Émile* 135-38). In reality, however, *Émile*’s “friendship” with the tutor is not the experience of genuine social interaction with a true peer, but a scripted series of highly structured pedagogical exchanges, and his few encounters with other individuals are similarly controlled by the tutor. As Rousseau himself admits, the rough and simple nature of a village environment is ideal for the education of natural man, as the tutor “will have much more control over the things he wishes to show the child” (*Émile* 59). In Rousseau’s educational model, therefore, the student is socially isolated through geography as well as pedagogy: the geographic seclusion of country life allows the tutor to control his student’s interactions to the point that unmediated social exchange becomes all but impossible.

For Godwin, the lessons learned from early, regular, and unscripted social exchanges with peers are central to the development of morality and virtue. As he argued

in the *Enquirer*, virtue and benevolent behaviour are the direct results of a developed sensibility that allows one to sympathize with another's emotional responses and alleviate his or her suffering through "the practice of minute attentions" (*Enquirer* 334). It is thus imperative that children, from a young age, be exposed to a wide range of social interactions with their peers in order to stimulate the development of the feelings. "The social affections are the chief awakeners of man," he argues in the *Enquirer* (56-57), declaring a preference for public education over private on the basis that "there can be little true society, where the disparity of disposition is so great as between a boy and his preceptor" (*Enquirer* 58).

Children who are raised in isolation—or, alternatively, children who interact almost exclusively with a Rousseauvian tutor—are therefore denied opportunities to forge the peer relationships necessary for successful socialization. "There is no motive more powerful in its operations upon the human mind, than that which originates in sympathy," declares Godwin.

A child must labour under peculiar disadvantages, who is turned loose among a multitude of other children, and left to make his way as he can, with no one strongly to interest himself about his joys or his sorrows, and no one eminently concerned as to whether he makes any improvement or not. In this unanimating situation, alone in the midst of a crowd, there is great danger that he should become sullen and selfish. Knowing nothing of his species, but from the austerity of discipline or the shock of

contention, he must be expected to acquire a desperate sort of firmness and inflexibility. (*Enquirer* 56)

This description evokes the situation of Fleetwood, who enters Oxford a “sullen and selfish” youth after sixteen years of social and geographic isolation. As I argued in chapter one, Godwin was quite uneasy with certain aspects of Rousseau’s pedagogical model, and we find in *Fleetwood* an example of his resistance. For Rousseau, childhood isolation was fundamental to the development of natural man. In this novel, however, Godwin offers a story that foregrounds the central role early socialization plays in the development of the virtuous and benevolent subject. Raised in the rugged seclusion of North Wales, Fleetwood has no peers and few social connections, and he enters Oxford with no real experience of fellowship. His father is very loving, “tender and indulgent” (53), but ultimately unavailable to his son on any deep emotional level. Existing in a perpetual state of grief for Fleetwood’s dead mother, and “enamoured of solitude,” his father passes “whole days and nights in study and contemplation” (53). In this respect, he is like Audley Mandeville, the paternal figure in Godwin’s next novel, who also withdraws socially and emotionally after experiencing the death of the woman he loves.

Fleetwood takes after his father in being a “lover of the sublime and romantic features of nature” (53), and his immersion in these scenes cultivates an emotional energy, an intellectual and psychological “wildness” (53), that signals his heightened capacity for emotional response. Fleetwood’s sensibility is perverted, however, by the isolation of his childhood. As I argued in chapter one, Godwin firmly places sensibility within a social context. In Godwin’s terms, sensibility is best understood as an

interactive relationship between the feeling subject and society—an emotional response activated by exposure to another’s feelings, a response which then manifests itself in outward extensions of philanthropic behaviour (*Enquirer* 326-36). Sensibility, therefore, is only healthy for the subject (and beneficial for society) as long as it functions within this milieu of interpersonal exchange; sensibility without this element of social reciprocity devolves into a perverted form of feeling. With no companions save an emotionally absent father, a dog, and a tutor for whom he feels little affection and no respect, Fleetwood cannot engage in the reciprocity needed to properly shape his developing sensibility. The proper pattern of sensibility is therefore reversed: Fleetwood’s acute feeling is channeled inwards and feeds his “intellectual luxuries” (59).

In *Fleetwood*, sensibility renders the feeling subject negligent, rather than solicitous, of others, and turns him into a misanthrope with little potential for benevolence. In the opening pages of the novel, Fleetwood acknowledges that his self-absorption may lead the reader to deem him “insensible to the miseries of man” (59). On the contrary, argues Fleetwood, “nothing was squalid, loathsome, and disgusting in my eyes, where it was possible for me to be useful” (59). Indeed, he dwells in great length on his “beneficence and charities” (59). “I never shrank from the presence of calamity,” he declares. “From the liberal allowance with which my father supplied me, I relieved its wants” (59). He insists that “the generous sympathy which animated [his] charitable deeds was pure” (60). “In every act of benevolence,” argues Fleetwood, “it was the love of another, and not of myself, that prompted my deed” (60). “I experienced a

disinterested joy in human relief and human happiness, independently of the question whether I had been concerned in producing it," he writes (60).

These sentiments are undercut, however, through the very language in which Fleetwood disavows his self-interest. There is a "very subtle and complicated association in human feelings," he admits (60). The prospect of his own "gratification" may not initially motivate him to perform philanthropic acts, but the later recollection of those acts certainly gratifies his vanity: "When the season of retrospect arrived, I exulted in my own benevolence, from the divine consciousness that, while I had been most busily engaged in the task, my own gratification was forgotten" (60). Moreover, he recognizes that these later "exultations" shaped his future behaviour: "There is no doubt [] that the honourable character I exhibited on these occasions prompted me the more joyfully to seek their repetition. Humanity and self-complacency were distinct causes of my beneficence; but the latter was not less powerful than the former in nourishing it into a habit" (60). Although he refers to it as an "execrable doctrine," he nevertheless acknowledges the principle that "our best actions are only more subtle methods by which self-love seeks its gratification" (60).

This principle of self-love informs Fleetwood's dramatic rescue of William, the shepherd boy who almost drowns trying to save a lamb that had fallen off a mountain ridge into the river. While self-interest does not ostensibly influence Fleetwood's behaviour during the scene of the rescue, it takes centre stage immediately after. The peasants are "tumultuous in their expressions of gratitude," Fleetwood tells the reader (63), which motivates him to regard himself as their "patron and a preserver" (64).

Indeed, the happiness of the peasant family delights him not for its own sake, but for its effect on his vanity: “When I observed the degree of content which prevailed among them, when I witnessed the effusions of their honest esteem and affection, my heart whispered me, ‘This would not have existed but for me!’” (64). We see here Fleetwood’s self-absorbed preoccupation with his own self-image. His heightened emotional response may drive him to perform courageous or benevolent acts, but these acts are only valued for their ability to sustain Fleetwood’s narcissism.

In her examination of the novel, Mona Scheuermann considers the causal relationship between sensibility, misanthropy, and Fleetwood’s formative years. Like a number of other critics, Scheuermann contends that *Fleetwood* offers a portrait of a man irrevocably flawed by a childhood spent in excessive solitude, a childhood that “lacked a pattern of adequate social intercourse” (“Study of Mind” 19). As a result of this social deprivation, argues Scheuermann, Fleetwood is mired in a narcissistic self-absorption that renders him literally unable to make “a total human connection with anyone” (“Study of Mind” 20). Fleetwood’s misanthropy, however, stems not so much from an inability to make interpersonal connections with the social world around him; rather, it is the precise *nature* of the connections that he must, inevitably, forge with his social environment that produces such conflict and dissatisfaction with humanity. More precisely, it is Fleetwood’s initial response to a physically absent, yet all too real, social world, coupled with his imaginative consumption of a natural environment all too present in its overpowering sublimity, that formulates his primal connection with society and humanity.

In the first chapter of the novel, Fleetwood meditates in great detail on the natural beauty and sublime scenery of the childhood home he shares with his aged father in Merionethshire, North Wales. This extended description significantly associates the sublimity of Merionethshire with creative freedom and increased sensibility. As Fleetwood recalls,

I had few companions. The very situation which gave us a full enjoyment of the beauties of nature, inevitably narrowed both the extent and variety of our intercourse with our own species. My earliest years were spent among mountains and precipices, amidst the roaring of the ocean and the dashing of waterfalls. A constant familiarity with these objects gave a wildness to my ideas, and an uncommon seriousness to my temper. (53)

The rugged beauty of North Wales cultivates a similar mental “wildness” in young Fleetwood, as well as a keen awareness of the imaginative inspiration offered by the “grand and savage objects around [him]” (55). Fleetwood’s sensitivity to the world of nature evokes the poetic philosophy of William Wordsworth, and a number of critics have pointed to Wordsworth’s influence on the man who was once a great influence on Wordsworth.

For Gary Kelly, *Fleetwood’s* Wordsworthian undertones situate the novel within the larger framework of Romantic ideology, and demonstrate Godwin’s “transition to Romanticism” from his earlier jacobinism (*English Jacobin Novel* 240). Tysdahl goes even further in foregrounding the extent of the poet’s influence on the text, arguing that the first chapters of *Fleetwood* read like a “prose imitation of Wordsworth” (117).

Indeed, like Fleetwood, the Wordsworthian Poet is a “New Man of Feeling”: “All good poetry,” argued Wordsworth in his 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, “is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” and good poetry—“to which any value can be attached”—can only be produced by a man “possessed of more than usual organic sensibility” (358). Good poetry, for Wordsworth, is thus the product of a unique sensibility coupled with the process of reflection—the Poet must have “thought long and deeply” about his emotional responses (358). “Our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts,” argues Wordsworth, “which are indeed the representation of all our past feelings” (358).

With his acute emotional sensitivity and unique capacity for feeling, Fleetwood is very much this Wordsworthian Man of Feeling. Like Wordsworth’s Poet, Fleetwood’s imagination is both inspired by, and structured around, his interactions with the natural world, a paradigm that situates the novel within a discursive framework associating Romanticism with nature. As Anne K. Mellor has argued, however, the representation of nature in what she calls “canonical” Romantic texts (those major poetic works by the “Big Six”—William Blake, Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats) “masks a sexual politics” that is both misogynist and self-serving:

Nature is usually gendered feminine by these six Romantic poets who adopt the traditional cultural metaphors of Mother Earth, Dame Nature, Lady Bountiful. But by identifying nature as the external objective world which the self-conscious subject must penetrate, possess and interpret

[. . .] these poets often go further than previous poets in denying to Nature her own authority. (21)

By feminizing nature, canonical Romanticism thus constructs a model of subjectivity organized around the binary opposition of I and Other, where the male subject can only assert his power at the expense of a female Other so often troped as Nature. This paradigm, argues Mellor, forms the basis of an ideological discourse she calls “masculine Romanticism.” As we shall see later, Fleetwood, as a Wordsworthian Man of Feeling, is implicated in a discourse of “masculine Romanticism” that strives to control, possess, and appropriate feminine nature.

Although Fleetwood will eventually construct himself as the master of his natural surroundings, his appreciation of the Welsh scenery around his childhood home is initially troubled by the psychological anxieties that aesthetic theory associates with the sublime. As Edmund Burke theorized in his 1757 treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, one’s experience of the sublime is, by necessity, bound up with the sensations of “pain” and “danger” and “operates in a manner analogous to terror” (58): “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (58). Furthermore, this “terror” is a direct result of the fear that is engendered when one encounters the unfamiliar and the unknown, the “obscure”: “To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any

danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes” (*Philosophical Enquiry* 99). Implicit in Burke’s theorization of the sublime is the potential threat to the self aroused when one encounters such terror-inspiring sublimity. Such scenes “excite the ideas of pain and danger,” and we consequently fear for our safety in the midst of such natural spaces.

For Burke, this threat of self-annihilation is defused by the subject’s eventual appreciation of the sublime as the ultimate manifestation of divine power. For Immanuel Kant, the fear of the sublime is also defused, but not through recognizing the existence of the deity responsible for such scenes, as in the Burkean sublime. Rather, Kant places the sublime in a subordinate position to the perceiving subject, who possesses the power to intellectually transcend the sublime scenes of nature. For Kant, the power of the sublime is ultimately located in the “forces of the soul”:

Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track [. . .] and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature. (91)

The “immeasurableness of nature” may throw into relief “our own limitation” in comparison, but, through the intellectual act of reflecting on nature in all its sublimity, we discover “in our rational faculty” the potential greatness of our own minds, a greatness that gives us a “pre-eminence over nature even in its immeasurability” (Kant 91-92). Nature is thus subordinate to the powers of the rational mind: “In this way,” argues Kant, “external nature is not aesthetically judged as sublime in so far as it arouses fear, but rather because it summons our power [. . .] to regard its might [. . .] as exercising over us and our personality no such rude dominion that we should bow down before it” (92).

Nature is therefore deemed sublime “merely because it elevates the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can come to feel the sublimity of its own vocation even over nature” (Kant 92). In Kant’s formulation of the sublime, the subject is thus transcendent over the natural world. The sublime scenes of nature function only to throw into relief the greater sublimity of the human mind, a sublimity which is reflected in the intellectual processes of the rational man who engages in thoughtful consideration of the scenes around him. As we shall see, the Kantian sublime—with its emphasis on the subject’s intellectual mastery of the external world—forms the basis of Fleetwood’s specific engagements with nature.

Empowered by the sublimity of his childhood scenes, as well as anxiously aware of the overpowering grandeur of such scenes that threatens to extinguish the viewer’s sense of existential significance, Fleetwood strives to exert a dominance over the scenery surrounding his North Wales home. He seeks to absorb such scenery in its entirety and endeavours to see even beyond its scope—in short, he tries to overcome the terror brought

on by the Burkean notion of the obscure sublime: “There was no neighbouring summit that I did not ascend, anxious to see what mountains, valleys, rivers, and cities were placed beyond,” Fleetwood declares (54). Fleetwood differs from his aged father, who is also a “lover of nature” (54), but one who passively witnesses it from a respectful distance and within established boundaries: his father, Fleetwood tells the reader, typically “mounted his horse for a tranquil excursion, and kept along the road which was sedulously formed for the use of travellers” (54-55). In contrast, Fleetwood engages with the natural world much more actively. In fact, Fleetwood’s encounters with nature take on the tone of aggressive colonization evocative of male sexual violence enacted on a passive and virginal female environment: he “descended the most frightful declivities, and often penetrated into recesses which had perhaps never before felt the presence of a human creature” (55).

Fleetwood’s developing sense of manhood is staged against, and simultaneously cultivated by, the background of nature, but he juxtaposes his aggressive exploits with his passive appreciation of his sublime surroundings: “Every thing, however, was not exertion in the rambles I describe. I loitered by the side of the river, and drank in at leisure the beauties that surrounded me” (55). Fleetwood constructs his pleasure in passive terms—he “loitered” and enjoyed nature “at leisure”—but such passivity is undercut by the consumptive metaphor he employs—he “drank in [. . .] the beauties that surrounded” him. Again, Fleetwood’s language of consumption evokes the Wordsworthian Man of Feeling, who also experiences nature as something to be consumed, an object to be incorporated within his own subjectivity. Indeed,

Wordsworth's "spots of time" are envisioned in the *Five-Book Prelude* of 1804 as moments which provide "nourishment" for the Poet's later imaginative acts:

There are in our existence spots of time
 Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
 A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
 By trivial occupations and the round
 Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
 (Especially the imaginative power)
 Are nourished and invisibly repaired. (5. 280-86)

Likewise, in the later *Thirteen-Book Prelude* of 1806-07, Wordsworth continues this construction of the Poet as a man "feeding" on the "outward face" of nature:

A meditation rose in me that night
 Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
 Had pass'd away, and it appear'd to me
 The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
 Of one that feeds upon infinity. (13.66-70)

Mellor has pointed out that Wordsworth, in his role as a "masculine" Romanticist, ultimately "replaces (feminine) nature with the productions of the (masculine) imagination" (20). The "mighty Mind" of the Man of Feeling, in other words, "feeds" upon the sublime offerings of Nature to the point that they are incorporated within the

very subjectivity of the Poet. The “domination” of a female nature, a domination manifested in the “awful and sublime,” is thus defused and appropriated by the “mighty Mind” of the masculine subject who recasts nature’s sublimity as only the “Counterpart” of the “glorious faculty” of his own “higher mind[.]” (*Prelude* [1806-07] 13.76-90).

Fleetwood develops his own consumptive metaphors, describing how his complete consumption of nature’s external scenes allowed him to internalize such scenes to the point that he becomes insensible to them:

I acquired a habit of being absent in mind from the scene which was before my senses. I devoured at first with greedy appetite the objects which presented themselves; but by perseverance they faded on my eye and my ear, and I sunk into a sweet insensibility to the impressions of external nature. The state thus produced was sometimes that which we perhaps most exactly understand by the term reverie, when the mind has neither action nor distinct ideas, but is swallowed up in a living death, which, at the same time that it is indolent and inert, is not destitute of a certain voluptuousness. (56)

While Fleetwood is initially quite stimulated by the natural scenes around him, “devour[ing]” them with a “greedy appetite,” his hunger is eventually satiated, and he becomes “insensible” to an “external nature” which has been drained of its usefulness. Fleetwood uses the oxymoron “living death” to describe the paradox of his psychological position: his sensual awareness of the external scenes of nature is dead, his mind having

consumed all that it needs of this outward stimuli to sustain its “reverie,” but this “reverie” is very much alive in its “certain voluptuousness.”

“At other seasons,” Fleetwood tells the reader, the “certain voluptuousness” of this “reverie” gives way to something “more busy” and “definite” (56), that is, a propensity for narrative, an inclination towards the creative act that results in a visionary authorship of his own fate and identity. “I was engaged in imaginary scenes, constructed visionary plans, and found all nature subservient to my command. I had a wife or children, was the occupier of palaces, or the ruler of nations” (56). (Note, also, how the domestic and quotidian in Fleetwood’s “imaginary scenes”—the “wife or children” he obtains—fall easily into the same imaginative space as larger and more recognizably despotic forms of worldly power. These youthful fantasies foreshadow the gravity of Fleetwood’s later domestic tyranny.) This imaginative narration, this construction of “visionary plans,” gives Fleetwood an inflated sense of his own importance in the world. More significantly, however, Fleetwood comes away from these reveries with an illusory perception of authorial control over the narrative course of his life.¹

One might argue that this sense of authorial control existed for Fleetwood solely within the mind of the imagination and did not therefore influence the way in which he engaged with the reality of his actual life. After all, he characterizes his youthful imaginative indulgence as nothing more than the “idle and frivolous task of constructing castles in the air” (56). The more reflective Fleetwood, however, describes this task as one which was “frequently indulged” and which planted the seeds of his later misanthropy. “The tendency,” he argues,

of this species of dreaming, when frequently indulged, is to inspire a certain propensity to despotism, and to render him who admits it impatient of opposition, and prepared to feel every cross accident, as a usurpation upon his rights, and a blot upon his greatness. This effect of my early habits I fully experienced, and it determined the colour of my riper years.

(56)

As Fleetwood describes it, “this species of dreaming” involves engaging with the natural world in all of its sublime grandeur and systematically consuming, “drinking in” or “devouring,” the external scenes of nature so as to contain the sublime and render it, in Burkean terms, less “obscure.” This consumption of nature manifests itself in a conscious withdrawal from the “scene which was before [his] senses” (56), a process whereby the scenes of nature are not only interiorized by Fleetwood, but also become dispensable and unnecessary to his “reverie.” In this sense, the oxymoron “living death”—which Fleetwood employs to describe the paradox of his mind while contemplating nature—applies just as well to the natural scenes which bring about this conflicting state in young Fleetwood. As Fleetwood asserts, nature is always there, alive, “before [his] senses” (56); indeed, it is only “by perseverance” that he can will it to “fade” on his “eye” and “ear” (56). But his insensibility to those natural scenes around him renders them dead to him, and this metaphorical “death” of nature is, significantly, necessary for Fleetwood’s imaginative “reverie.”

Fleetwood does not explicitly associate this indulgence in “reverie” with the narrative myth-making—the construction of “castles in the air”—that occurs “at other

seasons.” However, the close association of both psychological processes suggests an interdependent relationship between the consumption of natural space and Fleetwood’s subsequent narrative indulgence. For the adult Fleetwood, such narrative indulgence cultivated “a propensity to despotism” in his young self that left him unable to weather the inevitable conflicts and disappointments that inform social and domestic life. However, we can see how this “propensity” first takes its root in a consumptive relationship with the natural world which *then* manifests itself in Fleetwood’s despotically constructed “castles in the air.”

In Fleetwood’s perception, his colonization of nature is complete: contained through psychological internalization, the potentially unruly elements of the natural sublime (unruly, as Burke would argue, in their “obscurity” or unknowability) are brought under Fleetwood’s controlling hand, which then writes its own narratives on the sensory impressions provided him. In his narrative visions, Fleetwood had gloried in the fact that he “found all nature subservient to [his] command” (56), and this sense of subservience ultimately also applies to Fleetwood’s conception of the very real world of nature around him. Indeed, it is precisely his sense of nature’s submissive “voice” that contributes to his appreciation of its worth. Within nature, he declares, “life is every where,” and the “solitary wanderer” experiences the breath of the cattle and the speech of the clouds, winds, and streams (54). But that “speech,” however, is “dumb,” the “eloquence” of nature “unobtrusive,” and the “gentle” and “kindly violence” of the natural world can only subdue the willing (54).

It is thus significant that Fleetwood places “cities” at the very end of the list of entities he visually absorbs when scaling a “neighbouring summit” (54), for it speaks to the distinct contrast between his conception of nature and his emotional response to urban space, society, and social life:

I gazed upon the populous haunts of men as objects that pleasingly diversified my landscape; but without the desire to behold them in nearer view. I had a presentiment that the crowded streets and the noisy mart contained larger materials for constituting my pain than pleasure. The jarring sensations of men, their loud contentions, their gross pursuits, their crafty delusions, their boisterous mirth, were objects which, even in idea, my mind shrunk from with horror. (54)

Burke had theorized that “absolute and entire *solitude*, that is, the total and perpetual exclusion from all society, is as great a positive pain as can almost be conceived” (*Philosophical Enquiry* 68), but Fleetwood reverses this contention and equates pain with the world of sociality. He shrinks from any direct experience with social space, experience that would require him to engage with the carnivalesque nature of human interaction—its unpredictability, mutability, and deception. Where the natural world is “subservient to [his] command,” the social world, as Fleetwood seems all too aware, will not extend the same favour. Instead, the city, which comes to symbolize the society and sociality from which Fleetwood is gratefully excluded at this point in his life, is the site of overwhelming sensory impressions and stimuli that refuse to be contained or internalized into submission.

Given this anxious response to social space, we can see how Fleetwood's misanthropy thus stems from an early realization that he will not be able to exert the same autonomous control over the social world of human interaction as he ostensibly does over the natural environment he deems so passively receptive to his desires. Through nature, Fleetwood is able to shape his own subjectivity and indulge in an inflated sense of his worth and importance as a human being. Nature provides him with the raw materials to consolidate a sense of his own masculine identity in a context of almost complete isolation from his peers. Society—the “populous haunts of men” which horrify Fleetwood with their noise, deception, and insistent desires contrary to his own—threatens both his inflated ego and ultimately his very sense of self.

