

*Monomanía en Fleetwood:  
La Tensa Transición de William Godwin  
al Romanticismo*

*Monomania in Fleetwood:  
William Godwin's Strained Transition  
to Romanticism*

EVA PÉREZ RODRÍGUEZ  
Universidad de las Islas Baleares  
eva.perez@uib.es

**ABSTRACT**

Published at the beginning of the nineteenth century, William Godwin's *Fleetwood* (1805) exemplifies the difficult transition that the author underwent from philosophical radicalism and rationalism to the culture of sensibility and Romanticism. The shifting political mood and the changes in his personal life also required Godwin to return to fiction-writing. He would have to move beyond the themes of the Jacobin novel, giving renewed expression to his emphasis on the "domestic affections" he had experienced personally as a husband and father, and a theme that he was now incorporating into all his writings, including the revisions to *Political Justice*. Devoid of the political background, however, Godwin's new fiction relied on extreme incidents and characterisation. In consequence, the eponymous protagonist of *Fleetwood* reveals a mixture of misanthropy (later misogyny) and need for sociability which readers and reviewers found unrealistic and strained. Although Godwin's main idea, inspired by Rousseau and Wordsworth, was to express the individual's need of philanthropy and companionship, *Fleetwood's* characterisation, couched in the rhetoric of Edmund Burke's major works, is ultimately the result of combining monomania and selfishness.

**Key words:** William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, Jacobinism, Romanticism, Monomania

## RESUMEN

Publicada a principios del siglo XIX, la novela *Fleetwood* (1805) de William Godwin ilustra la difícil transición que experimentó el autor desde el radicalismo filosófico hasta la cultura de la sensibilidad y el Romanticismo. El cambiante ambiente político y los ajustes en su vida personal también hicieron que Godwin volviera a escribir ficción. Para ello tendría que abandonar los temas de la novela jacobina, dando nuevo énfasis a los “afectos domésticos” que había experimentado personalmente como marido y padre, un tema que, en ese momento, estaba incorporando en todas sus obras, incluida la revisión de *Political Justice*. Sin trasfondo político, sin embargo, la nueva ficción de Godwin se apoyó en caracterización de personajes y sucesos extremos. En consecuencia, el protagonista homónimo de *Fleetwood* muestra una mezcla de misantropía (y más tarde misoginia) y una necesidad de sociabilidad que los lectores y críticos del momento encontraron forzados y faltos de realismo. Aunque la principal idea de Godwin, inspirada en Rousseau y Wordsworth, era expresar la necesidad del individuo de filantropía y compañía, la caracterización de Fleetwood, articulada por medio de la retórica de Edmund Burke, es finalmente el resultado de combinar monomanía y egoísmo.

**Palabras clave:** William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, Jacobinismo, Romanticismo, Monomanía

When William Godwin published *Fleetwood* in 1805, he was entering a new phase in his career. The turbulent 1790s had ended, but with them had also gone most of the energy fuelling the Radical cause. The Cabinet and, therefore, the country at large were less alarmed at the political events, on both sides of the English Channel. Terror was no longer «the order of the day», as Godwin had written in the 1795 Preface to *Caleb Williams*<sup>1</sup>. On the artistic level, the transition to Romanticism was well under way. It was precisely these changes, as will be argued in the present article, together with the drastic adjustments in his personal life, that made Godwin

<sup>1</sup> In the original Preface to *Caleb Williams*, Godwin forewarned his readers that the novel was written «to comprehend [...] a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man». Such an incendiary prelude was withdrawn due to «the alarm of booksellers» and reproduced in the 1795 revision of the novel. In this second Preface Godwin explained how in the frenzied political climate of 1794 «Terror was the order of the day; and it was feared that even the humble novelist, might be shown to be constructively a traitor. *October 29, 1795*». WILLIAM GODWIN, *Things As They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* [1794]. In Mark PHILIP (ed.), *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, London, Pickering & Chatto, Vol. 3, 1992, pp. 279-80.

unsure about the literary conventions and style he should adopt in the 1800s. These events are explained in the first part of this article. *Fleetwood* proved to be a minor success, both financially and artistically, and in the second part of this article it becomes clear that Godwin's choice of themes hindered rather than helped him. The tension between isolation and sociability –which he chose for the main narrative conflict– reflects the parallel dichotomy between the approaching Romanticism and the dwindling eighteenth-century radicalism. The last part of the article offers an analysis of the complex characterisation of *Fleetwood*, an unusual and challenging combination of monomania and selfishness.