Indeed, his apostrophe against the city is immediately followed by a simile that emphasizes Fleetwood's frailty in the face of conflict: “I was a spoiled child. I had been little used to contradiction, and felt like a tender flower of the garden, which the blast of the east wind nips, and impresses with the tokens of a sure decay” (54). Significantly, urban space, contemplated from afar, affords Fleetwood a mild pleasure, perhaps because the imaginative vision of the “noisy mart” throws into relief his perceived control of his natural surroundings. The juxtaposition of urban life with nature is significant, for it foreshadows the impending moment when Fleetwood will be compelled to enter into social space. Upon entering Oxford, Fleetwood is, at sixteen years of age, forced to engage with a social world that is not, like nature, “subservient to [his] command.” Fleetwood must confront a world that exists outside of his autonomous control, a world informed by a capricious unpredictability. He initially seems lost in a world that refuses

to offer itself up for easy consumption and narrative inscription. However, as we will soon see, Fleetwood's response to sociality is not to submit to the realities of this social world but, rather, to impose similar strategies of narrative control on the interpersonal connections he must inevitably forge.

“The Theatre of Life”

From the outset, Fleetwood's entrance into social space at Oxford signals his loss of agency. Although he “felt no strong propensity” to university, he “submitted to it” as a thing against which “it would be useless to object” (65). As Fleetwood rightly realizes, university life represents the impending encroachment of outside social forces on the relatively self-contained and self-directed nature of his childhood world. In North Wales, he had “lived in an ideal world of [his] own creation;” but this world had only been achieved by actively cultivating an identity as “solitary savage” and “shunning” a social world perceived as incapable of affording any kind of imaginative satisfaction (70). Indeed, Fleetwood employs a familiar Romantic analogy to describe the psychological tenor of a mind solely in tune with the forces of nature: “The strings of my mind, so to express it, were tuned to too delicate and sensitive a pitch: it was an Eolian harp, upon which the winds of heaven might ‘discourse excellent music’; but the touch of a human hand could draw from it nothing but discord and dissonance” (70).

As we have witnessed, however, this salubrious union of mind and nature was in reality more evocative of a colonizing relationship in which the young Fleetwood consumes the sublime scenes around him as the raw materials upon which he can narratively inscribe his own desires. Accordingly, once he is ensconced within university

life at Oxford, it is precisely these sublime images of a youthfully fertile and feminized nature he misses most—the “grand, the romantic, the pregnant, the surprising, and the stupendous, as they display themselves in North Wales” (70). In contrast, the natural scenery of Oxfordshire, personified by Fleetwood as an image of feminine senility—a “toothless and palsied beldame” (70)—inspires only contempt in young Fleetwood for its failure to offer up similar imaginative possibilities for shaping his inner visions of identity. Furthermore, Fleetwood’s ego suffers from the intrusion of autonomous beings into his carefully manipulated and protected world: the “gownmen”—with their erratic elbows, speech, and laughter—threaten both the tranquillity and the very stability of Fleetwood’s mind (71). “The cherished visions of my former years were broken and scattered in a thousand fragments,” laments Fleetwood in an image that conveys a keen sense of shattered subjectivity (71).

Faced with the destruction of an identity built upon “cherished visions” that were now, in the face of society and its intrusions, “scattered in a thousand fragments,” Fleetwood “surrenders” to the social discourse and codes of the “gownmen” (71). He characterizes his response in passive terms, but his strategy of “surrender” functions as an active process of clinical and conscious observation. Like a scientist or anthropologist surveying the behaviour of creatures unknown to him, Fleetwood adopts a pose of studious contemplation towards the behaviour of his university peers:

I was prompted to observe these animals, so different from any that had been before presented to my view, to study their motives, their propensities, and their tempers, the passions of their souls, and the

occupations of their intellect. To do this effectually, it was necessary that I should become familiar with many, and intimate with a few. I entered myself an associate of their midnight orgies, and selected one young person for a friend, who kindly undertook my introduction into the world.

(72)

Note how Fleetwood dehumanizes his fellow students as “animals,” constructing them as subservient objects “presented to [his] view” and offered up for his scientific observation and ultimate consumption. Ironically, Fleetwood soon finds upon extensive observation that his “new associates were of the same species as [himself]” (72), a realization that significantly underscores his lack of awareness, at least initially, regarding the interdependent nature of observation and emulation. He confesses surprise at “how soon [he] became like to the persons [he] had so lately wondered at and despised” (72), but his subsequent remarks reveal the way in which he has consciously entered into, internalized, and then *performed* the behavioural codes structuring social interaction at Oxford. “I hid the qualms and apprehensiveness of my nature under a ‘swashing and a martial outside”” (73).

In his youth, Fleetwood had defused the threatening potential of the natural scenery around him through a process of internalization and ultimate consumption. At Oxford, he structures his social interactions around a similar consumptive model: through clinical observation and then through a performative emulation, he internalizes the behavioural codes of his social peers. Fleetwood is thus able to defuse his social anxiety—the “qualms and apprehensiveness” engendered through social interaction—by

consciously absorbing those around him and putting into service the performative narratives structuring his social interactions with others. It is especially significant that Fleetwood describes the nature of his social performativity at Oxford through a reference to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, for the "swashing and a martial outside" with which Fleetwood cloaks himself speaks to the way in which such performativity offers up rich opportunities for the narrative self-fashioning of identity. Fleetwood's youthful consumption of nature proved fertile ground for the visionary myth-making that would both consolidate his identity and plant the seeds of his future misanthropy. Likewise, his consumptive approach to social life—where the performative narratives underpinning social intercourse are available for conscious manipulation—allows him to author his own vision of identity—to piece together the "thousand fragments" of an ego shattered by the intrusion of social forces beyond his control.

Fleetwood's education in these matters continues once he leaves Oxford and embarks on his first "real world" experiences while on the Parisian leg of his Grand Tour. His observations on the Paris court are underpinned by a series of theatrical metaphors that emphasize the inherent performance of identity in a community predicated on inconstancy and the mutability of desire. Upon arriving in Paris, Fleetwood connects with an old acquaintance from Oxford, Sir Charles Gleed, who is remembered by Fleetwood as both a social and intellectual failure. Noting that Sir Charles Gleed "was received upon a very different footing at Paris, from what he had been at Oxford" (95), Fleetwood asserts that the very artifice of polite society seems to provide both the opportunity and the means by which a dullard like Gleed assumes an "artificial character"

and “plays his part upon the theatre of life” (95). In Paris, Gleed “performed the part of an *elegant*” (95), and his performance of this role in the “theatre” of the Parisian court admits of no discrepancy between the assumed role of *elegant* and his prior, more “authentic,” position as failed wit. Indeed, as Fleetwood tells his readers, Gleed was “generally admitted as a man of breeding, amusement, and fashion. No one laughed at, and almost every one courted him” (95).

Fleetwood’s commentary on Gleed’s improved social fortunes attests to his growing perception of how public identity and internal subjectivity are contingent on a proper manipulation of one’s social world. Gleed is so successful in his role of *elegant*, plays that part so well—“to the great satisfaction of the spectators” (95)—precisely because the successful performance of that role has invested him with the inner confidence necessary for the performance. Social life in Paris provides one with various narratives—perhaps “scripts,” if one wants to pursue the theatrical metaphor—that must be first recognized and then mastered; properly mastered, these narratives will then allow one to craft a public persona specific to one’s desires and needs, a persona that will consequently impose an order and structure on the incoherence of internal experience.

Parisian society thus lends itself particularly well to the sort of authorial mapping of the external world that Fleetwood has come to rely on since his introduction to social life at Oxford. In Paris, Fleetwood encounters a society structured around the conventional roles associated with the debauchery of court life, and his time in the capital thus provides him with rich opportunities for the precise sort of self-fashioning that had informed his imaginative life since childhood. Moreover, the very codified nature of

these social narratives—their explicit expression in easily recognizable stereotypes—provides Fleetwood with the illusion of easy mastery over a mutable and unpredictable social environment. He thus determines, almost casually, to adopt the licentious and fashionable role of “*un homme à bonnes fortunes*” (100). Fleetwood significantly connects his inclination towards this sort of social performance with his earlier Oxford tendencies to “model” himself in accordance with the external pressures of peer approval: “driven from a sort of necessity to live upon the applauses of others” (99) and adopt an “artificial personage, formed after a wretched and contemptible model” (73), he “carried” the “habit” from Oxford into Parisian life.

Fleetwood’s Parisian performance seems to differ from his earlier Oxford one, however, in the sense of personal empowerment it seems to engender. Unlike the latter performance, which stemmed from apprehension and fear of “ridicule” (73), and was the result of “necessity” rather than choice, Fleetwood’s adoption of the *un homme à bonnes fortunes* role is informed by an agency that speaks to a greater sense of confidence in how one may master the social world around him: “I soon made my choice, and determined that I also would be *un homme à bonnes fortunes*” (100). Indeed, Fleetwood’s meditation on the improved social fortunes of Sir Charles Gleed attests to the potentially generative way in which even a dullard like Gleed, within a Parisian context, can successfully negotiate narratives of identity.

In choosing to become *un homme à bonnes fortunes*—and in consciously structuring his social intercourse through the conventions of this subject position—Fleetwood thus participates in one of numerous narratives on offer for

consumption. For Fleetwood, this narrative seems to carry within it the promise of ultimate authorial control over his social experience; it will return him to that prelapsarian “world of [his] own creation” (29) where he found “all nature subservient to [his] command” (19). The imaginative consumption of Fleetwood’s youth had been blighted by a university experience that initiated him into the realities of an external world beyond the reach of his imaginative desire. In Paris, however, we see Fleetwood attempting to tame his social environment in much the same way as he had consumed the natural scenery of his boyhood home. Through the conscious performance of identity, and the necessary manipulations of social experience that such performance requires, Fleetwood enjoys the illusion of authorial control over his life. Such control is always an illusion, however, and underestimates the autonomous nature of personal relationships that resist our attempts to shape them according to our narrative expectations or desires. Nevertheless, for Fleetwood, the possibility of asserting the same sort of authorial agency over his adult existence as he had over the “cherished visions” of his youth proves too tempting to resist. He subsequently embarks on a performance of identity that requires him to overpower the autonomy of the characters who people his chosen narratives.

We see this most compellingly in Fleetwood’s relationships with the two women he encounters during his pursuit of the *un homme à bonnes fortunes* role. Elton Edward Smith and Esther Greenwell Smith have commented on the narrative “oddity” of these two affairs, in that they are recounted by Fleetwood “without employing a single word of dialogue” (102). As we will see, however, this omission is symptomatic of Fleetwood’s larger effacement of the voice and autonomy of his female love object. Significantly,

Fleetwood's chosen persona is fundamentally structured around the staging of desire between the sexes, and such a choice strikingly underscores the specifically misogynistic tenor of Fleetwood's misanthropic consumption of those around him.² Handwerk and Markley have rightly recognized that "it is particularly toward women that Fleetwood directs the venom that he feels for human frailties" (Introduction to *Fleetwood* 27).³

We can, moreover, read these "human frailties" in more precise terms—as women's refusal of passive inscription within Fleetwood's narrative self-fashioning. The clearest example of this occurs with Fleetwood's first Parisian mistress, the Marchioness, a beautiful yet cruelly manipulative woman, who was, as Fleetwood terms her, a "finished coquette" (100). Fleetwood begins his description of the Marchioness by highlighting her capricious control over her seemingly endless succession of lovers. While such a characterization of his chosen love object suggests an independence of character not easily tamed, Fleetwood initially portrays their relationship in terms strongly suggestive of his ultimate control over her body and mind.

In colonizing the natural landscape of his youth—in "descend[ing] the most frightful declivities, and often penetrat[ing] into recesses which had perhaps never before felt the presence of a human creature" (55)—Fleetwood had couched his "conquest" of nature in decidedly sexualized language. In the description he gives of his first sexual encounter with the Marchioness, he similarly yokes the bucolic scenes of nature to images of sexual possession. "I might delineate," writes Fleetwood, "the ravishing sweetness of the weather on the day which first gave me possession of her person, the delightful excursion we made on the water, the elegantly furnished cottage that received us" (101).

Fleetwood cuts his narrative delineation of this scene short on the grounds of modesty: he “write[s] no book that shall tend to nourish the pruriency of the debauched, or that shall excite one painful emotion, one instant of debate, in the bosom of the virtuous and the chaste” (102). Despite its brevity, however, the scene nevertheless displays Fleetwood’s authorial scripting of a narrative that relies upon the pliant submission of the woman who offers up “possession of her person” on both a sexual and literary level.

The defining characteristic of the Marchioness, however, is the “customary wildness” of her inconstant behaviour and affection (103). As such, the submissive posture she occasionally assumes (if one credits Fleetwood’s scripting of such scenes) only serves to foreground her adept manipulation of the ritualized narratives underpinning desire and seduction within the Parisian court. Indeed, the Marchioness asserts an unpredictable autonomy even as she seemingly fulfills Fleetwood’s desires: as Fleetwood laments, she “tormented me with her flights and uncertainty, both before and after the completing my wishes. In the first of these periods I thought myself ten times at the summit of my desires, when again I was, in the most unexpected manner, baffled and thrown back by her caprices and frolics” (102). Paradoxically, the emotional turbulence engendered by the Marchioness’s inconstancy only serves to bind him more strongly to her in an almost manic attempt to possess her in body and mind. It is, in particular, a psychological colonization of the Marchioness which he seems to desire most, for he laments that her mind, which “greatly resembled in its constitution the sleek and slippery form of the eel” (102), continually evades his attempts to contain it. “It was never at rest, and, when I thought I possessed it most securely, it escaped me with the rapidity of

lightning. No strength could detain it; no stratagem could hold it; no sobriety and seriousness of expostulation could fix it to any consistency of system" (102-03).

Fleetwood's first romantic entanglement is thus structured around his failure to consume a love object that insistently eludes his control. Moreover, it is precisely the futility of this pursuit that feeds Fleetwood's obsessive quest to possess the Marchioness.

As he admits,

one thing that contributed, perhaps more than all the rest, to make this woman of so much importance to me, was the perpetual occupation she afforded to my thoughts. Abroad or at home, in company or alone, she for ever engaged my attention, and kept my soul in a tumult, sometimes, though rarely, of pleasure, frequently of apprehension, alarm, jealousy, displeasure, and condemnation. (105).

Significantly, the Marchioness's value for Fleetwood lies primarily in the stimulus she provides for his intellectual processes—she is "food" for the mind, so to speak. In this sense, his emotional connection with the Marchioness echoes his childhood relationship with nature in that excessive emotional response is productive of an intellectual fertility predicated on the consumptive internalization of that which inspires his sensibility. But, where nature had lain "subservient" to his intellectual demands, the Marchioness, as the "sleek and glossy coated eel" (110), denies Fleetwood a sense of physical ownership over her body (as evident in her infidelity) and, perhaps more frustratingly for Fleetwood, knowledge and control over the psychological workings of her mind. Quite simply, the Marchioness is better at the game of performance than Fleetwood, subtly manipulating

him through a continuous series of affected and stylized exchanges that underscore the utter failure of Fleetwood's desperate attempts to colonize her mind and shape her desires and behaviour.

From the Marchioness, Fleetwood moves easily into another adulterous relationship that logically seeks to address the failures of the first. Responding to heartache as "people of fashion in Paris were accustomed to do" (110), he substitutes one mistress for another. "Led by a sentiment to which [he] was unconscious" (110), he selects the Countess de B—, a choice solely made on his perception of her emotional transparency. In contrast to the Marchioness, the Countess

appeared to be wholly destitute of art [. . .] Her heart shone in her visage [. . .] Hers was 'the sleepy eye, that spoke the melting soul.' Her cheek was full, her skin transparent; the least thought of pleasure or of passion suffused her countenance with a blush. The Countess had no atom of the restlessness of her rival; a sort of voluptuous indolence continually attended her. (110)

The cold sterility of the Marchioness's stylized affections gives way, in this second mistress, to an overabundance of feeling and emotion that satiates Fleetwood's sensual and intellectual hunger. In the Countess, there is much for Fleetwood to feast on: the very language with which he describes her—the fullness of her cheek, the suffusion of her face with the blush of overflowing emotion, the lazy state of her body and mind—speaks to an overwhelming sense of voluptuous sensibility that operates without any active restraint on her part. Indeed, the tenor of the Countess's mind is completely given over to the forces

of emotion, and such languid sensibility is divorced from the more “masculine” intellectual capacities. In Fleetwood’s eyes, “she appeared born only to feel; to reflect, to consider, to anticipate, to receive and concoct the elements of instruction, were offices in which she seemed incapable to exist” (110). She “resign[ed] herself wholly to her feelings” (110), and her intellect, perhaps consequently, “was of narrow dimensions” (111).

The Countess thus embodies the stereotypical vision of feminine sensibility in the extreme, and Fleetwood recognizes that

according to the ideas many men entertain of the fair sex, it was

impossible for any one, in the particulars above described, to be more exactly qualified for a mistress or a wife, than this fascinating woman.

There was no danger that she should become the rival of her lover in any man-like pursuits, or that with troublesome curiosity she should intrude herself into his occupations of learning, of gain, or of ambition. (112)

Fleetwood is careful to distance himself from such misogynistic preferences (“many men” entertain such notions of women, but not necessarily he). However, it is clear that he is explicitly drawn to the Countess’s emotional availability and implicitly applauds the intellectual “indolence” that fosters her transparency of feeling and open demonstrations of affection and loyalty. As he asserts, “it was impossible for a tenderer mistress to exist; she gave herself up to her lover, and treated him as if he were father, mother, fortune, reputation, and life to her, in one. She placed no restraint on herself” (110-11).

The Marchioness had seemingly promised Fleetwood “possession of her person,” only to ultimately deny him such possession on sexual and psychological levels. The Countess, however, unlike her predecessor, offers up legitimate access to her inner emotional life, surrendering, “up to her lover,” her body and mind. Her appeal, for a misogynist like Fleetwood so intent on the psychological consumption of the women in his life, rests in the transparent and pliant nature of her being. To the extent that the corporeal markers of the Countess’s excessive sensibility inscribe themselves on her body, Fleetwood is able to “see” into the desires of her mind: her “melting soul” is simultaneously veiled and revealed through her “sleepy eye.”

In clarifying the intellectual weaknesses of the Countess, Fleetwood had voiced his misogyny through a well-worn conflation of femininity with a racist vision of the exoticized Eastern “other.” Having “all the attributes that belong exclusively to the female sex,” the Countess in Fleetwood’s view “was rather an Asiatic sultana, in her turn of mind, than a native of our western world” (112). Such a metaphor, evoking, as it necessarily must, the structures of power associated with imperial domination, speaks vividly to the colonizing desires of Fleetwood’s consumptive tendencies.

The Countess’s emotional availability carries within it the promise of ultimate possession. The perception of such possession facilitates on Fleetwood’s part the processes of narrative inscription, whereby the Countess is “written upon” with the narratives of his own desires and identity. Fleetwood’s characterization of the Countess as an Asiatic sultana is an example of such narrative inscription and a powerful metaphor for how the feminine colonized Other is rendered subservient to the dominating desires of

an imperial “master.”⁴ Just as the colonizer will inscribe his own desires and narratives onto the colonized, we witness Fleetwood engaging in a similar process whereby the autonomous identity of the Countess is subsumed within his own construction of self. In describing the delicate emotional state of a youth that experienced no “contradiction,” Fleetwood had compared himself to “a tender flower of the garden, which the blast of the east wind nips, and impresses with the tokens of a sure decay” (54). Later in his narrative, he significantly delineates the emotional vulnerability of the Countess through strikingly similar language: she “reminded her admirer of the most delicate flower of the parterre, which the first attack of a rude and chilling blast immediately withers” (111).

While the Countess’s emotions are transparent and her affections excessive, they are also, as Fleetwood eventually realizes, indiscriminate and inconstant. As Fleetwood admits, the “passion of the Countess was rather an abstract propensity, than the preference of an individual” (112). He finds the Countess’s inconstancy especially frustrating, since her emotional availability had suggested a complete surrender to his authorial impulses. She “was so simple, so intelligible, it seemed as if nothing could happen with her that might not exactly be foreseen” (114). Faced with yet another mistress who escapes his control, Fleetwood dispenses with the Countess and any narrative value she may hold in his memoirs. He hints at “long and severe calamities” later suffered by the Countess (113), but, as she is no longer part of *his* story as an extension of *his* being and identity, he is quick to cut short any delineation of her future history. “This,” he asserts, “does not belong to my history” (113).

“Form Her to Your Mind”

Fleetwood flees Paris in the wake of his disappointing romantic entanglements and travels to Switzerland, where he is warmly received by his father’s long-time friend, Monsieur Ruffigny, and informed of his father’s recent death. The two travel to what is now Fleetwood’s estate in Merionethshire. Fleetwood’s narrative is then interrupted by a lengthy, ten-chapter interpolation in which Ruffigny details his own history and relationship to Fleetwood’s family.⁵ Ruffigny’s story brings the reader well into volume two of the novel, where Fleetwood and Ruffigny, after spending some months in Merionethshire, travel to London. While in London, the two quarrel over what Ruffigny feels is Fleetwood’s return to the sexual immoralities that had informed his time in Paris, a quarrel that results in Fleetwood’s redemptive vow to forever renounce the “vices of a libertine” (215).

Although no longer a libertine, Fleetwood ultimately becomes, through further “education and travels,” a “confirmed misanthropist” (215). The next five chapters of the novel detail the further development of Fleetwood’s misanthropy in the ensuing stages of his life and its blighting effect on his personal happiness. We have seen how Fleetwood’s compulsive need to map his own identity and desires on to the social world around him resulted in two compelling, yet failed, attempts to consume the autonomous subjectivity of the women in his life. Fleetwood had often described his internalization of external objects and people through the analogy of excessive consumption: as a child, he “drank in” and “devoured,” “with greedy appetite,” the sublime scenes of nature (55-56); as a young man in Paris, he envisioned his romantic and sexual relationships in terms of a

proprietary absorption of women's bodies and minds. Such language evokes a metaphoric sense of Fleetwood's misanthropy as a process of (un)successful "feeding" on the people and scenes around him. Indeed, this metaphor continually resurfaces in Fleetwood's delineation of the "education and travels" leading up to his middle age. Failing to find salutary "nourishment" for his misanthropy in a variety of endeavours, he constructs himself as a diseased invalid mired in "long fits of languor and depression" and desperately in need of "nourishment" (219).