## 1. A DIFFICULT TRANSITION: THE END OF GODWIN'S JACOBIN FICTION

Even if the years between *St Leon* (1799) and *Fleetwood* (1805) were not so markedly turbulent as those around *Caleb Williams* (1794), they nevertheless afforded plenty of room for anxiety for Godwin both on the socio-political and on the personal level. As Don Locke argues, the 1790s «had begun in a fever of political debate, but they closed in a fury of political abuse. The intention was no longer to out-argue your opponent, but to ridicule and vilify him»<sup>2</sup>. Attacks poured on Godwin, for his endorsement of the French revolutionary cause, his private life and his literary productions. France, led by First Consul Bonaparte, resumed war with Britain in 1803, roughly a year after the Treaty of Amiens. 1805 brought the defeat of the French and Spanish fleets in Trafalgar, but the so called «wars abroad» would last until 1815. In spite of the commercial boom that the country enjoyed between 1799 and 1801 the atmosphere was one of tension and fear of revenge, which reflected themselves in an abandonment of support for the French cause and a turning of coats to attack one's former friends. Peter Marshall closes the chapter «Reaction» in his biography of Godwin with a dispiriting vision of the author at the turn of the century:

the concerted effort of the Anti-Jacobin campaign exhausted him. [...] The fiery advocate of liberty and equality, the skilful opponent of Pitt, and the bogeyman of the Anti-Jacobins was soon forgotten. Godwin remarried and put on his slippers. [...] With the exception of his novels, which show some of his old fire, he spent most of his time writing a series of distinguished but unsensational biographies, histories and essays. He remained at the cen-

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<sup>2</sup> Don LOCKE, *A Fantasy of Reason. The Life and Thought of William Godwin*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 156.

tre of an accomplished circle of friends, he never lost his radicalism, but he was unable to recapture the philosophical profundity and imaginative power of the early 1790s<sup>3</sup>.

First came, in one of the most notorious phases of that Anti-Jacobin campaign, the attacks on Godwin's *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1798): «Fierce passion's slave, she veered with every gust», derided one of the satirists<sup>4</sup>. Godwin himself was made to appear under every possible term of abuse (Mr Vapour, Mr Subtile, Stupeo, Mr Subtlewould, Dr Myope) in the satires and parodies that proliferated until the end of the century, alongside those works which intended to guard people against Godwinian principles put into practice. Mrs Opie herself in *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) contributed to the discredit<sup>5</sup>. Godwin was shocked at the criticism from James Mackintosh, a former supporter of the French revolution. The latter's *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791) had been the most scholarly attack on Edmund Burke's conservatism, but he now made of Godwinism the focus of his critique in *Law of Nature and of Nations*<sup>6</sup>. The «Whig Dr Johnson», Dr Parr, also stabbed Godwin in the back when he delivered the annual Spital Sermon on Easter Tuesday 1800 before the Lord Mayor of London, and struck hard at Godwin's New Philosophy. Godwin had hoped Parr would appreciate his new stance towards the private affections as expressed in *St Leon*, a complimentary copy of which Parr received and returned unread, stating in the enclosed letter that it was no oversight. Godwin reacted by composing his *Thoughts Occasioned by a Perusal of Dr Parr's Spital Sermon* (1801), clarifying his view of benevolence, which now includes a preference for one's own circle of domestic relations, a preference which must nevertheless be founded in reason and not override a greater public good<sup>7</sup>.

Even if the times in England afforded some optimism for the radicals, who were not so relentlessly persecuted as in the late 1790s, Godwin did not have much room for exultation. A widower with two young girls to care for; a radical authority first praised

<sup>3</sup> Peter MARSHALL, *William Godwin*, London, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 233.

<sup>4</sup> LOCKE, *A Fantasy of Reason*, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> The novel's intention is to show the evils of cohabitation (as opposed to the correctness of marriage), as exemplified by Glenmurray and Adeline, who like Godwin and Wollstonecraft, skip the formalities of matrimony. He dies and she marries the deceitful Berrendale, whose adultery and ensuing profitable marriage in Jamaica drive her to despair. Shelley KING and John B. PIERCE (eds.), *Amelia Opie. Adeline Mowbray* [1805], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, x-xi.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the numerous attacks which Godwin suffered, see MARSHALL, *William Godwin*, p. 211-233.

<sup>7</sup> William St Clair calls the *Thoughts on Parr* «one of the best things that Godwin ever wrote», and highlights how «the whole work was written in the generous rancour-free spirit which is the mark of true philosophy». William ST CLAIR, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family*, London, Faber & Faber, 1989, pp. 219-220.

and then vilified with equal vehemence in books, classrooms and churches; and above all a proud man who was by now writing lists of lost friends, Godwin strongly needed a redirection of his life pursuits to drag him out of the pit of depression that was slowly but surely swallowing him. His moves on the literary, personal and financial levels were no doubt intended at his regeneration; but if by this we understand recapturing the self-confidence that accompanied him in the years between *Political Justice* and his marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft, then the effort did not bear fruit. On 13 December 1800 his tragedy *Antonio* was performed, and it appears to have been a tragedy both on and off the stage<sup>8</sup>. Undaunted, he set out to write *another* one, *Abbas, King of Persia*, which was not even accepted at Drury Lane. He then moved from drama to biography, and wrote a *Life of Chaucer* (1803). This time even the *Anti-Jacobin* gave a favourable review. Godwin's next step was to go back to what he really did best: fiction. What started as «Lambert» following his plan of 1798 to «try the effect of my particular style of writing upon common incidents and the embarrassments of lovers»<sup>9</sup> became *Fleetwood*, a minor literary success although by no means comparable to *Caleb Williams* or even *St Leon*.

In order to fill the vacuum in his personal life, Godwin started looking for a prospective wife and even proposed, unsuccessfully, to a few women. Then in May 1801 he received the unexpected visit of Mrs Clairmont, who, perfectly aware of the answer, exclaimed «Is it possible that I behold the immortal Godwin?»<sup>10</sup>. The same determination with which she accosted him on this occasion, she showed for the rest of their married lives, for they indeed got married, just before the end of the year. Even if she could not boast the same relevance in Godwin's life as Mary Wollstonecraft (after all, it was the latter's portrait that hung with Godwin's in his studio), she nevertheless played an important, although not always a positive, role. Many of Godwin's friends found her exasperating and backbiting, and distanced themselves from him, and she openly favoured her own children above Fanny and Mary. But she was industrious, and in 1805 the Godwins opened the Juvenile Library, to which she contributed with translations<sup>11</sup>. Above all, Godwin needed and relied on her. Godwin's household was now filled with four kids, each probably the child of a different father<sup>12</sup>; then William

<sup>8</sup> LOCKE, *A Fantasy of Reason*, pp. 188-191.

<sup>9</sup> LOCKE, *A Fantasy of Reason*, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> Don Locke admits he could not trace the origin of the anecdote, but considered it appealing and likely enough to retell. LOCKE, *A Fantasy of Reason*, p. 205.

<sup>11</sup> For details of the early years of Mrs Clairmont at the Godwin household, see Emily W. SUNSTEIN, *Mary Shelley. Romance and Reality*, Baltimore MA, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, pp. 29-35.

<sup>12</sup> Fanny and Mary, Wollstonecraft's daughters by Gilbert Imlay and Godwin respectively, and Charles and Jane Clairmont, Mrs Clairmont's children supposedly by two different men.

Godwin Junior was born in 1803. They would have to live by Godwin's pen, which of necessity had to produce profitable material. The *Life of Chaucer* was a good attempt, so Godwin recovered some self-esteem, which he re-directed to fiction. But Godwin was no longer a radical writer, and in any case the literary mood had shifted. However, it would be a mistake to consider Sensibility and Romanticism as exclusively opposites of Radicalism.

If an extensive reading of the term «radicalism» is applied, then we can concur with Gary Kelly's assumption that the mere endorsement of sentimental values was liable to accusations of sedition, for anything in the late 1790s and early 1800s that went against convention and authority, also in literary matters, was taken as a challenge to the establishment<sup>13</sup>. The sensibility mode had been started by French writers who, like Rousseau, suffered accusations of affectation and effeminacy just as they had been accused before of an excessive belief in reason. No sooner was the excessive belief in emotions seen in contradiction to the traditional British values of honesty and bravery than the clash moved on to the political level. B. J. Tysdahl adopts the same stance when he wonders «isn't the sentimental novel antiestablishment anyway since it always tends to extol the emotional life of an individual who suffers because of the customs and rules of society?»<sup>14</sup>.