He joins a "club of authors," hoping to find in the "society of men of genius" the "food for thought" of intellectual stimulation (219). However, he finds the stimulation afforded by this club to be less than satisfying, declaring, "it might have answered to the confections which amuse the palate at the end of a feast, but it could never appease the appetite of him, who feels an uneasy and aching void within, and is in hot chase for the boon of content" (223). Travel abroad similarly fails to fill the "uneasy and aching void within," as does his career as a Member of Parliament. (This latter endeavour, however, in which Fleetwood appealed to the "plain, coarse manners" of his constituents through affected imitations of their behaviour, speech, and humour (24), demonstrates that he had not lost his old awareness of the conscious self-creation of identity.) Indeed, denied the stimuli which might fill the "aching void within," lacking a love object that might feed the consumptive turn of his psyche, Fleetwood feels himself the victim of an "*ennui* which devoured [him]" (228).

The "aching void within" could be filled, Fleetwood feels, by a "friend" who could prove that he does not "stand alone in the world" (229). "This must be a friend,"

writes Fleetwood, “who is to me as another self, who joys in all my joys, and grieves in all my sorrows, not with a joy or grief that looks like compliment, not with a sympathy that changes into smiles when I am no longer present, though my head continues bent to the earth with anguish” (229-30). Fleetwood dismisses the potential sadism implicit in his demands for a friend who will suffer as he suffers, claiming that he takes no “pleasure in his distress, simply considered” (231). It is clear, however, that Fleetwood’s conception of true friendship is predicated on the sadistic destruction of another creature’s independent capacities for emotion and thought. Acting “*as another self*,” this friend must, “by long habit,” make Fleetwood “a part of himself,” taking no pleasure or pain in activities or thoughts of which Fleetwood is not also a “partaker” (230). “Something of this sort,” he asserts, “seemed essential to my happiness” (231). Indeed, it is only through the consumption of another’s identity through its sympathetic diffusion into his own that Fleetwood is able to overcome the debilitating sense of being alone in the “active and crowded scene” of social life (232).

Unable to find this “friend,” however, Fleetwood spends more than twenty years in this debilitating state of *ennui*, which “grew upon [him] perpetually from year to year” (233). It is only with the entrance of the Macneil family—and, in particular, his future wife, Mary—into his life and narrative that Fleetwood finds any relief from this devouring *ennui*. It is significant that Fleetwood’s initial desire to make the family’s acquaintance stems from the narrative interest sparked in him by Mrs. Macneil’s scandalous history, a history that reads like the plot of a quintessential gothic novel: a foreign villain—“old, deformed, avaricious, and profligate” (234), indeed a “repulsive baboon” (235)—seduces

and then holds captive a young, motherless heroine in a “dismantled and unwholesome” Italian castle; she is only rescued when a “true knight errant,” a friend of the young woman’s father, manages to “besiege” the castle and return her to the safe bosom of England and family (235).⁶ Mrs. Macneil’s history is particularly amenable to the imposition of a gothic narrative model, so it should come as no surprise to the reader that Fleetwood, driven by his own compulsive need to script the lives of women, feels “an uncommon desire to visit the family” (237).

From the outset, Fleetwood is driven by a selfish conviction of what the family can give *him*, rather than what his acquaintance may offer the family. In his letter of introduction to Macneil, he admits to being “a very weak creature,” with “habits and temper” no doubt in conflict with Macneil’s own (241). Nevertheless, he feels justified in demanding that he not be refused “the sight of a happy family!” (242). “I ask only for a transient and momentary pleasure,” he writes Macneil. “I ask only for something to stock my memory with—the recollection of which I may call up from time to time, and with the image of which I may gild my solitude!” (242). Macneil and his family only matter to Fleetwood to the extent that they can provide him with the raw materials for his own psychological processes: they will become “something to stock [his] memory with,” the “recollection” that he may “call up from time to time,” perhaps when the overpowering *ennui* threatens to devour him.

This becomes even more apparent when Fleetwood mentions Mary, his future wife and the youngest of Macneil’s three daughters. An avid botanist, Mary provides Fleetwood with his “chief pleasure” in attending the family (247), and his physical

description of her strongly evokes his portrayal of the Countess de B—:

Mary had a complexion which, in point of fairness and transparency, could not be excelled: her blood absolutely spoke in her cheeks; the soft white of her hands and neck looked as if they would have melted away beneath your touch; her eyes were so animated, and her whole physiognomy so sensitive, that it was scarcely possible to believe that a thought could pass in her heart, which might not be read in her face. (246)

Fleetwood had appreciated the Countess for the “heart [that] shone in her visage,” and for the “transparent” skin that revealed the “blush” of every “pleasure” or “passion” (110). Mary is similarly valued by Fleetwood for an emotional transparency that lays open to the gaze her every thought and feeling. Indeed, Mary seems so emotionally open and amenable to outside forces that Fleetwood almost doubts her material existence: “beneath your touch,” he marvels, she might “melt[] away” (246).

Initially drawn to the Macneils by the narrative richness of the family’s history, Fleetwood later finds in Mary a potential conduit for his own self-creation, the elusive “friend” who will, at least in his own mind, sacrifice her autonomous existence and yield to his inscribing hand. It is quite ironic that Fleetwood, who is usually the one striving for narrative control over his life and the identities of those around him, submits so freely to Macneil’s overt manipulation of his thoughts and feelings on marriage. Indeed, the friendship between the two men quickly organizes itself around Macneil’s various performative manipulations. “In that vein of playful good-humour which he delighted to

indulge,” Macneil easily assumes the mantle of a Catholic priest or a physician, urging Fleetwood towards a “conversion” or a “cure” (248).

Accordingly, Fleetwood unburdens himself to Macneil, laying “before him the secret grief that preyed upon [his] heart” (247). In response to Fleetwood’s confession of misanthropy, Macneil adopts the hypothetical role of author, “composing a little novel or tale in illustration,” in which Fleetwood, as his chosen protagonist, is shipwrecked, stranded on a desert island with only one miserable companion, and, as a result of these misfortunes, converted to philanthropy (249-50). The ease with which Macneil assumes this hypothetical authorial role regarding Fleetwood’s history speaks to the very real way in which he actively re-shapes the younger man’s opinions on marriage and orchestrates the future trajectory of his life.

In advising Fleetwood on what type of woman would be most suitable as his bride, Macneil emphasizes the necessity of choosing one who will be easily “formed” by her husband:

‘If you marry, Fleetwood, choose a girl whom no disappointments have soured, and no misfortunes have bent to the earth [. . .] If your habits are somewhat rooted and obstinate, take care that there is no responsive stiffness in her to jar and shock with. Let her be all pliancy, accommodation, and good humour. Form her to your mind; educate her yourself. By thus grafting a young shoot upon your venerable trunk, you will obtain, as it were, a new hold upon life. You will be another creature; new views, new desires, new thoughts, will rise within you [. . .] you

will feel as alert as a boy, and as free and rapid in your conceptions as a stripling.' (254).

The language and imagery here are almost parasitical. Fleetwood should choose a young woman “whom no disappointments have soured”—essentially, a woman with no history, no narrative past that might interfere with Fleetwood’s imposition of his own authorial desires. He should “form her to [his] mind,” author her according to his needs, and she should be “all pliancy,” open to his every controlling manoeuvre and inscriptive gesture. He is the “rooted” and “venerable” trunk, which will be given renewed life and energy—transformed into a “stripling”—through his consumption of her youth and vitality. Macneil’s description of the ideal marriage partner strikingly evokes the imaginative processes of Fleetwood’s youth, in which he satisfied his imaginative needs by devouring the autonomous scenes of nature.

Indeed, Macneil’s metaphor, and the advice couched within it, convinces Fleetwood precisely because it reinforces the consumptive tendencies of his disposition: he needs to shape his love object according to his own desires, he wants to “form her to [his] mind” and to the narratives he has chosen for her. It is therefore quite fitting that Fleetwood imposes on Mary the same figurative analogy used to script the subjectivity of both himself and the Countess de B—: Mary’s “delight was in flowers,” he remarks, “and she seemed like one of the beauties of her own parterre, soft, and smooth, and brilliant, and fragrant, and unsullied” (259).

Fleetwood’s attraction to the gothic exploitation of Mrs. Macneil’s past foreshadows his later affinity for Mary as a distressed heroine in need of his protection.

After her entire family, en route to Italy, is killed in a shipwreck, Mary becomes a tragic figure to Fleetwood. His emotional response, however, is not limited to the pity and compassion her plight would naturally seem to inspire in a hopeful suitor and family friend. Instead, Fleetwood's attentions derive, at least in part, from a self-interested awareness of the pleasures afforded *him* through her distress. "Her desolate situation rendered her tenfold more interesting" to Fleetwood, and he "now felt, for the first time in [his] life, how delightful a task it is to console distress, when the sufferer is a woman, beautiful and young" (267).

The sadism suggested by Fleetwood's emotional response to Mary's distress is further reinforced by his reaction to the financial ruin she suffers as a result of the shipwreck's destruction of the necessary legal documents needed to claim her inheritance. Had Mary entered into their marriage a "distinguished heiress," she would have been, Fleetwood admits, an "independent being" and, as such, would have "commanded from [him] a certain deference and homage" (275). As an heiress, Mary had a claim to a "certain submission" from Fleetwood (275), and this submission compromises his ability to construct a coherent and confident presentation of himself. In the presence of Mary as heiress, his "thoughts moved slow," and his "tongue was apt to falter" (275). As an impoverished orphan, however, a "mere pensionary on [his] bounty" (275), she sacrifices this claim to independence.

Fleetwood is quick—even anxious—to declare that he "did not value her less" in her "pennyless" state (275), and this is quite true (for he actually values her more), but the value he ascribes to Mary stems not from any intrinsic qualities possessed by her as an

independent being separate from him. Rather, she is valued for the emotional response she generates—the feelings of “pity,” “tenderness,” and “humanity” she arouses in him through her dejected, impoverished state (275)—and for the way this emotional response invests his mind with imaginative energy and strength: “When I visited her portionless, my mind moved freer; I breathed a thinner and more elastic atmosphere; my tongue assumed a tone of greater confidence; and, at the same time that I felt for her the deepest compassion and the most entire sympathy, my speech became more eloquent, and I caught myself talking with the condescension of a superior” (275-76).

Fleetwood’s perverted brand of sensibility contributes to the consolidation of his masculine authority, and his masculine authority—and the sense of self cultivated by this authority—increases as a direct function of Mary’s despair and misfortune. He indulges in sympathetic consolation not so much to relieve Mary’s anguish, as to satisfy his own narcissism. Indeed, as a heroine beset by tragedy (and not unlike her mother in this regard), Mary “became every hour more interesting” to him (277). She serves as the instrument for his own self-creation, providing him with suitable tragic narratives and inspiring the appropriate forms of emotional response. In a long speech to Fleetwood, Mary seems to display a subconscious awareness of the consumptive tendencies lurking within her future husband. While promising a respectful subservience to his greater years and wisdom, she nevertheless declares that he will have, in her, ““a wife, and not a passive machine,”” a woman who will not ““sink [her] being and individuality in [his]”” (281). The process of consumption, however, has already begun, and it is thus quite fitting that the speech ends with Mary’s contemplation of her own death by drowning.

Fleetwood's burning need for a "friend, who is to me as another self" (229) is seemingly satisfied through his marriage to Mary. As we have seen, however, this fantasy of ideal companionship is predicated on a sadistic destruction of the autonomous existence of the friend who must be subsumed into Fleetwood's own subjective space and "formed" to his "mind." Indeed, the process of "forming" Mary to the needs and desires of his own mind begins soon after their marriage. Fleetwood spends their first evening as a married couple at Merionethshire regaling Mary with the "stories of [his] boyish exploits and sorrows" (291). Upon giving her a tour of the house the following day, he is overwhelmed with the need to tell her of the "ravishing associations" inspired by a particular closet (292). The first conflict of their marriage, in fact, results from Mary's appropriation of this closet for herself, an act which not only denies Fleetwood sole access to the closet in the future, but also—and perhaps more importantly—preempts his self-indulgent narration of past imaginative acts.

One of the most compelling examples of Fleetwood's overt manipulation of Mary's subjectivity occurs during a mutual reading of John Fletcher's 1624 play, *A Wife for a Month*.⁷ Fleetwood proposes the reading, which he later calls an "experiment" (299), and, at least initially, he is quite pleased with the synchronicity of his and Mary's intellectual and emotional responses to the play:

Mary seemed to enter strongly into the feelings of the poet; *we admired equally* the high and generous sentiments of the tragedy [. . .] *She agreed with me* that no poet of ancient or modern times, as far as her acquaintance with them extended, was able, like the writer before us, to paint with all

that body and retinue of circumstances which give life to a picture, a free, heroic, and gallant spirit. *We especially commended his style* [. . .].

(298-99; emphases added)

Fleetwood, convinced of the superiority of his own intellectual tastes, is “delighted” that Mary’s interpretations of the play so closely correspond to his own, and he seems to take an almost irrational satisfaction in the degree of similitude that almost erases the boundary between Self and Other and robs them of their respective voices: “We communicate with instantaneous flashes, in one glance of the eye, and have no need of words” (299).

However, at a particularly intense point in the play—just as the male protagonist’s confidence is at its peak⁸ (surely an allegory for Fleetwood’s own righteous self-assurance)—this similitude is shattered. Fleetwood and Mary are interrupted by a servant announcing the arrival of a young peasant boy with whom Mary had previously arranged a botanical excursion. In proposing the mutual reading, Fleetwood had consciously constructed an experiment whereby he would be able to shape his wife’s emotional and intellectual responses, “forming” them to the tastes and sentiments of his own mind. The interruption—and, more importantly, Mary’s enthusiastic response to an intellectual endeavour outside of Fleetwood’s interests and direct control—destroys the illusion of her complete pliancy to his will. Significantly, the play, which had just been constructed by Fleetwood as the site of their psychological and emotional union, is now, as Mary tells Fleetwood, “*your beloved Fletcher*” (301; emphasis added). Moreover, it is fitting that Mary’s act of autonomous self-assertion here—namely, her enthusiasm for

botany—involves something that Fleetwood cannot, or will not, share: despite receiving “with pleasure the early lessons of Mary in botany,” he “could never shape [his] mind to the office of herborisation,” it being “too pinched or minute an object for the tastes [he] had formed” (300-01).

Mary’s self-assertion threatens Fleetwood’s sense of masculine authority, his perception of control over a passive and easily consumable love object. Despite his anger at Mary over her perceived disloyalty to him and his interests, he constructs a fantasy of reunion in which he promises to “never have a taste, a pursuit, a gratification, but what is hers” (302). He recoils at the emasculation suggested by this submissive pose, however, declaring that he “cannot be content to be reduced to nothing”: “I must have an existence, a pursuit, a system of my own; and not be a mere puppy, dangling at her heels, and taught to fetch and carry, as she gives the word” (303).

Fleetwood is of course blind to the irony behind these statements, in that the subordinate state he disavows for himself is precisely the one he hoped to impose on Mary. Indeed, oblivious to the reality of his “experiment” in reading, he even goes on to lecture the reader on the necessity of recognizing the distinct existence of husband and wife: “Human beings, who enter into the engagements of domestic life, should remember, that however man and wife may in interests and affections be one, yet no interests and affections can prevent them from being in many respects distinct” (303). Similarly, in insisting that Mary attend an assembly in Barmouth and dance with the “young and handsome Mr. Matthews” (307), a man anxiously regarded by Fleetwood as a potential rival, he appears to adopt a masochistic pose. “To witness this petty prostitution of my

wife," he declares, "was a penance I enjoined myself, for having so undeservedly mortified her and insulted her" (307). The masochistic turn of Fleetwood's sentiments, however, soon reveals itself as a dominating act of surveillance and control, with Fleetwood watching over Mary "with the same sleepless anxiety with which a miser watches over his treasure" (310).

The analogy used here is evocative of the way in which Mary is commodified in the process of being "formed" to Fleetwood's "mind." As a commodity, as the object available for Fleetwood's manipulation and consumption, Mary is in danger of being "used up," depleted. Indeed, the physical and mental deterioration of Mary shortly after her marriage is highly suggestive of a consumptive process that has depleted her vital resources. Two months into their marriage, Fleetwood perceives a "sensible change" in Mary's health and behaviour: "Her appetite left her; her nights were sleepless; she became languid and meagre" (318). Her "pallid countenance" might betray the odd smile, but it was the smile of a "winter's day, when the sun sends forth a sickly beam, amidst watery and congregated clouds" (318). What is most significant about Mary's degeneration, the symptoms of which connote a tubercular wasting away, is Fleetwood's reaction to it. He is convinced that his "unkindness" is to blame for Mary's illness (318), and "the more she fell away from the healthful sleekness of a beautiful woman, the more she appeared to [him] like an angel" (319). Fleetwood's appreciation of Mary seems to increase as a direct function of her weakening body, in much the same way as his regard for her had grown upon learning of her orphan status and financial impoverishment. In her dejected, languid state, Mary is easily contained by Fleetwood's controlling hand.

Ironically, however, her physical illness is also attended by a mental degeneration which threatens this containment. Her inexplicable manic shifts in mood are troubling enough to Fleetwood (320), but what truly disturbs him are the nocturnal “escapes” she makes from the house to converse with the spirits of her dead parents upon the seashore. These escapes—in which Mary “steals” from her marriage bed in the dead of night—can perhaps be read as physical acts of defiance against the consuming demands of her marriage.

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Fleetwood plans a removal to Bath, which brings about a marked improvement in Mary’s physical and psychological health. Fleetwood “detests” Bath (325), seeing it as the epitome of everything he cannot control, everything he had found threatening since childhood—the mutability and inconstancy of fashionable society. For Mary, however, a return to society and social life has a powerfully rejuvenating effect, to the point where Fleetwood is consumed by a “sickly apprehension” of her reawakened vitality (325). It is perhaps this “sickly” and vulnerable state that allows Fleetwood to be so easily manipulated by Gifford, one of two younger relatives whom he invites to Bath for an extended visit. Although Gifford’s physical appearance evokes in Fleetwood a vague sense of uneasiness—“his general physiognomy,” Fleetwood tells the reader, “conveyed the idea of something obscure and problematical, which [he] was at a loss to expound” (337)—Gifford quickly insinuates himself into Fleetwood’s subjective space. “He talked like an oracle,” Fleetwood remarks of Gifford, “and I soon learned to place a great dependence upon his judgment” (337). “I could not refrain from sometimes opening my soul to him on the most sacred of all subjects,” he continues (342).

Indeed, it is remarkable how quickly Fleetwood is disempowered after first meeting Gifford, how easily Gifford is able to rob him of any sense of authority or control over his own life. Gifford ultimately assumes the controlling authorial hand in shaping events and, more importantly, the interpretations of those events to his own advantage. In direct contrast to the way in which Fleetwood has normally scripted and shaped the narratives of his own life—and the narratives of the lives of those around him—his relationship with Gifford renders him the passive recipient of an authorial scripting not his own. Indeed, Fleetwood experiences a disrupted sense of gender, in that *he* becomes mired in the gothic conventions that so attracted him to the female members of the Macneil family. *He* becomes, in a sense, the gothic heroine victimized by a foreign, “dark” villain who transgresses his domestic space and attempts to “possess [him] entirely” (338).

After ingratiating himself into Fleetwood’s home and confidence, Gifford stages a complex series of events and decisive interpretative moments that reveals the novel’s indebtedness to Shakespeare’s *Othello* on the levels of both theme and plot. Just as Iago slowly, but methodically, poisons Othello’s mind against the innocent Desdemona over the course of several acts, Gifford, as “treacherous adviser” and confidant (341), systematically convinces Fleetwood of Mary’s adulterous relationship with Kenrick, Fleetwood’s other young relative and Gifford’s own half-brother. Gifford’s orchestration of the woman’s warning near the Upper Rooms at Bath, his recounting of Mary and Kenrick’s behaviour towards each other at a Bath assembly, and his conspicuous placement of the love letter and miniature of Kenrick meant for Louisa Scarborough in

Mary's dressing room—all of these machinations speak to the way in which he is able to author his own narrative of adultery and disloyalty, a narrative which he then imposes on Fleetwood as the “truth.”

Indeed, in recounting the “indiscretions” of Mary and Kenrick at the Bath assembly, Gifford (un?)wittingly foregrounds the deceptive power of narrative to forge new, and possibly false, versions of reality. After relating his “most artful tale” (351), he tells Fleetwood to

‘forget for ever the conversation of this evening! It ought never to have existed. You have obliged me to repeat trifles the most frivolous and contemptible. I have sacrificed every thing to the faithful performance of my task. Yet, in spite of all the pains I have taken to bring these trifles down to their true level, I can see that you misconstrue every thing.

Things make so different a figure, when brought regularly together in a narrative, from what they made as they actually passed.’

(351; emphasis added)

Gifford's skill is in this precise kind of authorship, this keen ability to bring ““regularly together in a narrative”” of adultery events and behaviour that were innocent as ““they actually passed.”” And, just as Gifford's skilful authorship is proving successful in bringing about its desired aims, Fleetwood's own authorial powers, his ability to shape and control the narratives of his own identity and the identities of those around him, are at their weakest. Fleetwood falls prey to Gifford's manipulation of narrative and language,

his careful deployment of “half words” and “broken sentences” (371), and the imaginative sensibility that had proved so intellectually fruitful for Fleetwood as a child is now regarded as a deviance that manifests itself in a “sick imagination” that torments him in its manic speculations (348).

Fleetwood is thus rendered helpless in the face of Gifford’s superior authorial powers. He subsequently becomes the passive site for the inscription of Gifford’s own lust for wealth and power. Upon witnessing a secret meeting between Mary and Kenrick (a meeting carefully orchestrated by Gifford), Fleetwood surrenders unequivocally to the younger man’s controlling hand. Indeed, on the journey over to the Continent which Fleetwood immediately embarks upon after the final breach with his wife, he is almost infantilized in his complete physical and emotional dependency on Gifford:

It is impossible for words to express any thing so wretched as the state of my mind during the whole of this journey [. . .] Nothing could be more exemplary than the attention I received from Gifford during the whole of this period. He never left me; he never ceased from studying the means of restoring me; the meanest offices were not repulsive to his kindness and zeal. I am certain that, in this extremity, I owed the preservation of my life to his care. (382)

Fleetwood is aware that his psychological breakdown, the “disorder” or “distemper” of his “mind” (383-84), has left him dangerously vulnerable, and he even seems, at certain points, anxiously aware of the ominous “ascendency” Gifford had claimed over him, an “ascendency” he could not seem to “easily shake off” (384). Nevertheless, Fleetwood is

so completely contained within Gifford's inscribing hand that he even allows the younger man to compose, in Fleetwood's own name, a letter directing his business agent to financially disown Mary. To this letter, Fleetwood simply "annexed" his signature (382), as if he were no longer a separate and independent being, but a colonized state only granted an identity through its relationship to a more significant colonizer.