In addition, Sensibility and Enlightenment had co-existed in the 1790s as two forms of social criticism that gave way to the expression of Gothic stories and Jacobin ideas. Then Romanticism brought with it a redefinition of «the idea of the self, the "domestic affections", the experience of community, the nation and nature»<sup>15</sup>. This redefinition however carried a mixture of aspects sympathetic to Jacobinism and others rather inclined towards conservatism. Romanticism then, together with Anti-Jacobinism, has been seen as a reaction against the Enlightenment and the cult of Sensibility, even if many of its characteristics were adopted and adapted from them (for example, the individual's isolation in the midst of a society that does not embrace or foster him/her; the fact that circumstances form one's character; or the taste for extreme frames of mind in accordance with sublime or picturesque landscapes). Marilyn Butler points out the difference between Sensibility, or «its near synonym sentiment», and Romanticism. In her view Sensibility has a scientific or physiological edge since it «echoes eighteenth century philosophy and psychology in focusing upon the mental processes by which impressions are received by the senses». The Romantic writer, however, focuses on «inwardness», totally dissimilar from «the sentimental writer's

<sup>13</sup> Gary KELLY, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830*, London, Longman, 1989, pp. 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> Bjorn TYSDAHL, *William Godwin as Novelist*, London, Athlone Press, 1981, p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> KELLY, *English Fiction*, p. 24.

interest in how the mind works and in how people behave»<sup>16</sup>. Focusing on the literary field, Janet Todd analyses how «sentimentalism» or «sensibility» invaded fiction from the 1740s to the 1770s:

This fiction initially showed people how to behave, how to express themselves in friendship and how to respond decently to life's experiences. Later, it prided itself more on making its readers weep and in teaching them when and how much to weep. In addition, it delivered the great archetypal victims: the chaste suffering woman, happily rewarded in marriage or elevated into redemptive death, and the sensitive, benevolent man whose feelings are too exquisite for the acquisitiveness, vulgarity and selfishness of this world<sup>17</sup>.

As for the effect the sentimental novel has on its reader, Janet Todd says that it «moralises more than it analyses», its emphasis «not on the subtleties of a particular emotional state but on the communication of common feeling from sufferer or watcher to reader or audience»<sup>18</sup>. Richardson, she affirms, gave the sentimental fiction the polish it needed after its early identification with scandal narratives and cautionary tales, using the «epistolary form to investigate the key problems and concepts of sentimentalism: the expression and moral implications of sensibility and the ideal of benevolence and social harmony»<sup>19</sup>. We shall see how these features apply to *Fleetwood*.

Gary Kelly's assumption that *Fleetwood* unites the Jacobin and the Romantic indeed grants Godwin a higher status as a writer than that of his contemporaries, for it shows his ability to adjust to the new literary modes. But if as Kelly himself admits, Godwin's last fictional productions, *Mandeville* (1817), *Cloudesley* (1830) and *Deloraine* (1831) are all romantic and all reworkings of *Fleetwood*, then there is more reason to see the latter pointing forward in the direction of Romanticism than backwards in the direction of Jacobinism. Political criticism went on, of course, and Godwin was no stranger to it; but Britain was too engrossed in the war against France for British authors to support the latter openly. The days of the *Rights of Man*, of the *Vindications*, of *Political Justice* were gone. Most of the public figures (scientists, philosophers, politicians, etc.) that had embraced the Jacobin cause were retired either in shock or in disillusion. Tom Paine had fled to France in 1792; Joseph Priestley emigrated to America in 1794; Richard Price had died in 1791.

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<sup>16</sup> Marilyn BUTLER, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981, pp. 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> Janet TODD, *Sensibility; An Introduction*, London, Methuen, 1986, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> TODD, *Sensibility*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> TODD, *Sensibility*, p. 66.