By this point, it is clear that Fleetwood has lost any definite sense of his own identity, something which speaks to the consumptive nature of his relationship with Gifford. As Fleetwood eventually realizes, Gifford had, from the outset of their acquaintance, intended to "possess [him] entirely" (338), and this goal could only be realized through a consumptive process similar to the one which had characterized Fleetwood's relationship with Mary. In this sense, Gifford's forging of Fleetwood's hand is simply a synecdoche for the larger displacement of identity that occurs between the two men. Indeed, Gifford wants quite literally to replace Fleetwood in the social order by assuming the mantle of the Fleetwood name and estate, and this desire necessitates not only the colonization of Fleetwood's mind, but the destruction of his very existence. The evocative imagery associated with consumption—as both a metaphorical process and a physical ailment that robs one of vital energy—returns to haunt Fleetwood's body, just as it had marked Mary's: "The distempered activity under which I [had] suffered, was now gone," laments Fleetwood. "I became jaundiced, body and soul. My blood loiteringly crept through palsied veins" (385).

It is particularly significant that Gifford controls Fleetwood through the interception and destruction of his letters, for it foregrounds the central role that

authorship—or, more precisely, failed authorship—plays in Fleetwood’s eventual physical and mental collapse, the ultimate crisis of self that he experiences. Fleetwood does indeed compose letters to Mary and Kenrick, but these are intercepted by Gifford, an act which not only keeps Fleetwood ignorant of Gifford’s treachery but, perhaps more importantly, robs him of any narrative opportunity to shape the events unfolding in his life. Fleetwood, accustomed to exercising the authority and power of the author in scripting his own life, is now unable to exercise the same sort of authorial agency. While he is told by Gifford that his initial frenzied letters to Mary and Kenrick were never received (intercepted by Gifford with “apparent propriety” (384)), he is blind to the fact that his later letter to Mary, granting her an annuity of a thousand pounds, was similarly intercepted (400). Likewise, he is oblivious to the reality that letters from Mary, Kenrick, and Lord Scarborough are consistently kept from him (400).

Scarborough, upon disclosing the true extent of Gifford’s treachery, remarks to Fleetwood, ““you have been a close prisoner in the keeping of the villain, who was proceeding with rapid, yet deliberate steps, *to thrust you out from the scene of the world, and to reap the inheritance of your estates*”” (400-01; emphasis added). Indeed, Gifford’s modus operandi largely revolves around this process of keeping Fleetwood ““from the scene of the world,”” robbing him of the means and opportunity for self-expression and communication. In doing so, Gifford keeps Fleetwood not so much from the ““scene of the world”” as from the scene of Fleetwood’s own world, the scenes most central to his life—the dissolution of his marriage, the reality of his wife’s distress, the birth of his child, the legal use of his name.

Fleetwood is rendered impotent in shaping the narratives of his own life. This is perhaps most compellingly observed in the adultery prosecution against Mary and Kenrick, legal proceedings in which Fleetwood assumes an oddly passive and awkward position, resigning the entire matter over to Gifford, who then (mis)informs Fleetwood of legal events as they unfold. Fleetwood's latent anxiety regarding the lack of agency and control over his life seems to register in the "furious impatience" (383) and "vehement emotion" (388) with which he receives any written communication. The literary inscriptions of others perhaps signify for Fleetwood their successful authorship, and may foreground his own loss of authorial power.

The crisis of these authorial anxieties occurs with Fleetwood's orchestration of the "banquet" celebrating the anniversary of his marriage. In July, Fleetwood is alone in Florence, Italy (Gifford being in England), and it is here that he orchestrates an elaborate spectacle that functions on both a masochistic and sadistic level. "Resolved to solemnise a strange and frantic festival on [his] wedding-day," Fleetwood visits a "celebrated modeller in wax" and commissions the construction of life-size wax figures of both Mary and Kenrick—Mary from a miniature portrait in Fleetwood's possession and Kenrick from a magazine image of a "terrible and monstrous figure of a fiend" (386). He dresses both figures in the appropriate attire; constructs a stylized scene, complete with a barrel organ for musical entertainment, a cradle, and a chest of child-bed linen; and "caused a supper of cold meats to be prepared" (386-87). Fleetwood's construction of the scene is remarkable for its careful attention to detail, regardless of the expense incurred. As

Fleetwood remarks, “never had madness, in any age or country, so voluptuous a banquet” (387).

Fleetwood is the literal “author” of this scene; it is generated from the imaginative energy (insanity) of his mind, and he scripts the tableau in much the same way as he would author a dramatic or literary scene—establishing the mood and controlling every detail of plot, setting, and character. Indeed, notice how even those details for which Fleetwood cannot claim sole creative responsibility are presented in such a way as to foreground his agency: “*I caused a supper of cold meats to be prepared,*” he writes, in an awkward mixture of the passive and active voices. Robbed of any real ability to script the scenes or narratives of his life, Fleetwood, in his latent frustration and rage over the emasculated and impotent position in which he finds himself, resorts to illusion, crafting, from the “ground up,” a tableau completely within his narrative control.

Significantly, he attempts to exert narrative power over precisely those people and events which he feels have robbed him of his authority. (He is at this point still ignorant of Gifford’s villainy.) Mary, in particular, had seemed to promise Fleetwood, in her emotional transparency and malleable nature, a unique opportunity for exerting his narrative authority. Spurred on by Macneil, who encouraged his courtship of Mary by implying that she would serve well as the means for his self-rejuvenation, Fleetwood had seen in his future wife an easily consumable love object, a woman whose subjectivity could be “formed” and shaped in the service of his own self-construction. That Mary had failed him in this regard—her supposed infidelity the final proof that Fleetwood had been unable to contain her, just as he had been unable to contain his two Parisian mistresses—is

particularly traumatic for Fleetwood's sense of masculine authority and self. It is therefore not surprising that he directs his most explicit inscriptive manoeuvres towards Mary, putting "provisions on her plate" and "invit[ing] her to eat" (387).

Art imitates life, however; even in this scripted and seemingly controlled scene, "Mary" does not stay bound to Fleetwood's narrative hand:

I looked wildly, and with glassy eyes, all round the room; I gazed at the figure of Mary; I thought it was, and it was not, Mary [. . .] I saw her move—if I live, I saw it. She turned her eyes this way and that; she grinned and chattered at me. I looked from her to the other figure; that grinned and chattered too. Instantly a full and proper madness seized me; I grinned and chattered, in turn, to the figures before me. (387).

Fleetwood's construction of an inanimate Mary had perhaps betrayed his subconscious desire for a similarly "inanimate" wife, a wife unable to resist his authorial inscriptions. In perceiving that his "Mary" had assumed an animation, a voice, he had not intended to grant her, Fleetwood experiences again, on a symbolic level, the trauma of failed authorship. This trauma brings about a madness that signifies not just an insanity of behaviour, but a clear break in the ego: "I no longer distinctly knew where I was, or could distinguish fiction from reality" (387). Fleetwood is no longer even certain of himself at the very basic level of existence: "I saw her move—if I live, I saw it" (387). Of course, he did not see it, and this then begs the reader to ponder the central question of Fleetwood's identity in this scene.

What this scene specifically foregrounds is Fleetwood's lack of identity—the absence at the center of his being—and the complex process of consumption that he has engaged in since childhood. As a solitary child raised amidst the feminized scenes of nature, Fleetwood had constructed “castles in the air” out of the raw materials presented by the natural scenery around him, consuming them (and, metaphorically at least, destroying them) in his attempts to script visionary fantasies around which he built a sense of masculine identity. In his later years in Paris, and in his marriage to Mary, his consumptive power over a feminized nature was displaced onto a series of female love objects who seemingly promised him the same sort of consumptive power and authorial control he had exercised over the natural scenes of his youth. The monstrous, “chattering” Mary in this scene is thus symptomatic of Fleetwood's failed consumption of not just Mary, but all the women in his life. In his rage and despair, Fleetwood's metaphorical attempts at consumption and destruction become quite literal:

I dashed the organ into a thousand fragments. I rent the child-bed linen, and tore it with my teeth. I dragged the clothes which Mary had worn, from off the figure that represented her, and rent them into long strips and shreds. I struck the figures vehemently with the chairs and other furniture of the room, till they were broken to pieces. (388).

Tysdahl points to the “cannibalism” of this scene (124), and Bruhm has highlighted how the sadistic intention of this spectacle (i.e., Fleetwood's desire to torture “Mary” through verbal and physical abuse) devolves into an exercise in masochism, whereby Fleetwood becomes the tortured body. “In effect,” argues Bruhm, “the effigy

scene enacts a series of bodily displacements: the effigy first replaces Mary's body, but *it is then replaced by Fleetwood's*. He becomes the victim in the torture he has executed" (37). Despite this movement from torturer to victim, however, a strong sense of sadism still pervades the scene, for this displacement of bodies and identities is predicated on the necessary effacement of Mary's subjectivity (specifically, her very real identity as victim in both this enacted scene and in the reality of the novel) to make room for Fleetwood's. Indeed, as Bruhm recognizes, Fleetwood "claims a monopoly of victimization that centers pain solely in himself and obliterates the object with which he had claimed an identity" (37).

It is with this scene of crisis that the novel seems to come full circle. From this point, Fleetwood's memoirs proceed quickly and terminate rather abruptly: we are told of Gifford's failed assassination attempt (391-92); are apprized, via Scarborough's extended autobiographical narration, of the detailed course of Gifford's treachery (396-416); and hear of Gifford's execution, as well as Kenrick and Louisa Scarborough's marriage (423); all in the final pages of the novel. Incredibly, we also hear of the unlikely reunion of Fleetwood and Mary (421-23). In general, the condensed and rather abrupt conclusion to the text proves unsatisfying for the reader, especially with regard to Fleetwood and Mary's reconciliation. We may feel optimistic about Fleetwood's ultimate redemptive potential; he has after all suffered in both a physical and psychological sense, and has weathered, apparently successfully, the trauma of the banquet scene and the crisis of self which it represented. The text, however, is conspicuously silent on this issue. While we hear of Scarborough as the "most indulgent of grandsires" (423), we hear nothing of the

later state of Fleetwood and Mary's marriage, nor of Fleetwood's later conduct as a husband. Fleetwood may have been punished, but we do not hear whether he has been reformed.

Indeed, if we return to some of Fleetwood's initial remarks at the beginning of his memoir—which of course, in the chronology of his life, occur after his reconciliation with Mary—we may have cause to doubt any reformation on his part. Fleetwood's narrative is a retrospective one, and as such should theoretically be informed by the moral instruction he has received as a result of the events he will recount in the ensuing chapters of the text. What we find, however, is a Fleetwood who adopts a certain authorial position, namely, that of the masochist who scripts his authorship as the “act of [his] penitence and humiliation” (59). Fleetwood is the suffering body here, and thus enacts the same manoeuver at the beginning of his memoirs (when he should, theoretically, be “older” and “wiser” for the misfortunes he has endured, cured of his consumptive and destructive tendencies towards women and in particular Mary) as he did during the crisis of the banquet scene. As we saw in that scene, Fleetwood's construction of himself as victim was contingent upon a necessary destruction of Mary's subjectivity, a “displacement,” as Bruhm calls it, of both Mary's body and her position as victim in the torturer-victim relationship. Ironically, a similar destruction or displacement occurs at the beginning of Fleetwood's memoirs, in that he scripts himself as the suffering body, the tortured author who inflicts pain on himself with every word he writes. In appropriating this role for himself, Fleetwood assumes Mary's position in the text, displacing her as the true victim of the narrative, the one who truly suffers at his hands. Fleetwood's cycle of

consumption is therefore complete, as Mary has indeed been “formed” to his body, mind, and narrative.

Chained Up in Silence: Language and Alienation in *Mandeville*

When Godwin published *Mandeville* in 1817, it had been twelve years since his last novel, *Fleetwood*, and it would be thirteen years before he would publish another.¹ For B.J. Tysdahl, “*Mandeville* is the last novel from [Godwin’s] pen which impresses by its originality” (126). Indeed, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley praised the novel as one of the philosopher’s finest. While *St. Leon* and *Fleetwood* were “moulded, with somewhat inferior distinctness,” *Mandeville* possessed for Shelley an “interest and importance” that put it on a par with what he considered as Godwin’s greatest novelistic achievement, *Caleb Williams* (Graham 357-58). The interest of the tale, writes Shelley in a review of the novel published in Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner*, catches the reader like a “wind which tears up the deepest waters of the ocean of mind” (Graham 359).² For George Woodcock, *Mandeville* is remarkable if only for the impressive sense of melancholy that informs the book, a “misanthropic gloom whose consistency of texture is alone impressive” (“Notes” 693).

Indeed, we have in *Mandeville*, as in *Fleetwood*, another tormented misanthrope, a man who, by virtue of an unhealthy childhood and later social disappointments in adolescence, is unable to join in satisfying fellowship with family and friends. As both Marion Omar Farouk and Pamela Clemit have pointed out, the novel engages with the related issues of history and psychology and how both combine to produce character. As Clemit has argued, partly what makes *Mandeville* so compelling is the way in which the novel registers Godwin’s increasing skepticism of the powers of rationality to overcome the damaging effects of historical and political trauma (*Godwinian Novel* 96). In

Mandeville, our protagonist's misanthropy rapidly takes the form of an unsettling emotional instability which eventually devolves into madness, a delusional paranoia that, in Mona Scheuermann's terms, produces the "most total alienation possible" ("Study of Mind" 29). As Scheuermann argues, Mandeville's alienation "is the most complete of any of the Godwin heroes, and in the course of his study of the roots and the effects of that alienation Godwin created his most intensely focused psychological study" ("Study of Mind" 29).

The roots of Mandeville's alienation, as I shall argue in this chapter, stem from a childhood mis-education grounded in isolation, melancholy, and paranoia. In particular, the melancholic tone of formative years spent in the company of an emotionally broken and reclusive uncle, coupled with the overwhelming effects of a tutor's hyperbolic lessons in humility, operate to produce an environment that requires constant repression on Mandeville's part. This repression takes its most notable form in the suppression of *voice* that ultimately consumes Mandeville's character. Having internalized the imperatives of silence and restraint from childhood, Mandeville is incapable of effectively articulating his inner thoughts and emotions. His linguistic failures consequently marginalize him, and his melancholic isolation ultimately degenerates into paranoid madness as he moves into adulthood. Mandeville's only connective link to humanity rests in his relationship with his sister, Henrietta, for it is only through her that he is able to compensate for his own failures in self expression. As madness takes greater hold over his mind, however, Mandeville demands of Henrietta a complete identification, an effacement of self that displaces his own subjectivity and speaks to larger crises in identity.

“Shut Up in the Chamber of My Thoughts”

In *Political Justice*, Godwin argues that character is purely a product of external social influences, that forces of society—history, politics, culture, and education—operate on the young mind to shape temperament, intellectual aptitude, and morality. “The actions and dispositions of mankind,” asserts Godwin, “are the offspring of circumstances and events, and not of any original determination that they bring into the world” (Vol. 1 of *Political Justice* 26). This theory of development is clearly evident in *Mandeville*. For Farouk, the important role that history plays in the development of the novel’s plot and themes supports Godwin’s vision of character as something shaped by historical events: “Godwin saw that human character originates in the special features of the times, and created his novel *Mandeville* according to this conception” (111). Similarly, Clemit argues that, in the novel, Godwin “explores the disabling pressures of politics and history on the individual psyche” (*Godwinian Novel* 101). Indeed, in detailing the events of the seventeenth-century English Civil War, *Mandeville* is much more of an overtly historical and political text than Godwin’s previous novel, *Fleetwood*, which, while set in the first half of the eighteenth century, is largely a domestic tale that never engages with the larger contours of history with any detailed specificity. In this sense, *Mandeville* marks a return to Godwin’s earlier experiment in historical fiction, the 1799 *St. Leon*.

Despite the obvious historical context for the novel, however, *Mandeville* is, like *St. Leon* and *Fleetwood* before it, essentially a psychological study, a tale of one man’s emotional and intellectual disintegration, a disintegration that occurs against a backdrop

of larger historical and cultural traumas. Significantly, the seeds for this later disintegration are planted in childhood, in that Mandeville's formative years are spent in a melancholic environment that blights his development into a well-adjusted adult. We may recall Godwin's argument, in Volume 1 of *Political Justice*, that "the characters of men are determined in all their most essential circumstances by education" (45); we might also remember his conception of education as a "comprehensive" process involving "every incident that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections" (Vol. 1 of *Political Justice* 45).

In both *St. Leon* and *Fleetwood*, we saw how the heroes' later misanthropy developed from specific failures in this early childhood "education." Likewise, in *Mandeville*, the narrator draws a direct connection between the educative experiences of his youthful years and the later tragedy of his life, between the melancholic isolation and paranoia of his childhood and his ultimate development into a misanthrope who will never find peace or happiness in society or social relationships. In the 1797 *Enquirer*, Godwin emphasized the desirability of early socialization in the education of the young. "The child should early begin in some degree to live in the world, that is, with his species," argues Godwin (143). "He should neither be bred apart from the world, nor in ignorance of what passes in the world. He should be accustomed to behold the faces of his species. He should know something of the story of their passions, their singularities, and even of their vices" (143). In both *Fleetwood* and *Mandeville*, Godwin constructs protagonists who are denied this type of early interaction with society, protagonists who are "bred apart from the world" and are ignorant of their "species," and both novels

ultimately document the deleterious effects of such social isolation on the developing psyche.

There are numerous echoes of *Fleetwood* in the opening chapters of *Mandeville*, and it is significant that both protagonists experience many of the same blighting environmental influences. Orphaned at the age of three, his parents massacred in the 1641 Irish rebellion, Mandeville is escorted by a Protestant clergyman named Hilkieh Bradford from Dublin to his uncle's estate in Derbyshire, England. He spends the next nine years at the estate, in the guardianship of his uncle and under the tutelage of Bradford. Like Fleetwood's ancestral home in Merionethshire, North Wales, Mandeville House is isolated both geographically and socially. Nestled atop a rocky cliff overlooking the English Channel, the estate is surrounded by an "immense extent of barren heath," with the "nearest market-town [] at a distance of seventeen miles" (24). Visitors are virtually unknown at the House, and Mandeville's only social connections, like Fleetwood's, are with a tutor, whose companionship proves dissatisfying and even deleterious to his pupil, and a distant, withdrawn paternal figure. Although his withdrawal and dejection are by far the more extreme, Audley Mandeville is similar to Fleetwood's father in that he has been broken by a loss in love, and his heartbreak, combined with a sensible nature that exacerbated—and was exacerbated by—the effects of this heartbreak, renders him unfit as either a mentor or a companion to his young nephew.

For both Fleetwood and Mandeville, the social and geographical isolation of their childhood years, combined, perhaps, with a latent sensibility that renders them acutely sensitive to the effects and possibilities of this isolation, lends itself to solitary habits and

aimless wanderings which are productive of reverie and mythmaking. Ironically, the “barren heath” is fertile ground for both “rambles” and fantasy. For “a wanderer like myself,” Mandeville declares, “the desolateness of the scene, the wideness of its extent, and even the monotonous uniformity of its character, favourable to meditation and endless reverie, did not fail to be the source to me of many cherished and darling sensations” (24-25). He is “formed [] early to a habit of reverie” in which “visionary scenes” occupy his thoughts (44). An appreciation of the solitary natural spaces around them inspires, in both Fleetwood and Mandeville, an urge towards creativity. Unlike Fleetwood, however, whose immersion within the sublime grandeur of his childhood home cultivates a visionary mythmaking that gives him a sense of omnipotence and authority, Mandeville is prone to a melancholic reverie structured around visions of pain, despair, and death.

As we saw in the last chapter, Fleetwood found much to inspire the self in the rugged beauty and awesome sublimity of North Wales. For Mandeville, however, the geographical and social isolation of his uncle’s estate is compounded by the “eminently insalubrious” state of its natural surroundings (24). As Mandeville tells the reader, “various portions of bog and marshy ground” surround Mandeville House, enveloping its inhabitants in an “endless succession of vapours” or “steams” which threaten “healthful animal life” (24). The distinction between day and night, moreover, is confounded by “thick fogs and mists” that plunge the estate and its occupants into a perpetual and no doubt metaphorical darkness (24). Throughout Mandeville’s description of the House, there is the strong implication that the “insalubrious” influence of the landscape and its

climate cultivates both physical and mental disease in those who dwell in or near it. Perhaps consequently, then, Mandeville is drawn to the melancholic images of the violence and sterility of nature:

I delighted to wander; but I was not delighted with objects of cheerfulness. It will already have been seen, that I was not often intruded on with impressions of this sort. I loved a hazy day, better than a sunshiny one. My organs of vision, or the march of my spirits, gave me an aversion to whatever was dazzling and gaudy. I loved to listen to the pattering of the rain, the roaring of the waves, and the pelting of the storm. There was I know not what in the sight of a bare and sullen heath, that afforded me a much more cherished pleasure, than I could ever find in the view of the most exuberant fertility, or the richest and most vivid parterre. (44)

Repulsed by beauty and fertility, and attracted to nature in its violent and sterile manifestations, Mandeville indulges in the construction of “visionary scenes”—images and narratives that take shape in his mind while roaming over this “bare and sullen heath.” Inspired by the dour and hostile scenes of nature, Mandeville finds himself nursing violent fantasies, reveries which form themselves into “a perpetual succession of flight, and pursuit, and anguish, and murder” (44). Moreover, the melancholic turn of Mandeville’s imagination is further inflamed by the horrific barbarities he witnessed as a child during the Irish rebellion: “I recollected distinctly the expiring bodies I had beheld along the roadside in my flight, some perishing with hunger and cold, and some writhing under the mortal wounds and tortures that had been inflicted by their pursuers” (44).

Significantly, the aggressive tone of Mandeville's imaginative reveries also extends to himself. Whereas Fleetwood's visionary indulgences produced delusions of grandeur, in which he was "the occupier of palaces, or the ruler of nations" (56), Mandeville's fantasies are of a more complex and ominous sort, combining both an inflated perception of his own importance with a crippling sense of persecution. "Habitually a visionary," he is mired in fantasies in which he is victimized by forces attempting to thwart his inherent greatness:

My visions were frequently of long duration, and branched out into a variety of minuter circumstances. In these moods I sometimes imagined that every thing around me was engaged in a conspiracy against me, that I was, in some inexplicable way, a captive, whose genuine destiny led to higher things, but who, like some imperial bird that had fallen into the hands of lawless men, was shorn of its strongest feathers. (60)

For Fleetwood, consuming the natural scenes around him produced the sense of a visionary authorship that allowed him to carve out a sense of omnipotence against the passive backdrop of an acquiescent nature. Imaginative daydreaming amounted to building "castles in the air" (56), a metaphor that attests to the grandeur of Fleetwood's visions and the powerful position he plays in them. In these childhood visions, Fleetwood retains the controlling hand and wields considerable power, and this sense of authority ultimately comes to pervade his perception of his place in the "real" world as well. One may recall, for example, the way in which he projects himself as a confident and fearless colonizer of the North Wales landscape, "descend[ing] the most frightful

declivities, and often penetrat[ing] into recesses which had perhaps never before felt the presence of a human creature” (55).

In contrast, Mandeville is haunted by a perception of himself as helpless victim, incapable of exerting any control over his being or destiny. He does of course, like Fleetwood, suffer from a destructive overabundance of pride. “I was proud,” Mandeville declares, “because I felt my value. I was conscious that my intellectual powers far exceeded the common rate [. . .] I felt an inborn pride of soul, which, like an insurmountable barrier, seemed to cut me off for ever from every thing mean, despicable and little” (56). This overweening pride, moreover, lends itself to an ambitious anticipation of his future achievements: “I felt like one for whom adventures and great events are reserved, and, as we find it expressed in the common story-books, who is ‘to go out, and seek his fortune’” (53). Despite such expressions of pride and optimism, however, Mandeville’s visionary meditations suggest that more compelling fears of persecution dominate his inner world. Adventures, great events, and fortune may be reserved for him, but these rewards are by no means guaranteed, as larger conspiracies will organize themselves against him, robbing him of these advantages and rendering him as passive and helpless as a bird in the hands of “lawless men.” It is perhaps his acute belief in the persecutory forces which he perceives to be aligned against him that draws him so strongly to the narratives and images in the *Book of Martyrs*. With its gruesome descriptions of torture, the text has an indelible effect on his young mind, cultivating the fearful and suspicious turn of his temperament and “produc[ing] a strange confusion and horror in [his] modes of thinking” (52).

Mandeville's paranoia ultimately produces the paradox of a young boy who, while feeling inherently superior in his intellectual and moral capacities, is nevertheless prone to anxious insecurities regarding his ability to withstand the forces of life, or to exert any power or authority over his own being. Like Fleetwood, Mandeville is a wanderer, an explorer of nature; unlike Fleetwood, however, who had the authoritative confidence to "descend[] the most frightful declivities" and "penetrat[e]" obscure "recesses" (55), Mandeville, in his wanderings across the "barren heath," resigns himself to the "firm ground," "avoiding as carefully as might be a deviation into quaggy and treacherous paths" (24). Whereas Fleetwood courted challenge and potential danger, Mandeville shrinks from these things, a response suggestive of his insecure need to protect himself (and his ego) from challenges he feels unable to withstand. What is present in Fleetwood, but strikingly absent in Mandeville, is the colonizing instinct that is often both a symptom of, as well as a contributor to, a defined sense of one's authoritative selfhood. Ironically, for all his pride, Mandeville is not confident, but fearful of persecution, suspicious of others, and anxiously aware of his helpless and victimized state, at least as he perceives it.

For a number of critics of the novel, Mandeville's later misanthropy and madness are inextricably bound up with this early failure in establishing a confident selfhood. For Tysdahl, Mandeville's schizophrenic misanthropy is the result of the "weak hold" he has on his "identity;" this, argues Tysdahl, is the product of social isolation, the lack of "those contacts with others that could have given him a definite and secure idea of his own self" (142). Mandeville is isolated socially, and this social alienation no doubt contributes to his uncertain sense of identity. I would argue, however, that the few social "contacts"

Mandeville does experience in his youth—namely, his interactions with his uncle and tutor at Mandeville House—contribute, perhaps more than his isolation does, to the anxious insecurities and feelings of powerlessness and rage that form the foundation for his later hatred and fear of humanity. The social dynamics of Mandeville House, structured as they are around the demands of excessive silence and passivity, on one hand, and the silencing effects of hyperbolic discourse, on the other, operate to produce an environment that requires constant repression on Mandeville's part.

The “insalubrious” gloom of the estate's landscape and climate is mirrored in the melancholy of its master, whose “passive mode of existence” mires him in sadness and regret over the past. His uncle, Mandeville declares, “loved his sadness, for it had become a part of himself [. . .] He found a nameless pleasure in the appendages and forms of melancholy, so great, that he would as soon have consented to cut off his right hand, as to part with them. In reality he rather vegetated than lived” (41). Audley has so internalized a languid passivity into the very fabric of his existence that he has rendered himself quite incapable of withstanding the realities of life—its mutability, its activity, and its noise. As such, a sense of restraint and solemnity pervades the House and governs the behaviour of its occupants. The domestic staff, for example, exhibit a “solemn countenance, and a slow and measured step” (43).

Although only a boy, Mandeville is also expected to restrain any signs of activity or life around his uncle. As he describes,

if by any rare accident I came within sight of [my uncle] unexpectedly, I was instructed to hide myself, to steal away with cautious steps, and to do

nothing that might excite observation [. . .] if the restlessness of boyish years chanced at any time to awake me to a gayer tone, the sight of my uncle checked my buoyant spirits at once, my countenance fell, and my thoughts became solemn. (42)

Although Mandeville declares himself to be of a naturally “gloomy and saturnine cast” (53), it is apparent from descriptions like these that his youthful solemnity was, at least to some extent, a consciously performed act that required a certain repression of “natural” tendencies towards gaiety and activity. Indeed, as Scheuermann remarks, “Mandeville’s earliest manifestations of withdrawal and sadness are learned behaviours, inculcated both by precept and by emulation of his uncle” (“Study of Mind” 24).

Such a performance, moreover, seems to carry within it a certain denial of one’s very existence. Mandeville, after all, must “hide himself,” “steal away,” and “do nothing that might excite observation”—all of which implies a conscious removal of one’s being from the realm of acknowledgment. It becomes clear that Mandeville, from a young age, experiences a certain effacement of his identity, an effacement that demands not only a restraint of the “buoyant spirits,” but a suppression of voice as well. Indeed, it is particularly significant that the passive solemnity which governs the domestic staff is specifically registered in their reluctance to speak and the consequent brevity of their speech: “When you spoke to them, they seemed to hesitate whether they should answer you; and if the final decision was in your favour, the answer was framed by the most concise and sententious model” (43-44).

In the presence of Audley, even Mandeville's verbose tutor, Hilkiah Bradford, is subject to a self-imposed silencing, in that his "surprising powers of copiousness and amplification" are consciously limited to perfunctory and concise comments on his pupil's progress (42-43). Mandeville sees his uncle once a month in formalized and stilted meetings which "seldom last[] more than two minutes" (42). He is not encouraged to speak during these meetings, nor does the rigid and controlled nature of the scene allow for fluid and natural exchange. There are no opportunities at Mandeville House for true and unmediated expressions of emotion and sentiment. From these experiences, Mandeville is taught to suppress his voice and efface the very sights and sounds of his existence.

Within this environment of silence and controlled discourse, Mandeville is also subject to another force compromising his psychological development. While he internalizes the imperatives of emotional and verbal restraint from his uncle's example, he is also paradoxically subject to the dominating effects of the overwhelming ferocity of Bradford's lengthy discourses on the glories of Protestant martyrdom, the corruption and heresy of the Catholic Church, and the moral and spiritual necessity of renouncing pride and self-conceit. Bradford's anti-Papal discourses, in particular, "inflamed his blood, and made his eye sparkle with primitive and apostolic fury" (46). Indeed, Bradford's religious fervour on this topic borders on mania, and in the intense energy and overwhelming verbosity of his speech he seems the very antithesis of everything Mandeville House represents.

Moreover, Mandeville's relationship with Bradford is fraught with conflict. "I scarcely loved Hilksiah," he admits, claiming that the "magisterial tone" and "elaborate style" of his discourse proved "insupportably galling," especially when applied to his own character and behaviour (54-55). Despite his resentment on these occasions, however, Mandeville's relationship with Bradford is more generally informed by extreme feelings of worshipful dependence: "I was convinced of his integrity; I admired his intellectual powers; I was lost in astonishment at the greatness of his attainments. I was conscious of the limited sphere of my own knowledge; I distrusted my judgment; I looked up to him as an oracle" (54). Fleetwood, as we may recall, also refers to Gifford as an "oracle" (337), describing, with a certain belated alarm, the "ascendency" which the orchestrator of his downfall obtains over his judgment and thought processes (384). Similarly, Mandeville speaks of Bradford in terms of the "ascendency he possessed over [his] mind" (54). As Mandeville asserts, "he was [. . .] my oracle and guide, the master of my theories, and the regulator of my faith" (69).

The connections suggested here between Fleetwood's friendship with the manipulative Gifford and Mandeville's relationship with his tutor are not misplaced, for Mandeville, like Fleetwood, finds his own voice and subjectivity subsumed by those of his "oracle," to similarly tragic results. Bradford, of course, is not the incontestable villain that Gifford, a man ruled by greed and driven by intentional deceit, proves himself to be. Indeed, Bradford's motivations are largely honourable, in that he hopes to instill in his young charge a becoming sense of humility and religious piety. Despite his best intentions, however, Bradford's pedagogical approach—which seems dominated by

lengthy and hyperbolic lectures on chosen topics—only serves to further Mandeville’s alienation and misanthropic tendencies, as Bradford himself suspects on his deathbed (66-67).

Godwin was particularly sensitive to the fact that the educative process, in his day, so often involved a certain tendency towards “despotism” on the part of the tutor or “preceptor.” In the *Enquirer*, he argued that “all education is despotism. It is perhaps impossible for the young to be conducted without introducing in many cases the tyranny of implicit obedience. Go there; do that; read; write; rise; lie down; will perhaps for ever be the language addressed to youth by age” (60). This dangerous tendency can infect even the best-intentioned educative programmes, but Godwin emphasizes that “private” education—such as the one experienced by Mandeville—is particularly susceptible to this type of tyrannous control—or, at least, the student will experience the despotism more acutely because he suffers alone, without peers. “The most wretched of all slaveries,” contends Godwin, “is that which I endure alone; the whole weight of which falls upon my own shoulders, and in which I have no fellow-sufferer to share with me a particle of my burthen” (*Enquirer* 60). The social isolation of private education necessarily results in solitary suffering, and such suffering, argues Godwin, creates antagonism between the tutor and the pupil, and can lead to despair on the part of the student. Under the “slavery” of such despotic control, “the mind pusillanimously shrinks. [The student is] left alone with [his] tyrant, and [is] utterly hopeless and forlorn” (*Enquirer* 60). The tutor-pupil relationship modeled by Bradford and Mandeville is a striking portrayal of the antagonism which can result from the despotism of private education.

On one level, Mandeville's alienation from Bradford is simply a product of his excessive pride, of the anger and humiliation produced by Bradford's instructions in humility. Mandeville's "soul revolt[s] from the ignoble comparison" of himself to a beggar-boy or a kitchen hand (57), and he bitterly resents having to perform manual labour (58). On another, more compelling level, however, Mandeville's rage and resentment seem to be products of the silencing effects of Bradford's overwhelming and insistent discourse, discourse that, ironically, also inspires his worshipful reverence of his tutor. "Tickled with the speciousness of his discourse" (56), Bradford "amply [] unrol[s] the volume of his lessons" (54); he "accompan[ies] his instructions with a full statement of the causes and considerations by which they are inforced" (54); he "dwelt upon those conceptions" (54-55), and never failed to "comment[] with great rigour" (55).

Taught by both his uncle and by his socialization at Mandeville House to repress the sight and sounds of his existence, Mandeville is furthered silenced by Bradford's excessive speech. The insistent energy of Bradford's lectures leaves no room for his pupil's own voice, and, as such, Mandeville feels helplessly passive in the face of Bradford's overwhelming discourse. Mandeville is thus split between outward compliance to his tutor and an inner rage he cannot verbally articulate: "I submitted indeed outwardly, for my nature did not prompt me to scenes of violence; but I retained the principle of rebellion entire, shut up in the chamber of my thoughts" (59). Internal rebellion, for Godwin, was too often the unfortunate consequence of private education, where "control" leads to a "contention of the passions" (*Enquirer* 61). Godwin articulates this contention from the perspective of the student: "I feel all the bitterness of

being obliged uncomplainingly to submit the turbulence of my own passions to the turbulence of the passions of my preceptor [. . .] [M]y heart pants with indignation against the injustice, real or imaginary, that I endure” (*Enquirer* 61).

Such contention, and the internal rebellion it necessarily engenders, contributes to the development of a spiteful disposition in the pupil. For Mandeville, however, rebellion is simply the exercise of his own voice, the freedom and ability to articulate, without fear or restraint, the sentiments or emotions of his mind. Furthermore, it is the very necessity of repressing this “rebellious” tendency, his voice, that cultivates the rage and bitterness that form the foundation for his later misanthropy. “I was not indeed a tumultuous and refractory pupil,” Mandeville declares. “I did not give much trouble to my preceptor; *but on that very account* these things revolved incessantly in my mind, and worked themselves more deeply into the substance of my character” (55; emphasis added). His misanthropy, in other words, is a direct product of his silence, in that the very act of not articulating his anger furthers the hateful turn of his mind. Indeed, for Mandeville, an unhealthy mind is the product of repressing the voice:

I said little; but this circumstance only deepened the effect on my mind.

‘Give sorrow words’, says the great master of the human soul.³ Whatever sentiment finds its way to the lips, and vents its energies through the medium of language, by that means finds relief. ‘Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh’; and we feel satisfied, if we have told, even to the desert air, but much more in the hearing of an intelligent creature, the story of our griefs.⁴ But my silent nature was an ever-living and

incessant curse to me. My displeasures brooded, and heated, and inflamed themselves, at the bottom of my soul, and finding no vent, shook so my single frame of man, like to an earthquake. (59-60)

While Mandeville is insistent that these early experiences are responsible for the later development of his personality—they “worked themselves [] deeply into the substance of my character,” he argues (55)—he nevertheless considers the possibility of an inherent misanthropy contaminating his soul. He wonders, for example, if he might be a “monster, not formed with the feelings of human nature” (44). The description of his childhood, however, serves to support Godwin’s view that external environment, above all, shapes human character, and we get a clear sense that the combined forces of Audley’s example, the somber imperatives of Mandeville House, and the effects of Bradford’s pedagogy shape Mandeville into the mentally unstable misanthrope he will ultimately become. In particular, we see how the silencing effects of these three forces operate on Mandeville’s mind to produce a child, and then a young man, who feels unable to exercise his own voice, who feels silenced by the overwhelming pressures of his social environment. Unable to express outwardly, in speech, his emotions or thoughts, Mandeville increasingly turns inward, internalizing the imperative of silence and perceiving himself as a passive victim of various persecutory forces, a perception which then structures his imaginative conceptions of himself and his place in the world. As we will see, Mandeville soon becomes aware of the power inherent in using language, and using it well. His inability to take an active or effective role in expressing his thoughts or emotions, his inability to escape being “shut up in the chamber of [his] thoughts” (59),

will come to symbolize his ultimate failure in life. This failure, furthermore, will be the most compelling factor in the development of his misanthropy and his eventual mental disintegration.

“The Interchange of Defiance and Debate”

The potentially deceptive power of language is a central theme in *Mandeville*. Bradford’s discourse after all is articulate, yet “specious,” crafted into “well sounding periods,” yet “vague and indefinite”(56). Indeed, in this sense, Bradford’s language mirrors the geographic murkiness of the land surrounding Mandeville House, with its “vapours” and “steams,” its “thick fogs” which envelop everything within an opaque and confounding mist (24). The eloquence of his lectures on Mandeville’s character masks the flaws in his reasoning, the lack of clarity in his advice. “If I desired to correct myself in conformity to its admonitions, I knew not where to begin [. . .] it furnished me with no light to direct my course,” declares Mandeville (56). Bradford’s example serves as an instructive lesson for his pupil regarding the seductive appeal of eloquent speech, but he will receive a much more extreme lesson in the deliberate manipulation of language for deceitful ends. We see this most obviously in the character of Coke Holloway, the unscrupulous attorney who designs numerous schemes to bring both Audley Mandeville and his nephew under his sway of influence and to ultimately deprive Mandeville of the estate entailed on him.

Godwin had made an earlier indictment of lawyers, and of the profession of the law in general, in his *Enquirer* essay, ““Of Trades and Professions.” In that essay,

Godwin criticizes the law as “necessarily captious and technical, pregnant with petty subtleties and unmeaning distinctions” (225). “[A lawyer’s] great object,” contends Godwin, “is to puzzle and perplex. His chief attention is given to the enquiry, how he may distort the law so as to suit the cause in which he is engaged” (*Enquirer* 225).

Lawyers, in Godwin’s view, thus operate in a manner antithetical to that of the rational philosopher, who is guided by the principles of justice, reason, and the pursuit of universal benevolence.

Indeed, in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin had already created a fictionalized portrait of the dishonourable attorney motivated by greed and self-interest, rather than the pursuit of justice and truth. In that novel, the tenant farmer Hawkins correctly perceives the law as an instrument of persecution, rather than justice, a tool “better adapted for a weapon of tyranny in the hands of the rich, than for a shield to protect the humbler part of the community against their usurpations” (138). Although he is initially reluctant to redress his wrongs through the law, he eventually brings an action against Tyrell, his former landlord and current persecutor. Tyrell in turn instructs his lawyer, Swineard, to manipulate the case in order to pervert the course of justice: “the business was, by affidavits, motions, pleas, demurrers, flaws, and appeals, to protract the question from term to term and from court to court” (139). Swineard, thus directed by Tyrell, is not concerned with justice, or even with a successful “repelling of the charge” against his client (139); instead, he employs the “whole series of his subterfuges” to manipulate the legal system and evade disclosure of the truth (138).

In *Mandeville*, Godwin returns to the figure of the unethical lawyer to illustrate the potentially deceptive nature of language. In a letter, Audley's steward informs Mandeville of Holloway's presence at the estate and the unlikely influence he wields over the master. "Such a scoundrel as this," writes the steward, "ought to have no power" (185). Holloway does have power, however, and his power is a direct function of the way in which he uses language to manipulate others' perceptions of reality. For Holloway, that "pettifogger of the law," as Mandeville terms him (231), an ambitious man's greatest skill is in learning to veil his true motives with false rhetoric, with a performance of kindness and flattery. "The whole world [. . .] the civilised world, was a scene of warfare under the mask of civility," and for the lawyer, the "most advantageously disposed" of all modern professionals to use language as a weapon, "flattery is the art, that makes him who is accomplished in it, the master of the masters of the earth" (234). With his well-chosen words and carefully orchestrated actions, Holloway is able to ingratiate himself into Audley's home and confidence.

It is his skill with obfuscation, however, that serves, on at least one significant occasion, to bring Mandeville under his control. After Audley's death, Holloway manages to retain autonomous control over Mandeville's legal and financial affairs by overwhelming the young man with the "sublime obscurities of [his] explanations" (220). In deliberately shaping his explanations of business concepts and terms in such a way as to intentionally obscure Mandeville's comprehension of such things, and in overwhelming his young client with largely irrelevant jargon and minutiae, Holloway uses language to cultivate ignorance, rather than knowledge. He "was a master in his

art,” asserts Mandeville. “He knew how to ‘perplex, and dash maturest counsels’,⁵ and to congregate a cloud that should baffle the acutest vision” (220). Indeed, even Mallison, Holloway’s unscrupulous nephew, is impressed with the lawyer’s facility in the manipulation of language and legal discourse: ““He has the law at his fingers’ ends, with all its quirks and its cranks, and its ins and its outs,” he boasts towards the end of the novel (304). As a “pettifogger of the law,” Holloway engages in obfuscation in a deliberate attempt to veil his true intentions within a shroud of “sublime obscurities” (220). Mandeville House, with its “thick fogs and mists” (24), is thus a fitting environment for Holloway to practise his rhetorical deception: in their ability to trap auditors within an entanglement of lies and confusion, Holloway’s words evoke the “vast quantities of sargassos and weeds” thrown up by the tides around Mandeville House (24).

Holloway’s nephew serves as his apprentice in such deception. Mallison, whose very name speaks to the malevolence of his character (“*malum*” being Latin for “evil” or “crime”), is a former schoolmate of Mandeville from Winchester College, the public school Mandeville is sent to after Bradford’s death.⁶ At the College, Mallison takes a sadistic pleasure in encouraging the verbal harassment of his fellow students, in “seeing his fellows writhe with mental pain” (84). His weapon of choice, like Holloway’s, is his keen control over language, his ability to pervert the words of another to suggest something entirely different, something calculated to inspire the humiliation and torment of his chosen victim. From “honey itself,” declares Mandeville, he could “extract a poison” (84). Significantly, when Mallison resurfaces in the text as Holloway’s nephew and apprentice, he manipulates Mandeville, not through “poison,” as he had done years

earlier, but through the “honey” of false flattery and well-designed conversation. With his carefully worded “stock of anecdotes and panegyric” (244) on Mandeville’s character, combined with a memory that allows him to recite long passages from Mandeville’s favourite authors and mimic the idiosyncrasies of their former school masters, Mallison is able to ingratiate himself into Mandeville’s confidence through the power of conversation.

It is at Winchester School that Mandeville meets Lionel Clifford, the young man he will perceive as his life-long nemesis, the “evil genius” who will blight his every chance at happiness or success (106). For Mandeville, Clifford’s defining characteristic is his unparalleled eloquence, his ability to expound on a variety of topics with remarkable ease and articulate energy. Whereas Mandeville labours under the imperatives of silence inculcated in childhood, and feels “shut up in the chamber of [his] thoughts” as a result, Clifford seems to “attract all eyes, and to win all hearts” with the gaiety of his wit and the open nature of his interactions with others (82). To Mandeville, Clifford’s discourse is a manifestation of the sublime, and the natural and unmediated nature of his rhetorical effusions seem to be the inevitable overflow of an inspired soul superior to Mandeville’s own. In one of his many long speeches to his schoolmates, Clifford declaims against the evils of wealth and touts the glories of poverty, and Mandeville acutely recognizes the sublime effects of Clifford’s eloquence on the sensibilities of his peers: “these discourses of Clifford, while he spoke them, appeared almost divine. He charmed, as it were, our very souls out of our bodies, and might have led us through the world” (89). “He spoke,” Mandeville continues, “because he could not

help it, and to give vent to his full bosom. And his discourses were always so well timed, so aptly rose out of the occasion in hand, and were so animated and pithy, that every one longed for the occasion, and were delighted to listen to the magic of his tongue” (89-90).

Mandeville is clearly in awe of Clifford’s rhetorical prowess and, more significantly, of the power he commands over his auditors. However, as the above descriptions suggest, he is also deeply suspicious of language and, perhaps more importantly, of those who use it too well. He had after all, from his early interactions with Bradford, sensed that excessive eloquence can potentially mask “specious” argument. Eloquence, as Mandeville also knew, tends to lull its auditors into a passive position of reverence. Mandeville thus perceives something deceptive in Clifford’s discourse, an incongruity between surface appearance and actual reality. His “discourses” may appear to be spontaneous expressions of the authentic self, but, to Mandeville, they also potentially bear the stamp of careful orchestration, of being “well timed,” “aptly [rising] out of the occasion in hand” (89-90). Mandeville increasingly comes to regard Clifford as a sort of sophist, a supernatural “enchanter” who distorts reality to manipulate the perceptions of those around him (90). In this way, Clifford, in Mandeville’s eyes, operates as a corrupting force at Winchester. While Mandeville admits to feeling envious of Clifford, the “root” of his aversion towards him lies in a “sort of moral disapprobation”: “I considered Clifford as a kind of mountebank, debauching the character of his equals, and destroying that sobriety and concentration of soul, without which there can be no considerable virtue” (83). In Mandeville’s mind, the sophistries of

Clifford, combined with the gaiety and wit of his speech, fosters an unbecoming levity in his peers which will lead to vice.