A similar process took place in the field of literature. By 1805, date of publication of *Fleetwood*, the three authors Kelly studies alongside Godwin in *The English Jacobin Novel* were already out of the literary scenario or not faring very well. Bage –author of *Man As He Is* (1792) and *Hermesprong; or Man As He Is Not* (1796) – had died in 1801. Mrs Inchbald –author of *A Simple Story* (1791), and *Nature and Art* (1796) – had given up fiction-writing; and Holcroft –author of what has been considered the first fully-fledged Jacobin novel, *Anna St Ives*– produced «the farrago of satire and sentiment that was *Bryan Perdue*» (1805)<sup>20</sup>. Even Godwin was forced to publish children's books and histories under pseudonym, in order to escape state vigilance<sup>21</sup>. Many writers found reasons for disillusion on both literary and political grounds. Some strove to cope with the changes; Godwin certainly moved with them, probably in isolation, away from Jacobinism.

Marilyn Butler relates the radical bent of the majority of writers in the 1790s with their Dissenting background, and refers to a decline, around 1800, in the religious views of those intellectuals, which acutely affected their writing<sup>22</sup>. Butler's thesis would mark a termination of Jacobinism in 1800 at the latest. Gary Kelly likewise theorises that the Jacobin literary movement expired coinciding with the decline of political Jacobinism, a thesis that excludes *Fleetwood* from the subgenre<sup>23</sup>. Mark Philp also highlights the interrelation between Godwin's social background and his diminished relevance in the literary and political circles at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

Godwin's philosophy was firmly tied to the language, conventions and arguments he found in his social milieu and [...], as a result, much of what he argued was persuasive to the radicals and intellectuals of the time. It is only by seeing his work in this way that we can explain his rise to fame. Equally it is only by looking at the changes in his social context that we can understand the collapse of his reputation<sup>24</sup>.

Towards the end of the 1790s Godwin had been showing evident signs of his abandonment of his earlier excessively philosophical rationalism, on the one hand, and on the other his increasing interest in sentiments. In the second and third editions of *Political Justice* (1796 and 1798 respectively) he altered his views on cohabitation,

<sup>20</sup> Gary KELLY, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 240.

<sup>21</sup> ST CLAIR, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, pp. 285-287.

<sup>22</sup> BUTLER, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> KELLY, *Jacobin Novel*, p. 261.

<sup>24</sup> Mark PHILP, *Godwin's Political Justice*, London, Duckworth, 1986, p. 230.

the so-called «domestic affections» and matrimony. Between both revisions of the political treatise, in the third edition of *Caleb Williams* (1797) he introduced the character of Laura, designed to emphasise the importance of philanthropy. In addition, Godwin's diaries provide evidence that at the end of 1794 and throughout 1795, he discusses with his friends over God and Christian morality, gratitude and self-love, family affection and passions<sup>25</sup>. Most importantly, in 1796 Godwin had met and fallen in love with Mary Wollstonecraft, a relationship that led to his marriage, fatherhood (eventually also heartbreaking bereavement and widowhood), and a completely altered outlook on life.

## 2. THE TENSION BETWEEN ISOLATION AND SOCIABILITY IN FLEETWOOD

True to his Dissenting background, Godwin wrote *Fleetwood* in the philosophy of candour and the confessional style which he had used in *Caleb Williams* and *St Leon*<sup>26</sup>. From his native Merionethshire, Fleetwood is sent to Oxford as a student. Here he becomes alternatively a rascal and a misanthrope, until his grand tour takes him to Paris, where he gets involved in flighty relationships with frivolous high society women. The Alps receive him heart-broken and disillusioned, but the grandiosity of Switzerland's landscape and the wise advice of his father's friend Ruffigny restore him, albeit briefly, to an honourable life. Both Fleetwood and Ruffigny return to Wales to cry over the grave of Fleetwood's father. The misanthrope starts craving for a friend, whom he finds in a personal acquaintance of Rousseau's, the Scottish philanthrope Macneil. With him Fleetwood also meets a virtuous woman to marry, the idealised Mary Macneil. The marriage is celebrated in a melancholy mood after her family's sudden perishing in a sea storm. Back in Merionethshire, Fleetwood's obsessive nature and Mary's social life feed his misgivings. In Bath, they receive the visit of two cousins of Fleetwood's: Kenrick, lively and honest, who befriends Mary; and Gifford, treacherous and circumspect, who uses this to his own end: driving Fleetwood into insanity through unfounded jealousy. Fleetwood decides to disown Mary when Mr Scarborough intervenes. A former misanthrope, he puts all the fictitious stories by

<sup>25</sup> Victoria MYERS, David O'SHAUGHNESSY, and Mark PHILP (eds.), *The Diary of William Godwin*, Oxford, Oxford Digital Library, 2010. Accessed 07-03-2015, URL: <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>.