Mandeville's first interactions with Clifford at Winchester School initiate a life-long pattern whereby his sense of self is organized around a conception of himself as the very antithesis to Clifford and his eloquence. Ironically, despite Mandeville's moral disapprobation of Clifford and the power he wields through language, it is on precisely this ground that he feels most envious of his rival. In contrast to Clifford's easy sociality and open style of communicative exchange with his schoolmates, Mandeville's "rooted habits" are organized around the introverted processes of "reflection, silence, and reverie" (83). "I was not like Clifford," Mandeville soon realizes upon arriving at Winchester:

I could not put my soul into my tongue, and witch all hearers with my eloquence. Envious nature had denied to me this privilege. But I felt my deficiency with fierce and burning impatience. Why should this youth steal away the souls of his companions with glozing words, and I have no tongue to check his mistakes, and expose his sophistries? (91)

We see here the ambivalence of Mandeville's relationship with language and rhetoric. While language is something to be mistrusted, as it can "witch all hearers" into an acceptance of false logic and ultimately vice, it is also perceived by Mandeville as both the source and the manifestation of authentic selfhood, whereby the "tongue" becomes the conduit for the genuine expression of one's "soul," as well as a moral force in the correction of "mistakes" and "sophistries."

Certainly, Mandeville feels his lack of rhetorical prowess as a decided “deficiency” on this altruistic level. In his inability to “check [the] mistakes” and “expose [the] sophistries” he perceives in Clifford’s discourse, Mandeville fails, in his mind, to act as a corrective force in the “sacred cause of truth” (91). More significantly, however, Mandeville’s failures with language threaten his very sense of a coherent self. Incapable of expressing, verbally, the sentiments of his mind—unable to “unbosom [his] thoughts” to another (96)—Mandeville increasingly projects his frustration through the body, taking solace in the brutal physicality of inflicting violent harm on himself and his schoolmates. “I delighted in the sight of blood,” Mandeville remarks of these boyhood confrontations. “Whether it flowed from the person of my competitor or from my own, in the one case no less than the other, it seemed to lighten and dilute the impure and substantial fluid that weighed on my heart. I gained some, but an imperfect relief to the injustice I felt” (93). The masochism of this comment suggests the extent of the alienation between Mandeville’s mind and body. Trapped inside a body that, in his perception, fails him, he can only experience a limited sort of relief and pleasure by inflicting pain on an offending body he cannot entirely claim as his own. “I had no respect for the limbs and members of my body,” he declares, “and viewed them as an incumbrance upon the activity of my spirit. They were mine, not me. My arm was but an implement and a tool, of the same nature as a hooked stick, and of no value but for the commission in which it was employed” (94).

It is therefore significant that Mandeville describes his own subjectivity in terms of the disconnection which he feels exists between his mind and his body. “The habit of

my soul was endless rumination,” he writes, “in which the tongue was chained up in silence, and the limbs almost forgot their office, but the thinking part of the machine worked incessantly, like the members and wheels of a vast machine, or like the eternal descent of the waters in a foaming cataract” (68). Although Mandeville details his early development in terms of the overwhelming role that silence comes to play in forming the substantive part of his character and in structuring his interactions with the world around him, the reader is nevertheless aware of a tremendous intellectual energy (the “endless rumination” of a mental “machine” that operates “incessantly”) which can find no release or expression in a body from which Mandeville feels inherently alienated.

Due to a childhood spent at Mandeville House conforming to the imperatives of silence inculcated through his experiences with a vegetative uncle and a domineering tutor, Mandeville has retreated so far into his own mental space that he finds it almost impossible to breach the dictate of silence he has imposed on himself. By the time he arrives at the “moving and busy scene” of Winchester School (82), this self-silencing has played such a central role in the development of his subjectivity that it functions more as an involuntary silencing whereby he is unable to speak, or voice his case, even when it is socially imperative for him to do so. Indeed, it is precisely his inability to assert his voice at Winchester School that initiates the train of misunderstandings that will ultimately blight his future prospects. As Mandeville tells the reader, “political party ran very high” at Winchester (80), and the various ideological and religious tensions structuring the School and its student body lend a combative tone to social interaction.⁷

Mandeville falls victim to such political prejudice when a book of satirical prints lampooning Charles I is found in his apartments and shown to Clifford, Mandeville's nemesis. Although the book is found in Mandeville's rooms, some doubt exists as to its actual ownership given that Mandeville at the time had struck up a limited sort of friendship with a boy named Waller, another social misfit at Winchester and, significantly, the son of a famous Presbyterian military commander. As both boys are Presbyterian and thus considered possible owners of the book, an informal judicial assembly headed by Clifford and comprised of other head-form boys is convened to determine both the book's owner and the penalty he will face for possessing such seditious material. Although, in private, Waller claims the book as his own, he nevertheless cowardly imputes ownership to Mandeville in a fearful, yet rhetorically effective, speech delivered to the assembly of his peers. It is Mandeville's pervasive silence in the situation, however, that allows for Waller's deception. When brought before the assembly, Mandeville stands in "mute astonishment" (99), convinced that, in his innocence, he is freed from the necessity of defending himself in speech. "It was not my business to speak to justify *myself*," Mandeville declares, "and still less to cast the charge upon [Waller]; and I left my companion to explain the matter as he could" (99). Waller is thus able to weave an artful tale out of the vacuum created by Mandeville's silence, and even when faced with the reality of his friend's treachery, Mandeville is capable of no greater articulation in his own defence than an "interjection of astonishment" (99) and a one-sentence denial of ownership that he naively assumes will be credited as the truth (100).

On one level, Mandeville ascribes his silence to choice, to his sense of pride in refusing to justify himself on so base an accusation. “Could I have stooped,” he asks, “to make an elaborate defence against an infamous charge, which I felt within myself to be void of the slightest foundation?” (100). Moreover, he eventually enters into Waller’s deception as a willing accomplice, agreeing to accept ownership of the book and shoulder both the punishment and social ostracism that such a choice will yield. The masochism of such an act, however, is ironically perceived by Mandeville as a source of power, particularly as it allows him to effect a posture of silent suffering:

[T]here was something gallant, that at this time suited my savage temper, in braving the imputation of guilt, when secretly, in the chambers of my own heart, I knew that I was innocent, and more than innocent [. . .]

There appeared to me, while I thought of it, a sort of lordly delight in standing the scorns and reproaches of my companions, when all the time in my own reflections I smiled contemptuously at their error, and rose serene above the clouds in which their misconstructions sought to envelop me.

(103)

For Mandeville, “braving” the “scorns and reproaches” of his peers will prove both his moral superiority and strength of character, and it is significant that the demonstration of his superiority in this regard rests on the silence he must sustain in the face of social disapprobation. In Mandeville’s conception, his moral superiority is a direct function of not only innocence but, more specifically, of an innocence that is never verbally expressed, an innocence that can only be recognized in the introspective space of his own

mind, “in the chambers of [his] own heart” (103). Mandeville thus retreats into his own mind yet again, taking refuge in constructing his silence as a sort of masochistic choice on his part. There is a definite sense, however, that Mandeville’s decision to brave the charge on Waller’s behalf grows out of a conscious awareness of his inability to assert his voice before his hostile peers. Even before he shoulders the blame for Waller, Mandeville is cognizant of his rhetorical failings: “I was not eloquent,” he laments. “My nature refused to supply me with the stream of a copious discourse on any occasion” (100).

We see another missed opportunity at vindication a few years later, when, as a seventeen-year-old student at Oxford, Mandeville returns from a disappointing adventure as attempted secretary to the commander-in-chief of the Royalist and Presbyterian forces arming against the government of Cromwell. Mandeville, anxious to play a role in the upcoming engagement, and eager to assume the post for which he had been strongly recommended by an ambitious statesman, sees in this “first scene upon the theatre of real life” (120), a chance to assert a burgeoning sense of masculine independence. When Mandeville is denied the post, however, on the account of it being promised already to Clifford, he returns to Oxford in quiet despair over this missed opportunity, his violent hatred of Clifford strengthened all the more by the humiliation Mandeville feels he has received at his hands.

Mandeville’s inability to defend himself against the accusations of his Winchester schoolfellows had allowed for the rumours of his anti-Royalist sentiments to take root, and we see the fallout of this unfortunate circumstance when, after returning to Oxford,

he becomes the subject of spiteful misconstructions regarding his time spent with the Royalist forces. When Lisle, a fervently Royalist schoolmate previously befriended by Mandeville, accuses him of being both a cowardly deserter and a potential spy for Cromwell's regime, a "king-killer in [his] heart" (137), Mandeville is faced, for the second time in his life, with defending himself against false charges. Although Lisle tells Mandeville that his "ambiguous adventure [. . .] admits of no honourable explanation" (137), the very characterization of the "adventure" as "ambiguous" suggests that there is at least a limited potential for Mandeville to clear his name in this matter. He fails, however—just as he had failed at Winchester School—to speak up in his own defense and launch an adequate explanation of his actions. Rather, just as at Winchester, he listens, "with astonishment" (137), and nurtures a rage that he then refuses to express:

I thought scorn of the idea of vindicating myself, of making appeal, as to the scales of a balance, casting the foul aspersions to which I had listened into one scale, and my own explanations and protestations into the other, and carefully watching which way the beam would turn. This, of all things, was the most contrary to my temper [. . .] He that did not understand me from the impulse of his own mind, that did not find in his own heart the explanation of my conduct, and the true estimate of my thoughts, was unworthy to hear me. (138).

Just as at Winchester, Mandeville constructs his silence as both a source and a manifestation of his pride and superiority of character, refusing to accept a social reality that may require him to explain himself or his conduct. His character, he believes, should

be known and felt, in the “impulse” of the “mind” or the “heart,” and should not be reliant on any “explanations or protestations” on his part.

Just as at Winchester, however, Mandeville’s “voluntary” silence carries within it marks of a passive resignation that underscores his awareness of his own rhetorical failings. Later in his memoir, he reflects on his schoolboy days and the “diffidence” which “sealed up [his] lips” and destroyed his attempts at persuasive rhetoric: “I fell into blunders inconceivable,” he laments. “All that I knew before seemed to have left me at the moment it was wanted; I could never command the recollection of things, in the interchange of defiance and debate, that were most fully at my disposal in the cool element of meditation” (243). Although, in the context of his memoir, Mandeville is specifically referring to his failures in the persuasive discourse of debate, the sentiments he expresses speak to his larger failures with language and self-expression. Damaged by a childhood mired in silence and repression, Mandeville is, at this point in his life, unable to assert his own voice at precisely those crucial moments of “defiance and debate,” those moments which will help shape not only his future, but his sense of self and his perception of his own subjectivity.

Significantly, after both of his public failures in self-defense, Mandeville suffers either a physical or mental collapse. Immediately following the judicial assembly at Winchester, he falls into a “raging fever” that incapacitates him for several weeks. When he recovers, he is an “altered creature,” a pale and “languid” version of his former self, a “meagre, unlaid ghost” (105). Similarly, after his confrontation with Lisle, Mandeville plunges into the forest surrounding Oxford, mad with rage and despair, and collapses

senselessly. Confined to an asylum for a short period, he sinks into a delirium filled with grisly images that send him into hysterics. Struggling against those attempting to subdue him, he is truly the picture of a madman: “My teeth were ground almost to pieces; my head shook, and my mouth scattered foam, like that of a war-horse in the midst of the din of arms” (144). In both of these cases, Mandeville suffers either a physical or mental collapse in the wake of social embarrassments which underscore his failures in self-expression. In this sense, both incidents not only foreshadow what is to come for Mandeville, but document the very strain of silence on the mind and the body.

For Mandeville, his “first scene upon the theatre of life” (120) results in humiliating disappointment that underscores his failed attempt at entering into masculine life. As he relates to the reader, the post of secretary to Sir Joseph Wagstaff was so appealing precisely because it offered him the opportunity to “count for something” in the world of men:

I felt that the door of manly existence had just been opened upon me, that I had been permitted for a moment to contemplate prospects that appeared to me delicious and rapturous (for what sensation exists more rapturous, than that which a young man experiences, when he feels for the first time, that he is counted for something substantive in the *dramatis personae* of society, that his voice is numbered, that his opinion is listened to, that some eyes are turned upon him to remark the part he shall act?)—and then the door was suddenly and violently clapped in my face. I was left alone, in the narrow line between being and no-being. (123)

Like Fleetwood, who spoke of the “theatre of life” during his early years in Paris (95), Mandeville is also aware of the performative nature of social life, and, like Fleetwood, he also uses a theatrical metaphor to describe the process whereby one must cultivate an exterior image of identity which then serves as the standard by which he or she will be judged. Playing a major role in the “*dramatis personae*” of “manly” life would have lent Mandeville, in his eyes, a certain masculine authority that might have compensated for the rhetorical failures that seemed to relegate him to the margins of society. Denied such a role, however, Mandeville retreats even further into misanthropic isolation, experiencing a certain existential crisis of sorts, in which he feels himself occupying the anxious space between “being” and “no-being.”

The crisis Mandeville experiences at this point in his life is reminiscent of the numerous other instances in which he exhibits a problematic sense of his own identity. As Tysdahl has pointed out, Mandeville is fundamentally flawed in that he lacks a “definite and secure idea of his own self” (142), and we see this most obviously in his life-long obsession over Clifford as his “evil genius” (106). Like Caleb, who sees the “whole fortune of [his] life” as “linked” to Falkland’s tragic “story” (66), Mandeville similarly perceives himself as existentially connected to Clifford. Upon his entrance at Winchester School, Mandeville constructs his own identity as a direct function of his conception of Clifford. Just as Clifford has no significant existence in Mandeville’s memoirs apart from his role as Mandeville’s “evil genius,” Mandeville has no sense or perception of his own identity apart from Clifford. Indeed, he uses a variety of

compelling images to convey what he sees as his monstrous union with Clifford. “I have read of twin children,” he declares,

whose bodies were so united in their birth, that they could never after be separated, while one carried with him, wherever he went, an intolerable load, and of whom, when one died, it involved the necessary destruction of the other. Something similar to this, was the connection that an eternal decree had made between Clifford and me. I was deeply convinced, that his bare existence, was essentially the bane of mine. (141)

Just as Caleb perceives his dyadic bond with Falkland in pathological terms—“we were each of us a plague to the other,” he writes (199)—Mandeville experiences his “eternal” union with Clifford as equally destructive (although in Mandeville’s case it is only he who faces annihilation, and not his rival). Indeed, as his hatred and envy of Clifford take deeper root, Mandeville indulges in images even more pathological. “Clifford is my fate,” he declares after the failed reconciliation with his rival at Beaulieu House. “He is part of myself, a disease that has penetrated to my bones, and that I can never get rid of, as long as any portion of consciousness shall adhere to the individual Mandeville” (176). Notice how, in both images, Mandeville perceives himself as the passive victim of circumstances entirely beyond his control: an “eternal decree” binds him to Clifford, not his own obsessive insecurities, and his corporeal “union” with Clifford is likewise perceived as an incurable disease unjustly imposed upon him for no explicable reason. Just as Mandeville perceived himself in childhood as the helpless

victim persecuted by people and forces beyond his control, he continues in adulthood to see himself as the unwilling casualty of a capricious fate.

Such images foreground the extent to which Mandeville relies on others to consolidate a sense of his own identity. Although Clifford serves as the most obvious reference point in Mandeville's construction of his own subjectivity, we see, in his relationship with Mallison, another and perhaps more compelling example of Mandeville's uncertain hold on his own selfhood. This is particularly true in terms of Mandeville's weak sense of masculine authority. Tormented by the failed reconciliation with Clifford and feeling trapped by living arrangements which—in the wake of his uncle's death—had left him sharing a domicile with the detested Holloway and Mallison,⁸ Mandeville takes solitary refuge in his enjoyment of horsemanship, a pastime that affords him a welcome sense of physical vitality. "The motion of a horseman was agreeable to me," he relates, as "it communicated a new alacrity to the circulation of the blood; it excited the animal spirits" (236). Riding, furthermore, "brings nameless relief to [his] wearied spirit" (236), and he relishes the image of manly nobility conveyed, he believes, by him and his horse. "I was no ill model of a cavalier," he declares (237).

A fall, however, abruptly ends these solitary pursuits, and Mandeville finds himself bed-ridden for a fortnight, a period during which he forges a vexed companionship with Mallison, the hated nephew of Holloway and the malignant schemer responsible for much of Mandeville's social embarrassment at Winchester School. As a lawyer, Holloway functions as the archetypal spokesman for the Law of the Father, and Mallison, as Holloway's apprentice, is similarly at home in the Symbolic Order of

language from which Mandeville feels so alienated. Indeed, as Mandeville relates, the artfulness of Mallison's temperament rendered him a particularly keen disciple of Holloway's philosophies regarding the manipulation of people and language. Holloway had preached of the necessary "mask of civility" one must don to veil one's malevolent ends (234), and Mallison becomes, in turn, an "admirable mimic," an "excellent actor," who "could compose the phrases and the sentences of the part he had to play" (249).

Mallison takes his lessons in mimicry a fundamental step further, however: rather than simply donning a "mask" or playing a "part," he seems to empty himself of any inherent being or disposition that exists prior to his chosen performance. Mallison, Mandeville remarks,

without being any thing in himself intrinsically, superior to the dirt upon which he trod, [] had that pliancy of disposition, that he could remove himself for the moment into the person he wishes to represent, with a power something similar to that, with which Fadlallah in the Persian Tales, could shoot himself into any organized body that lay inanimate before him. (249-50)⁹

When Mallison effects a posture of friendship towards Mandeville, therefore, the performance carries within it a certain authenticity that Mandeville is unable to resist, despite his inner conviction of Mallison's duplicity. Mallison's primary weapon is of course flattery, and his carefully chosen words of admiration and amusing anecdotes function to lull Mandeville into an acceptance of, and then a reliance on, his company.

It is significant, however, that Mallison's flattery, and his bedside ministrations to Mandeville, situates him within a gendered dynamic that casts him in a feminized role. While Mandeville is physically incapacitated, Mallison assumes the specifically feminized role of doting nurse. Mallison, Mandeville remarks of this period, "tended my couch with unwearied care; nor was there any species of tenderness and attention left by him undischarged" (239). As care giver, his actions appear to be perpetually informed by the "utmost watchfulness and tenderness" for his charge (240): as Mandeville relates, "he seemed to have no object but my gratification, no study but of what would be acceptable to me, and no standard of good, but what depended on my will" (245). Such characterizations of Mallison as self-effacing helpmeet to a male companion align him with other compelling images of the doting female partner found in Godwin's novels.¹⁰ Indeed, this term of Mandeville's convalescence reads almost like a period of courtship, whereby Mallison, with contrived gestures and artful conversation, not only engages Mandeville's attention, but wins his approbation as well. "I began comparatively to like Mallison," Mandeville tells the reader (244), displaying an awkward sense of both ignorance and knowledge regarding the way in which he is manipulated in these exchanges. Mallison is even characterized by Mandeville in terms of those archetypal symbols of female seduction, the Sirens, who, with their "ravishing strains," threatened to render even "wily" Ulysses a "fool" (245). "The company of Mallison was in some measure to me like the song of the Sirens," Mandeville declares (245).

Such a simile, however, is double-edged and speaks to the way in which Mandeville's sense of masculine authority is simultaneously fortified, as well as undercut,

by his relationship with Mallison. On one level, Mandeville's masculinity is no doubt affirmed by the feminine posture adopted by Mallison, a posture which not only relieves Mandeville's boredom and soothes his anxieties but, most importantly, always defers to his superior judgment. Mallison, Mandeville tells the reader, "was so implicit, bowed so completely to all my judgments, and drank in all my suggestions, that it was a pleasure to talk to so accommodating a pupil" (244). The Siren simile, therefore, can function as a way for Mandeville to cast himself in the active role of Ulysses, the clever hero who, while tempted by the Sirens, is nevertheless able to outwit them. As we see in his exchanges with Mallison, however, Mandeville is no Ulysses, and he ultimately fails to resist the temptations of Mallison's flattery. Rather, his ego soothed by Mallison's Siren song, he quickly falls prey to the machinations of Holloway and his nephew. Indeed, the seductive force that Mallison seems to exert over Mandeville's mind disempowers him to the point of complete incapacitation. Falling "victim to the machinations of this precious pair of devils" (254), his physical body is ultimately marked with the signs of his psychological submission: "My health wasted daily; my powers of action seemed reduced to almost nothing [. . .] My skin was dried up; my flesh perished from my bones; my eyes became unacquainted with sleep; my joints refused to perform for me the ordinary functions of a living being" (257).

While Mandeville is anxiously aware of the dangerous state of his dependence on these two men, he feels physically unable to shake their hold over him, a dilemma strikingly suggestive of Fleetwood's similar reliance on Gifford. "Holloway and Mallison became in some degree a part of myself," laments Mandeville, and "I felt that

day maimed and incomplete, in which I did not sup up my allotted dose of the nauseous draught they administered” (257). Moreover, the masochism of his dependence takes on sexualized connotations, whereby Mandeville’s masculinity is compromised by the feminized position he is forced to assume in his dealings with Holloway and Mallison: “They had me in their hands, to play upon me as they pleased” (254); “when by their flatteries they had laid me most naked to be assailed, that was the moment they chose to aim at me the most deadly wound” (255).

However, despite his physical weakness in the face of “this precious pair of devils,” Mandeville is tormented by a mental energy—a “preternatural activity” of the mind (258)—that demands he violently resist the machinations launched against him. “My mind balanced between two tones, that of inexorable rage, and that of the lowest despondency. The former urged me to revenge; the latter to suicide,” declares Mandeville (258). We thus see Mandeville haunted, yet again, by powerful emotions and sentiments he is unable to articulate or act upon, and it is this inability to speak or act that feeds the misanthropic rage that ultimately destroys his sanity.

“The Sister of My Soul”

The image of Mallison as nursemaid to Mandeville during his convalescence from the riding accident brings to mind Henrietta’s similar role as Mandeville’s care giver, particularly after the mental collapse occasioned by his public humiliation at Oxford. With Mallison, Mandeville’s attachment was a gradual development, one which ultimately devolved into a dependence that left him anxious whenever his nursemaid “left

[his] bed-side but for a moment” (240). With Henrietta, however, Mandeville’s affection (and dependence) runs much deeper, having taken root in a childhood deprived of any other emotionally satisfying social connections. Indeed, it is only upon meeting his sister Henrietta for the first time at age twelve, that he feels connected to another creature by virtue of their shared humanity: “I seemed now for the first time to associate with a being, with whom I felt an affinity, and whom I recognized as of the same species as myself. This was indeed a memorable era in my existence” (63). That Mandeville recognizes this meeting as a “memorable era in [his] existence” is significant, for it speaks to the way in which his sister will assume for Mandeville a humanizing and connective role in his life. From this point on, and with increasingly tragic consequences as the two grow into adulthood, Henrietta will serve as Mandeville’s link to humanity and the mediator of his social exchange. As Mandeville recognizes at even this young age, it is only through Henrietta—only through her soothing presence and, significantly, her inspiring discourse—that he is reconciled to society and human interaction.

Of course, Mandeville’s reliance on Henrietta as his mediator or connective link to humanity only underscores his own troubled sense of identity, something we have witnessed in his exchanges with both Clifford and Mallison. When Mandeville writes that “Henrietta was father, and mother, and every thing to me in one” (63), we may recall Macneil’s similar words to Fleetwood: “If you marry my daughter,” he warns him, “you must be to her, father, and mother, and sisters, and all the world in one” (262), a declaration that highlights the vulnerability of Mary’s position in the world. However, whereas Mary struggles to maintain her own identity in the face of her husband’s

controlling tendencies, Mandeville, as we have seen, has never managed to consolidate any coherent sense of his own selfhood. We thus witness Mandeville vacillating between a conception of Henrietta as the complement to his own somewhat completed existence—the “sister of [his] soul” (308)—and an understanding of her as inextricably bound up with his own being, as forming the other half of his own uncompleted subjectivity.

“As the dearest half of [his] soul” (62), Henrietta becomes the subject of Mandeville’s numerous fantasies regarding the transmutation of their souls. While recovering from his mental collapse, Mandeville attributes his ensuing serenity and calm to the displacement of his own soul in favour of Henrietta’s: “Why was it that I felt a serenity and a calm during this awful crisis, that I had never before experienced at any period of my life?” asks Mandeville. “The soul of Mandeville seemed to have left me, and the soul of Henrietta to have entered my bosom in its stead” (159). At the end of his memoir, right before the disastrous kidnaping attempt that finally severs Mandeville’s last tie to both his sister and the familial and social community she represents, Mandeville recounts his loss in terms of an early self hatred that compelled him to “live in,” and through, Henrietta:

I loved, as never man loved. I poured out my heart and my soul, all my faculties, and all my thoughts, upon Henrietta. Early I learned to be dissatisfied with myself, and to despise myself [. . .] Early therefore I learned to go out of myself; and, like the dervise to whom I once before

alluded, in the Persian Tales, I left my own rejected and loathsome corpse,
to live in another, to feel her pleasures, and rejoice in her joys. (319-20)

In this allusion to the Persian prince who could enter into another's body at will, Mandeville displaces Mallison as the empty vessel that can appropriate another's subjectivity. As Mandeville realizes at this point in his narrative, the one consolation that had sustained him throughout his various misfortunes was his perception that he could cast off a "loathsome" selfhood he could not claim as his own and live vicariously through the subjectivity of Henrietta.

It is ironic, yet at the same time highly fitting, that the one attribute which so acutely draws Mandeville to Henrietta is his perception of her unrivaled wisdom as it is revealed in their discursive exchanges. In her numerous speeches to Mandeville regarding the potential perfectability of humanity and the necessity of a benevolent and tolerant philanthropy, Henrietta exhibits a remarkable eloquence that aligns her with much of the social idealism expressed in *Political Justice*. The nurturing patience of her discourse to Mandeville also looks back to Marguerite's similar speeches to St. Leon regarding humanity's responsibility to achieve happiness, even in the face of misfortune. Indeed, for Elton Edward Smith and Esther Greenwell Smith, Henrietta is best viewed as the "bearer of the Godwinian philosophic line in the novel" (104), and, for Shelley, this was precisely the most appealing aspect of her character. As he declares to Godwin in a December 7th, 1817 letter, "I do not think [. . .] that there ever was produced a moral discourse more characteristic of all that is admirable and lovely in human Nature—more

lovely and admirable in itself—than that of Henrietta to Mandeville as he is recovering from madness” (260).

The humanizing role that Henrietta plays in Mandeville’s life largely stems from the way in which her eloquence and perceptive use of language reconcile him to both himself and to the demands of sociality. After his first visit to Beaulieu Cottage, Mandeville appropriates Henrietta as the guiding force in his life, the standard of judgment against which he shapes his sense of self and plans his future conduct. “Henrietta was the whole world to me,” he declares. “In every thing I thought of her approbation; and I resolved to accomplish myself in whatever was praise-worthy, because I felt that she was capable of being my umpire and my judge [. . .] What should I do to make myself the worthy mate of such a sister, was therefore the perpetual burthen of my thoughts” (77).

Besides assuming for Mandeville the earthly roles of “umpire” and “judge,” Henrietta also takes on qualities of the supernatural and the mystical, becoming a “heavenly monitress” (152) who shapes Mandeville’s opinions and guides his conduct towards the path of benevolence and philanthropy. With her “divine discourses” (155), she seemed to hold for Mandeville the “master-key of [his] soul” (173), and his “heart” is consequently “tuned” in accordance to the sentiments she expresses (148). Indeed, in the face of Henrietta’s almost supernatural influence, Mandeville is unable to resist resigning himself over to her guiding hand. In response to her repeated entreaties regarding a reconciliation with Clifford, Mandeville ultimately responds, ““take me, and mould me as you please. I can refuse you nothing. I will be the friend of Clifford!”” (159).

Henrietta assumes a definite and rich existence in Mandeville's mind, her memory inspiring him with an intellectual energy that nurtures his own creative impulses: "She made me a painter. Whenever I shut my eyes, I saw her: whenever I let my thoughts loose in imagination, I pictured to myself her gestures and her air" (62). However, unlike Henrietta, whose "divine discourses" situate her firmly within the Symbolic Order, Mandeville is primarily functioning on the level of images, the pre-verbal Imaginary. Henrietta seems to realize this about her brother, and she attempts to morally reform him by combining the verbal—her "divine discourses"—with the visual: "She talked to me of love," recalls Mandeville of the period immediately following his emotional collapse at Oxford. "She told me tales of her own daily experience, and the earthly paradise of Beaulieu [. . . .] She drew a bewitching portrait of an obscure and rural life" (148).

Although Henrietta makes Mandeville a "painter," it is telling that these creative impulses are purely introspective. Just as he is unable to express the intellectual activity of his mind around his peers at Winchester and Oxford, Mandeville is, around Henrietta, similarly constrained in speech. "She talked," he remembers, "and my soul hung on the enchanting sounds" (63). "I have always been the principal talker," observed Henrietta to Mandeville, "and you have answered me with silence or few words" (65). As Mandeville later discloses to the reader, however, "Henrietta talked best, but I loved the most" (66). This remark is significant, for it conveys Mandeville's awareness of the disjunction between speech and feeling, his awareness that eloquence and fluid discursive exchange are not necessarily the most authentic measures of truth.

Indeed, it soon becomes apparent to the reader that Henrietta and her “divine discourses” (55) are not immune to Mandeville’s deep-rooted suspicion of eloquent speech. The very act of characterizing her discourse as “divine” brings to mind Mandeville’s similar description of Clifford’s extended speeches to his fellow Wintonians (89), a characterization meant to highlight both the seductive appeal of well-phrased speech and its deceptive potential. As we may recall, Mandeville had disapproved of Clifford and his rhetorical eloquence on the grounds that it gave him undue power over his auditors and influenced them into accepting falsehoods as truth. Similarly, we witness Mandeville become increasingly suspicious of Henrietta’s powers of persuasion and critical of the ways in which she employs these powers. Indeed, at certain points in his memoir, Mandeville describes Henrietta’s influence over him in almost colonizing terms: She held an “empire over [his] soul” (158), and served as the “despotic mistress of [his] faculties,” irresponsibly carrying him away from all “recollections,” “associations,” and “griefs” (178).

Whereas Mandeville assumes the role of painter solely in the introspective processes of his own mind, Henrietta’s artistry, her authorship of “bewitching portrait[s]” and “tales” idealizing a rural life devoid of ambition (148), is very much a public process. Such “tales” were “fiction,” Mandeville realizes, “and not adapted to real life” (149). He nevertheless emphasizes the powerful effect they had on his sensibilities, highlighting the conscious artistry of Henrietta’s “Arcadian pictures”:

She drew a bewitching portrait of an obscure and rural life [. . .and]

however the Arcadian pictures drawn for me by Henrietta, might be

imperfect in a general view, *they were accurately adapted to my disease*. I was just recovered from a state of fearful perturbation; the very principles and foundations of humanity within me, had been shaken; and music was the restorative my condition required. Never was there so consummate an artist in this respect as my Henrietta. Her voice was melodious; her sentiments were all one mighty scheme of harmony; and the gay, yet peaceful and serene pictures, with which she amused me from morning till night, gave me a new sort of existence, to which I had hitherto been a stranger. (148-49; emphasis added)

As a “consummate artist,” Henrietta is able to manipulate her sentiments, gestures, and the very modulation of her voice to craft a fantasy for Mandeville “accurately adapted to [his] disease.” As Mandeville implies, Henrietta’s inspirational discourse is not necessarily the unmediated and artless expression of her authentic sentiments but, rather, a well-crafted “fiction” meant to shape his mind and conduct in accordance to her own wishes, which, as we soon find out, involve Mandeville’s reconciliation with Clifford.¹¹ In this sense, Henrietta’s “fiction” operates much like Mallison’s deceptive flattery, and it is striking that Mandeville similarly describes the effect of Henrietta’s speech as “like the song of the Sirens,” which “lulled [him] into forgetfulness” (149). “I was all ear,” Mandeville laments. “Every other sense was suspended; or was made tributary and subordinate, to assist the impressions that the sense of hearing conveyed” (149). It thus becomes clear that, while Mandeville may idealize Henrietta as his “heavenly monitress”

(152), he also feels an acute anxiety regarding the nature and degree of her influence over him.

With Clifford, we saw that Mandeville's disapproval of what he perceived as his rival's sophistry was also matched by an envious desire for similar rhetorical powers, as well as a resentful perception that his own voice will be perpetually eclipsed by that of his "nemesis." It would seem that Mandeville's relationship with his sister is informed by a similar perception that the "divine" nature of her eloquence overwhelms his own self-expression, and it is this perception, I would argue, that ultimately alienates Mandeville from his sister. As he relates to the reader on more than one occasion, he is desperate for a "friend," a friend being, in his terms, one whom he can "bear to hear," but also one to whom he can "bear to speak" (174). It is only within this conception of friendship that Mandeville feels he would be able to engage in the reciprocal act of both listening and speaking.

Despite this yearning for a friend, however, it is clear that Mandeville feels he can never fulfill this conception of friendship with his sister. "Why could not Henrietta be my friend?" he asks, anticipating the reader's question.

She could speak with eloquence divine; and I could bear to hear her; and, while she spoke, my soul became her prisoner, and all her accents had over me the power of enchantment. But, unfortunately, the converse of the proposition totally failed. I could not speak to her in return. I pined for her approbation [. . .] How then could I premeditatedly lay bare my

bosom in her sight, and expose all its blackness and deformities? [. . .]

My lips therefore were, in this regard, for ever closed in her presence.

(174)

In much the same way as Mandeville had been unable to assert his own voice as a child, he is similarly silenced in his relationship with Henrietta. Whereas Bradford's overwhelming ferocity of speech left little space for the dissenting voice of a boy, Henrietta's "eloquence divine" (174), at least as it is perceived by Mandeville, renders her brother a diffident observer of her superior rhetorical powers. Obsessively solicitous for her good opinion, and perhaps anxiously resentful of the passive position to which he feels relegated, Mandeville is unable to express the true sentiments of his heart or mind. "I secretly stood in awe of her judgment," he declares, and "tremble[d] lest she should discover the extent of my infirmities" (244).

It is perhaps to compensate for his own failures in self-expression that Mandeville clings so strongly to a conception of himself as somehow linked, in body and soul, with Henrietta. The nature of Mandeville's relationship with his sister is both complex and paradoxical. While, on the one hand, she seemingly robs him of the opportunity for confident self-expression, on the other, she symbolizes for him an opportunity to achieve a definite sense of his own selfhood. If Henrietta plays a humanizing role in reconciling Mandeville to social interaction, she also assumes, in Mandeville's mind, an important position as the conduit of his own sensibilities. Some of his earliest fantasies regarding Henrietta involve an almost incestuous union with her that transcends larger social realities such as marriage. Although he claims to recognize Henrietta's probable destiny

as a wife and a mother, and declares that he is not “vain and selfish enough” to want her as his “slave” (151), he still clings to a fantasy of domestic union with his sister: “The most pleasing vision I could frame to myself, was of our living together, and having the daily fruition of her society. Our delicious wanderings, as at Beaulieu, might then be made perpetual; and, under the fashioning care of my Henrietta, I could not fail to become peaceful, virtuous and happy” (150-51). It is only through Henrietta—her “fashioning care”—that Mandeville feels he can be “peaceful, virtuous and happy”—in short, that he can be conditioned for a life he feels unable to sustain without her. In this sense, Mandeville becomes much like his uncle Audley, who, after losing his childhood sweetheart, “rather vegetated than lived” (41).

It is clear that a compelling part of Henrietta’s appeal for Mandeville rests in his perception of her as the socializing agent who may ultimately allow him to assert his own selfhood. Like Fleetwood, Mandeville indulges in a fantasy of complete sympathy with his female partner. He is aware that his attempts to live through Henrietta are predicated on a complete identification of himself with his sister, and vice versa. “I demanded from her a complete sympathy,” Mandeville remarks, “and a sentiment in all respects responsive to mine. It was my delight to believe, that she loved as I loved, that she would sacrifice herself as I would, that for all the world she would not be persuaded to an act that would give me pain, and that she was the sister of my soul” (308). Learning of Henrietta’s love for Clifford thus marks a crisis in Mandeville’s conception of himself, as he now finds himself aligned with his rival in a process that quite clearly undermines any constructed sense of self. The loss of Henrietta to Clifford thus becomes, for Mandeville,

the loss of the self. As his last and only tie to the world, Henrietta symbolized for Mandeville perhaps the last hope of ever being reconciled to himself and to life. With the ultimate loss of that hope, Mandeville enters into a misanthropic madness that literally marks him for life.

It is therefore quite appropriate that Mandeville sees Henrietta's marriage to Clifford as also a union between Clifford and himself—their blood will be “mingled together” in the form of any children Henrietta may bear, he laments (312). Such an image speaks to the larger thematic displacements between Henrietta, Mandeville, and Clifford, displacements which have played themselves out throughout the text, but which now, in the final pages of the narrative, become the ultimate symptom of Mandeville's failed attempt at self-actualization.

We see this failure most acutely in the final pages of the novel, in which the attempted kidnaping of Henrietta is thwarted and Mandeville is left disfigured by a sword stroke to the face that leaves a grisly scar. His left cheek severed with a “deep trench,” Mandeville characterizes his wound as the imprint left by his colonizer: “I bore Clifford and his injuries perpetually about with me. Even as certain tyrannical planters in the West Indies have set a brand with a red-hot iron upon the negroes they have purchased, to denote that they are irremediably a property, so Clifford had set his mark upon me, as a token that I was his for ever” (325). Without the humanizing touch of Henrietta, Mandeville does in fact see himself as nothing more than a commodity or piece of “property” to be “branded” as such. Indeed, in this sense, Mandeville's scar—his *une balafre* or *cicatrix luculenta*—is quite simply the presence of an absence, a corporeal

symbol of an inner emptiness that allows, and even invites, the colonizer to place his (or her) mark.

The *balafre* thus evokes the presence of the absence within Mandeville's subjectivity. His scar functions as a fitting symbol of his inability to self-actualize, to achieve a coherent sense of self and present an integrated "face" to the world. Throughout his narrative, Mandeville has experienced his identity as split or divided. Without Henrietta, for example, he cannot experience himself as a whole being. She is the "dearest half of [his] soul" (62), and he feels himself compelled to "live in," and through, her (319-20). Likewise, Mandeville's appreciation of his own subjectivity is inextricably bound up with his hatred of Clifford, whom he envisions as part of his corporeal existence—"a disease that has penetrated to my bones" (176). Such displacements of self speak to the split nature of Mandeville's subjectivity, a divided self that ultimately manifests itself on the body in the symbol of the *balafre*—a scar that literally divides Mandeville's face in two. The *balafre* thus functions as a material inscription testifying to the madness that has fractured Mandeville's psyche.

“Of History and Romance”: Modern Man and the Dystopian World of Godwin’s Fiction

As I discussed in the Introduction, Godwin measured the value of written history by its moral effects on the reader. “Those histories alone are worthy of attentive and persevering study, that treat of the development of great genius, or the exhibition of bold and masculine virtues,” argues the philosopher in his 1797 essay, “Of History and Romance” (458). In that essay, Godwin makes the argument for the degeneracy of a modern humanity whose potential is blighted by oppressive social and cultural institutions. Ancient Greece and Rome, with their democratic states and republican sentiments, produced men with “bold and masculine virtues” (458). Modern states, however, built on a foundation of political oppression that is maintained by social prejudice and superstition, simply enslave and debase their citizens.

“The ancients,” contends Godwin, “were giants, but we, their degenerate successors, are pygmies. There was something in the nature of the Greek and Roman republics that expanded and fired the soul [. . .] The ancients [. . .] are men of a free and undaunted spirit” (459). In contrast, the “greatest personages” of modern history,

appear in the comparison encumbered with their rank. Their march is slow, weighed down as they are on every side with prejudices and precedents. They are disciplined to dull monotony [. . .] There is something in the nature of modern governments and institutions, that seems to blight in the bud every grander and more ample development of the soul. When we attempt to display the agility or the grace, the capacity

for which inheres in our nature, we resemble a vaulter or *figurante* that should undertake to dance in fetters. (459)

While humanity carries within it this capacity for spiritual greatness—the “capacity” for such greatness, contends Godwin, “inheres in our nature”—modern men fail to achieve the “free and undaunted spirit” that informed the ancients. Whereas the ancients were able to “proceed to their object with an unerring aim” and a “full and undivided soul,” modern men “lose themselves in dark, inexplicable windings” (460). The difference between both groups of men is so distinct and compelling, argues Godwin, that the student of history “will almost imagine that he is reading of a different species” (460).

For Godwin, the spiritual failings of modern humanity reside not in some inherent inferiority of the mind or soul, but in the social context in which the modern man finds himself, a context which “blight[s] in the bud every grander and more ample development of the soul” (459). “There is something in the nature of modern governments and institutions” that keeps modern humanity from achieving the greatness of their ancient predecessors (459). Of course, for Godwin, that “something” is political oppression and the various social injustices which debase modern man. The oppression of monarchies and other forms of tyrannical government, religious and cultural superstitions which impede the rational development of humanity, violence that goes unchecked by the forces of reason and education—all of these phenomena come together in a history informed by “fanaticism and hypocrisy,” where “scarcely a trace is to be found of a sense of the rights of men” (461). Whereas the republican institutions and sentiments of ancient Greece and Rome nourished “giants,” the political and social tyranny of Britain’s history has created

“pygmies,” men “lost” in “dark, inexplicable windings.” Our history, argues Godwin, is the “history of corruption and political profligacy,” “not the history of genuine, independent man” (461).

As I argued in the Introduction, Godwin’s vision of the political included broader social forces like education, which was understood by the philosopher in the “most comprehensive sense” as all those childhood experiences “that produce[] an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections” (Vol. 1 of *Political Justice* 45). This childhood education, for Godwin, serves as the single most important element in the creation of a happy and virtuous subject capable of universal benevolence through enlightenment and reason. If a sound childhood education can produce this happy and virtuous subject committed to benevolence and philanthropy, a defective education, a “mis-education,” can do much to thwart the development of happiness and virtue in the subject. The forms of mis-education experienced by the “modern” men in this study operate, in much the same way as political oppression does, to create “pygmies” out of protagonists who might have been “giants.”

Godwin’s description of modern men in this 1797 essay thus serves as a useful theoretical framework for *Caleb Williams* and the three “middle” novels I have examined in this study. Indeed, Godwin’s description of men “encumbered with their rank” and “weighed down [. . .] on every side with prejudices and precedents” aptly evokes the experiences of Caleb, Falkland, St. Leon, Fleetwood, and Mandeville. Like Godwin’s modern man, whose “march is slow” and whose soul is blighted, these Godwinian heroes are also mired in the “fettters” of both society and their own minds: “lost” in the “dark,

inexplicable windings” of misanthropy and neuroses, all of these “heroes” struggle to find their place within social environments from which they are hopelessly alienated. In the case of each hero, a childhood mis-education manifests itself in a later crisis of subjectivity that radically compromises his experience of identity. All of these protagonists “lose” themselves in some way.

Moreover, it is significant that the crises brought about by childhood mis-education are never resolved for any of these characters. Each narrative ends ambivalently without a clear sense of closure: Falkland dies a disgraced man, and Caleb’s formal vindication only serves to make him more miserable than ever; St. Leon’s new-found self-assurance is compromised by the fact that it is only gained through his connection with a son from whom he is forever estranged; although Fleetwood, at the end of his narrative, is formally reconciled with Mary, he still seems a broken man, and the reader is left unconvinced of his moral reformation; finally, in the case of Mandeville, the reader is presented, at the end of the novel, with an utterly fragmented and psychotic figure, a madman cut off from the social order. All of these Godwinian heroes seem, at novel’s end, perpetually “lost” in the “dark, inexplicable windings” of their own fractured psyches.

Godwin’s disillusionment with modern humanity, as he expresses it in “Of History and Romance,” locates itself in these fictional portraits. This disillusionment, however, speaks to a fascinating disjunction between the utopian idealism of *Political Justice*—where humanity is potentially perfectible and the irrational passions of the soul can be brought under the sway of the rational mind through education and reason—and the

dystopian world of Godwin's fiction—which is littered with men who seem irrevocably damaged by the destructive influences of a childhood “mis-education.” Indeed, as George Woodcock has pointed out, “nowhere in his novels does Godwin in fact describe the utopian world to which his reasonings as a political philosopher would seem to lead” (696). B.J. Tysdahl likewise argues that, in Godwin's fiction, “we often hear another voice than that of the confident spokesman of late eighteenth-century radicalism and rationalism” (6).

The other “voice” which Tysdahl identifies in Godwin's fiction evokes Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the “dialogic” text, a work—usually a novel, in Bakhtin's theorization—permeated with the dialogue of multiple voices, forms, and perspectives. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin celebrates the novel for its unique brand of “novelistic discourse” which structures the narrative and provides a complex and rich “heteroglossia.” The novel, contends Bakhtin, contains a “diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (262). “Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel,” argues Bakhtin (262). Godwin's novels embody these dialogic characteristics: in these texts, an optimistic philosophy of human perfectibility collides with the brutal realities of the human condition to produce texts which offer a “diversity of individual voices.” Godwin as rational philosopher seems at odds with his neurotic fictional creations, and even within the texts, there are tensions that exist between individual characters as symbolic representations of humanity's

potential. There is, in these novels, a stark incongruity between what could be and what is.

Moreover, it is striking that the women in the three “middle” novels come much closer to achieving the sort of human perfectibility espoused by Godwin in *Political Justice*. Indeed, the female characters in these texts serve as foils for the moral and spiritual failings of their male counterparts. *St Leon*’s Marguerite is selfless and utterly gracious in forgiving a vain husband who has just beggared his family through gambling; a committed advocate of Wollstonecraft’s “culture of the heart,” Marguerite takes solace in her philosophical celebration of the domestic affections. Likewise, *Fleetwood*’s Mary exhibits a striking moral virtue and generosity in forgiving a husband who throws her, pregnant and penniless, out of their marital home. Finally, Mandeville’s noble sister, Henrietta, remains loyal and committed to a brother whose misanthropic nature alienates everyone around him; in contrast to Marguerite, who celebrates the private affections, Henrietta is an advocate for the philosophical doctrine of universal benevolence, and, as such, she serves as a spokeswoman for much of Godwin’s own philosophy.

While the female characters in these middle novels are portrayed in idealized terms, the male characters are complex representations of human struggle—of the psychological turmoil, emotional frailty, and moral failure which inform the human condition. As complex case studies of masculine identity in crisis, these novels are compelling portraits of modern man as the philosopher theorized him in “Of History and Romance.” If, as Godwin contends in his essay, modern history is the history of “fanaticism” and “corruption,” and “not the history of genuine, independent man,” then it

is fitting that the philosopher offers, in his fiction, portraits of modern men who are both caught up in the corruption of modern life, and mired in the fanaticism of their own minds. Caleb, Falkland, St. Leon, Fleetwood, and Mandeville are thus quintessential examples of Godwin's modern man, and the profound identity crises each experiences can surely be read as the philosopher's fictional representation of how modern men "lose themselves in dark, inexplicable windings."

Notes to Introduction

1. My decision not to include a full chapter-length reading of *Caleb Williams* in this study was also influenced by a desire to focus on those novels of Godwin which have received little attention by scholars and readers. Modern critics of Godwin's fiction have directed the bulk of their energies towards *Caleb Williams*, and that novel is thus well represented in the scholarly literature examining the philosopher's fiction. It was one of my larger goals in this study to provide critical readings of Godwin's lesser-known novels.
2. As Godwin recorded in an autobiographical sketch, he wrote and published these three novels in quick succession over a period of five months at the end of 1783 and the beginning of 1784 (Woodcock, "Notes" 685-86). All three of these texts were long considered "lost," only to be "rediscovered" by scholars in the 1960s and 1970s.
3. Most critics are in agreement that Godwin's last two novels are reductive and poorly structured in terms of plot and character development. For George Woodcock, Godwin's final novels suffer from a "decline" in his "inventive powers," and he singles out *Cloudesley* as the "worst crafted" of all his books ("Notes" 695), as does Mona Scheuermann (*The Novels of William Godwin* 188-89). Moreover, although critics concede that *Deloraine* is superior to *Cloudesley* on a structural level, most do not find the text particularly engaging. "Its final interest is probably biographical," contends Woodcock ("Notes" 696), referring to the scholarly consensus that views Emilia, Deloraine's first wife, as Godwin's last fictional portrait of Wollstonecraft. *Deloraine*

becomes even more significant on a biographical level when one considers the possibility that Catherine—the impassioned, fiercely loyal, and articulate daughter of Deloraine and Emilia—is quite likely a fictional portrait of Godwin’s own daughter Mary Shelley, who remained emotionally and intellectually close to her father in the last decades of his life.

A notable exception to this overwhelming critical dismissal of Godwin’s last two novels is A. A. Markley, who reads *Cloudesley* as the culmination of Godwin’s attempts to “transform” traditional conceptions of manhood and put forth a new image of masculinity. In *Cloudesley*, argues Markley, “the social benefits of a particular Godwinian ideal of love and devotion between men is fully illustrated and celebrated” (39).

4. This quotation is taken from the third edition of *Political Justice*, published in 1798. In the original edition of the text, this passage was perhaps made even more scandalous by the fact that the “valet” was a “chambermaid,” and the sacrificed relative consequently a “wife” or a “mother,” rather than a “brother” or a “father.”

5. The Reverend Richard Polwhele (1760-1838) was an outspoken critic of the radical, or “jacobin,” cause. Most notoriously, his 1798 anti-feminist satire, *The Unsex’d Females*, attacked Godwin’s wife, feminist reformer Mary Wollstonecraft, who had recently died giving birth to their daughter, the future Mary Shelley. In his poem, Polwhele presents Wollstonecraft as the “intrepid champion of her sex,” the leader of her band of “unsex’d” female followers (13). She is represented by Polwhele as a pathological aberration, a vision of bodily disease and moral sickness that threatens the “healthy” state of femininity

best embodied by the “seraphic” Hannah More, the conservative poet, dramatist, and moralist. The climax of Polwhele’s poem presents More, a “seraphic” vision of grace and happiness, recalling her “unsex’d” “sisters” from the “pale form” and “livid limbs” of Wollstonecraft, the “dire apostate” and “fell suicide” (28).

Less virulent, but just as damning, was Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, a satirical novel published in 1800 which caricatured a number of intellectuals well known for their radical, “jacobin” views. Godwin is caricatured in the novel as the founder of a “New Philosophy” modelled on the principles of *Political Justice*; his ideas attract ridiculous devotees who take his ideas to absurd levels.

6. Along with the *Memoirs*, Godwin edited and published the 1798 *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a four-volume collection of Wollstonecraft’s unpublished texts, her unfinished manuscripts, and some of her private correspondence.

7. For a general overview of the shifting assessment of Wollstonecraft throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, see Amy Rambow, “‘Come Kick Me’: Godwin’s *Memoirs* and the Posthumous Infamy of Mary Wollstonecraft,” 45-54.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Godwin's resistance to Rousseau's educational model has been traced in a number of critical examinations of his fiction—most notably, Anne Chandler's "Romanticizing Adolescence: Godwin's *St. Leon* and the Matter of Rousseau," and Gary Handwerk's "Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education."
2. Godwin's novel was also quite effective in its narrative mode. As Gerard A. Barker has argued, Godwin's choice of first-person narration for his novel, a mode he was both inexperienced in and which sometimes created technical difficulties for the construction of the text, nevertheless contributes to the reader's engagement in the story, lending an urgent realism to the narrative which innovatively conveys Godwin's philosophical and political arguments.
3. See, for example, Robert J. Corber, "Representing the 'Unspeakable': William Godwin and the Politics of Homophobia;" Alex Gold, Jr., "It's Only Love: The Politics of Passion in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*;" Kenneth W. Graham, *The Politics of Narrative: Ideology and Social Change in William Godwin's Caleb Williams*; Mitzi Myers, "Godwin's Changing Conception of *Caleb Williams*;" Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Double*; Andrew J. Scheiber, "Falkland's Story: *Caleb Williams*' Other Voice;" Rudolf F. Storch, "Metaphors of Private Guilt and Social Rebellion in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*;" and Robert W. Uphaus, "*Caleb Williams*: Godwin's Epoch of Mind;"

4. David McCracken, in “Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*: A Fictional Rebuttal of Burke” and “Godwin’s Reading in Burke,” has also highlighted the influence of Burke on Godwin’s writing of *Caleb Williams*, and on his creation of Falkland.
5. For a full discussion of the pedagogical framework underpinning eighteenth-century sentimental fiction, see the first two chapters of Todd’s *Sensibility: An Introduction*.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. As a tormented drifter, St. Leon prefigures the quintessential Romantic trope of the troubled wanderer, as represented most compellingly by Lord Byron's *Manfred*, S. T. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and, ultimately, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. For a reading of *St. Leon*'s textual and thematic influence on Shelley's novel, see Gregory Maertz's "Family Resemblances: Intertextual Dialogue between Father and Daughter Novelists in Godwin's *St. Leon* and Shelley's *Frankenstein*."
2. Dubois's *St. Godwin* has recently appeared in Volume 9 of Pickering and Chatto's ten-volume series, *Anti-Jacobin Novels*, published in 2005.
3. As Marie Roberts has shown, however, Godwin's interest, and subsequent belief, in the clearly fantastic possibility of human immortality is paradoxically grounded in the rationalist philosophy laid out in *Political Justice*. In the section entitled "Of Health, and the Prolongation of Human Life," Godwin had theorized that, as humanity gradually progressed, through the exercise and refinement of its rational faculties, into a state of ultimate perfection, the limits of mortality could be overcome. Although Godwin declares that "it would be idle to talk of the absolute immortality of man," he nevertheless contends that, "by the immediate operation of intellect," the "term of human life may be prolonged [. . .] beyond any limits which we are able to assign" (Vol. 2 of *Political Justice* 527). Thus, for Roberts, Godwin's central critique in *St. Leon* is not of immortality, but of an immortality obtained through the dangerous and unnatural means associated with scientific advance and magic. As Roberts argues, *St. Leon* "is a warning

to those enlightened thinkers who sought to shortcut the path of human progress, which Godwin believed should be achieved only by evolutionary means” (1199).

4. P.N. Furbank points out that St. Leon’s fear of poverty is made particularly poignant by Godwin’s own financial troubles during this time (227). It would seem that Godwin was only too acutely aware of the anxiety and deep shame associated with pecuniary distress.

5. For an alternative interpretation of the novel’s gambling theme, one which reads St. Leon as the quintessential capitalist, see Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, 160-64.

6. Godwin’s changing views on the importance of the domestic affections are in fact quite compatible with the theoretical principles underpinning his philosophic vision of progressive enlightenment. In the *Enquirer*, Godwin had argued that “the salutary condition of the human mind, is that in which it is prepared to bring every principle upon which it proceeds, within the scope of its own examination” (223). All ideas and opinions should therefore be subject to a rational analysis that is both rigorous and continual, argues Godwin, for “nothing is more suspicious than a system of conduct, which, forming itself inflexibly on general rules, refuses to take the impression, and yield to the dictates, of circumstances as they may arise” (*Enquirer* 195). By thus modifying his opinions on cohabitation based on his personal experiences living with Wollstonecraft, Godwin is participating in this rational practice of continual examination, and his changing views on the subject represent an inevitable progression of his thought:

“Who is it that is likely, through Shakespear’s seven ages of man, to think always alike?” asks Godwin. “The slave of prejudice, or the slave of idleness. The active and independent mind, the genuine lover of and enquirer after truth, will inevitably pass through certain revolutions of opinion” (*Enquirer* 325).

7. St. Leon and Marguerite’s living arrangement is suggestive of Godwin’s own complicated views on marriage and cohabitation. While he celebrates the “domestic and private affections” in the 1799 Preface to *St. Leon*, deeming them “inseparable from the nature of man” (52), he had previously, in the 1797 *Enquirer*, warned against “excessive familiarity” as the “bane of social happiness” (86). In the essay, “Of Cohabitation,” Godwin argued that

the ill humour which is so prevalent through all the different walks of life, is the result of familiarity, and consequently of cohabitation. If we did not see each other too frequently, we should accustom ourselves to act reasonably and with urbanity. But, according to a well known maxim, familiarity breeds contempt. The first and most fundamental principle in the intercourse of man with man, is reverence; but we soon cease to reverence what is always before our eyes [. . . .] In order that we may properly exercise this sentiment, the occasions for calling it forth towards any particular individual, should be economised and rare. (91-92)

In his description of St. Leon and Marguerite’s domestic habits, Godwin seems to have struck a balance between the dangers of “excessive familiarity” and the benefits he had

come to recognize in the private affections. Moreover, St. Leon's narration of the satisfactions attendant on a marriage partially informed by "separate pursuits" evokes Godwin's description, in the *Memoirs*, of his own relationship with Wollstonecraft. Recalling his practice, during their marriage, of maintaining a separate residence a short distance from their marital home, as well as their shared practice of maintaining separate social engagements and intellectual pursuits, Godwin asserts that he and Wollstonecraft were thus able to "combine, in a considerable degree, the novelty and lively sensation of a visit, with the more delicious and heart-felt pleasures of domestic life" (*Memoirs* 110).

8. Marguerite's celebration of rural retirement prefigures William Wordsworth's similar philosophical meditations on "low and rustic life" in the 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Freed from the "influence of social vanity," argues Wordsworth in the Preface, "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language" (357). For Wordsworth, rustic life is thus more conducive to spiritual development and moral elevation. Marguerite's impassioned speeches to St. Leon on this issue also foreshadow many of the arguments against wealth put forth by a character in *Mandeville*, one of Godwin's later novels. In that text, the morally virtuous Clifford argues against wealth on the grounds that it compromises one's self-sufficiency and true appreciation of life. Moreover, in *Fleetwood*, Godwin will explore even further the Wordsworthian elements of nature, rural life, and the effects of both on imagination and intellectual development.

9. For a discussion of the ideology of “separate spheres” in Victorian marital culture, see Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895*.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Mona Scheuermann also points out how Fleetwood's expressed preference for day dreams over night dreams in this passage indicates his significant "preoccupation with power" (*Novels of William Godwin* 159) and the need to exert that power "over all and sundry" (*Novels of William Godwin* 160).
2. Despite Scheuermann's contention that Fleetwood is unable to "adjust himself to another human being" ("Study of Mind" 19), never able to make that "total human connection" ("Study of Mind" 20) with another creature that would enable him to overcome, even temporarily, the destructive misanthropy of his temperament, we see a number of significant instances where Fleetwood cultivates interpersonal relationships that are emotionally, morally, or intellectually salutary. The friendship that the young Fleetwood shares with Ruffigny, for instance, develops into a bond not only predicated on a sense of duty, but also on mutual respect and affection, a bond that endures until Ruffigny's death and provides the catalyst for Fleetwood's moral improvement in the form of his ultimate repudiation of the libertine tendencies that had marred his youth. In middle age, Fleetwood again manages to transcend his misanthropic inclinations enough to forge a stimulating intellectual alliance, built on "temperate and sober discussion" (259), with Macneil, the father of his future wife, Mary. Note, however, how all of these satisfying emotional connections are with men. In contrast, not once in the novel is Fleetwood able to develop and sustain a similar relationship with a woman.

3. Gary Handwerk, in particular, has argued that Fleetwood's misogyny functions as Godwin's critique of Rousseau's discussion of gender in Book Five of *Émile*. Although Rousseau's philosophical conception of gender conforms to the traditional construction of women as passive and weak relative to men's superior intellectual and physical powers, it also posits them as singularly informed by a propensity towards guile and deception. "Cunning is a natural gift of woman," argues Rousseau (*Émile* 334). "This special skill with which the female sex is endowed is a fair equivalent for its lack of strength; without it woman would be man's slave, not his helpmeet" (*Émile* 334-35). "Women have a natural gift for managing men," continues Rousseau, but their control is artfully concealed under a facade of weakness and soft manners (*Émile* 370). "Woman's reign is a reign of gentleness, tact, and kindness; her commands are caresses, her threats are tears" (*Émile* 370). As Handwerk points out, Rousseau's emphasis on the inherent guile of women dovetails with his construction of a passive *Émile* who is manipulated into a subordinate and dependent position by a deceptive tutor. In the novel, argues Handwerk, Ruffigny plays the role of Rousseauvian tutor to Fleetwood, manipulating, often through subterfuge, Fleetwood's emotional responses and his moral development. The tutor's (Ruffigny's) deceptive "mode of operation," asserts Handwerk, "feminizes" him (388), and he argues that Fleetwood's later misogyny could thus be read as the "displacement of resentment toward his paternal figures and of their rational (or rationalized) insistence upon his immaturity" (396).

For another example of Godwin's revisionist approach to Rousseauvian educational theory, see Anne Chandler's "Romanticizing Adolescence: Godwin's *St.*

Leon and the Matter of Rousseau.” As Chandler argues, Godwin took issue with what he saw as the reductive nature of Rousseau’s highly structured and tightly controlled pedagogical model. In his depiction of a middle-aged St. Leon in a young man’s body, a body which then comes into contact with numerous “tutor figures,” notably Bethlam Gabor and his own son Charles, Godwin complicates the established age and power differentials between tutor and pupil, restoring—in Chandler’s view—“the libidinous energy so readily tamed in Rousseau’s accounts of male adolescence” (410).

4. Significantly, this metaphor also points to Fleetwood’s position as the despotic “Other.” A “sultana” is of course the female relative or mistress of a sultan; as the Countess is the mistress of Fleetwood, the metaphor then serves to situate Fleetwood as the sultan—a figure conventionally associated, within the western imagination, with corruption, vice, and despotic power. In *St. Leon*, we see such a figure represented in the character of Muzaffer Bey, the Turkish military governor and extortionist. Also see note 6 in the chapter on *Mandeville*.

5. Ruffigny’s narrative, while seemingly unconnected with the later events of the text, is nevertheless one section of the novel consistently praised by critics for its original depiction of child labour in a silk mill at Lyons. Handwerk and A. A. Markley deem it “an example of literary realism [. . .] remarkable for its time” (Introduction to *Fleetwood* 36), while Ivanka Kovačević calls it the “first occurrence in prose fiction of social criticism directed against the factory system” (qtd. in Tysdahl 109).

6. Mrs. Macneil's history is almost parodically recounted by Fleetwood, who seems to savour every sensational detail of the tale, but it is troubling how the mother's past—particularly her abusive union with a controlling older man who won the approval of her father through “conversation” (234)—will be eventually resurrected as the daughter's future.
7. The play recounts the tragedy of Valerio, who enters into an agreement with the ruler of Naples that allows him to marry his beloved, Evanthe. The agreement requires Valerio to submit to decapitation after one month of marriage.
8. Specifically, Act 2, lines 34-40

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Godwin's novel was published, in three volumes, in London and Edinburgh on December 1, 1817. In 1818, a French translation of the novel appeared, as well as two pirated versions of the text by American publishers in New York and Philadelphia (Marshall 340). In both American editions, the original three volumes of the novel are conflated into two. Moreover, the unfinished quality of the novel's ending no doubt encouraged the anonymous 1818 publication of a spurious and highly satirical fourth and "final" volume of the text, entitled *Mandeville; or The Last Words of a Maniac!* As both Burton R. Pollin and Mona Scheuermann have observed, a number of later critics have mistaken this spurious volume as an authentic addition to the novel (34, n. 7; *Novels of William Godwin* 210, n. 53).

2. Pollin has proposed that Shelley's enthusiasm for *Mandeville* can be traced in the several linguistic and thematic similarities with the novel that he identifies in the poet's "Ozymandias" (1818) and "Love's Philosophy" (1819). See "Godwin's *Mandeville* in Poems of Shelley." Moreover, as John Colmer and, more recently, James Mulvihill have argued, signs of *Mandeville*'s influence can also be found in the work of another Romantic author, Thomas Love Peacock, whose 1818 novel *Nightmare Abbey* includes a scene in which the characters receive a packet of texts, one of which is entitled *Devilman, a novel*. Described by one of the characters as a tale of "hatred—revenge—misanthropy—and quotations from the Bible [. . .] the morbid anatomy of black bile," *Devilman* has traditionally been read as an allusion to Godwin's *Mandeville*, the former being an anagram for the latter (qtd. in Colmer 331). As Colmer demonstrates,

Nightmare Abbey's setting, as well as its satiric depiction of a gloomy misanthropy, was at least partially influenced by *Mandeville* and the "popular cult of misanthropy" to which it both contributed and helped to produce (332). See Colmer's "Godwin's *Mandeville* and Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey*," as well as Mulvihill's "A Prototype for Mr. Toobad in Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey*."

3. Shakespeare, in *Macbeth* (4.3.209)

4. Matthew 12:34

5. Milton, in *Paradise Lost* (2.114-15)

6. Like Gifford, who had a "dark complexion, approaching to the mulatto" (337), Mallison also possesses a "dark, sallow complexion" (84). Significantly, in both cases, villainy seems to reveal itself on the body in particularly racialized terms. In *St. Leon*, Godwin directly represented racial difference in his portrayal of Muzaffer Bey, the Turkish bashaw to whom St. Leon appeals for protection when he becomes a target of Hungarian civil unrest. In the novel, Bey's "muddy" complexion and "coarse," "distorted" features are reflective of his corrupt and avaricious character (374), a trope very much in keeping with contemporary representations of the Oriental "Other."

7. Despite the uneasy alliance between the Royalist and Presbyterian factions of the English state, both of which were united, at least in theory, in their desire for an overthrow of Oliver Cromwell's rule and the restoration of at least a limited form of monarchy, conflict between the two parties created suspicion and mistrust, especially on the part of the Royalists towards their new allies (*Mandeville* 81-82). This, *Mandeville*

explains, was the historical context that determined the social climate at Winchester School, where every boy was a Royalist and on guard against any Presbyterian sentiment deemed injurious to the house of Stuart (80-81).

8. This is yet another instance in which Mandeville's inability to speak forcefully, or at all, on an issue sets up the train of events that consequently result in his future misfortunes. Although his "whole soul rose against the thought" of sharing a domicile with Holloway and Mallison and being thus subject to their company and potential duplicity (232), Mandeville is unable to formulate any verbal response or plan of confrontation. Instead, he retreats further into the isolation of a resentful silence: "I shut myself up, more than I had ever yet been accustomed to. When my occasions or my inclination prompted me to go out of my apartment, I asked myself, 'Now, the moment I open the door, shall I not meet these scoundrels?' [. . . .] Often I saw nothing of them: when I did, for the most part I scowled, and *turned away in silence*" (232; emphasis added).

9. Godwin's allusion here is a reference to "The History of Prince Fadlallah, Son of Bin-Ortoc, King of Mousel," a tale found in *The Thousand and One Days: Persian Tales*, compiled by François Pétis de la Croix and translated into English by A. Philips in the early eighteenth century. Of course, Mandeville's allusion to this tale is an anachronism, since he is presumably narrating his history in the mid-seventeenth century.

10. One may recall *St. Leon's* Marguerite, a quintessential example of a self-effacing caregiver who unwearingly ministers to her husband's psychological and physical needs

during his lengthy and recurring periods of incapacitation. As we will soon see, Mandeville's sister, Henrietta, also figures significantly as a nursemaid.

11. Shelley registered his extreme disappointment in the character of Henrietta on precisely this ground. For Shelley, the philosophical beauty of Henrietta's eloquent appeal to Mandeville for a disinterested philanthropy is undercut by what is later revealed to be her true motivation—her love for Clifford and her understandable desire to reconcile her brother with her suitor. On December 7th, 1817, Shelley wrote to Godwin: "Shall I say that, when I discovered that she was pleading all this time secretly for her lover, and when at last she abandoned—weakly abandoned poor Mandeville, I felt an involuntary and, perhaps, an unreasonable pang?" (260). In his *Examiner* review, Shelley elaborates in greater depth on Henrietta's character as a failed experiment in the ultimate representation of truth and virtue:

One regrets that Henrietta, who soared far beyond her contemporaries in her opinions, who was so beautiful that she seemed a spirit among mankind should act and feel no otherwise than the least exalted of her sex; and still more that the author capable of conceiving something so admirable and lovely should have been withheld by the tenor of the fiction which he chose from executing it to its full extent. It almost seems in the original conception of the character of Henrietta that something was imagined too vast and too uncommon to be realized; and the feeling weighs like disappointment on the mind. (Graham 359)

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