<sup>26</sup> A basic tenet of Radical Dissent, «candour» was understood as speaking the «plain truth» or just «plain speaking». Linda Lewis YOUNG, *William Godwin's Liberal Political Philosophy: The Virtue of Sincerity and the Right of Private Judgement*, Ann Arbor MI, University Microfilms International, 1993, pp. 133-134.

Gifford right in Fleetwood's eyes. Mary and Fleetwood are reconciled, and it seems he learns once and for all to trust in those he loves.

Godwin's choice of the subtitle «The New Man of Feeling» for his novel was a clear indication that he had modelled his protagonist on the successful novels of Henry Mackenzie: *The Man of Feeling* (1771) and to a lesser extent, *Julia de Roubigne* (1777). The latter was written in the manner of Richardson's *Clarissa* and the former exposed the central tenet of the novel of Sentiment, the alliance of acute sensibility with true virtue, as expressed with genius by Sterne in *A Sentimental Journey*<sup>27</sup>. Mackenzie, Richardson, and Sterne were all deeply indebted to Rousseau, an author admired by sentimental female writers and enlightenment male authors alike. The sentimental man portrayed along the lines of Mackenzie's Hartley exemplified the union between sensibility and benevolence, or virtue: his sensibility is evident in outbursts of tears and charity when helping those in need. The innovation in Godwin's Fleetwood, what makes him a *new* man of feeling is the lack of such an equation: in him sensibility does *not* equate with virtue.

The plight in which Fleetwood finds himself, that of believing he is being cuckolded by his young wife with the innocent Kenrick, is taken from Mackenzie's other success, *Julia de Roubigne* as well as from Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1760). Rousseau's novel of passionate love interwoven with an account of contemporary manners was, together with *Clarissa*, a landmark in eighteenth century literature<sup>28</sup>. The motif Godwin took from these leading figures of the sentimental novel is that of the triangle relationship husband-wife-young man, although he added a psychological layer by making the infidelity a suspicion, real only in the protagonist's mind. He thus stressed the overpowering hold emotions could have on man, regardless of any logical reason. Again Godwin moves towards monomania and insanity, as in the cases of Caleb and St Leon, but this time caused by sheer jealousy<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> In *The Mirror* Henry Mackenzie praised his own prose for its «power of awakening the finer feelings, which so remarkably distinguish the composition of a gentleman». G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> After failing, as Pamela Clemit affirms, to «develop a new form in which to embody their philosophical concerns», it was on Richardson that the Jacobins modelled their most effective novels, especially on «*Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-8), with their central struggles for mastery and independence of mind within an entrenched paternalistic society». Pamela CLEMIT, *The Godwinian Novel; The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Gary Handwerk mentions the disbelief *Fleetwood* created among contemporary readers and reviewers, who «rejected [...] the logic of Godwin's ethical analysis – that the sensibility of a figure like Fleetwood might manifest itself in personally and socially destructive ways», a feature of characterisation

The philanthropist Ruffigny in *Fleetwood* shares characteristics of both Wordsworth (who had been influenced by *Political Justice*, but later had a bumpy friendship with Godwin) and Rousseau, whose *Confessions* (1781-8) Godwin was imitating. *Fleetwood*'s confessional style, which the author had chosen already for *Caleb Williams* and *St Leon*, again presents us with a biased tale of the protagonist's misfortunes. This contributed, as advanced by Godwin himself in the *Preface*, to the novel's air of everydayness: «The following story consists of such adventures, as for the most part have occurred to at least one third of the Englishmen now existing, who are of the same rank of life as my hero»<sup>30</sup>. Godwin had transferred his focus of interest from the portrayal of the individual as the sufferer of social and political abuse, in *Caleb Williams*; through the allegorical use of gothic paraphernalia encroaching on the domestic affections, in *St Leon*; to a story of dissipation, marriage, jealousy, treason and madness, in *Fleetwood*. This speaks well of Godwin's inventiveness as a novelist in rapidly changing times, but the new thematic focus did not contribute to a cohesive plot or a realistic characterisation of the protagonist. *Fleetwood* thus appears as the work of an author departed from his so far social and philosophical position (the Jacobin novel) and not yet arrived at new thematic and stylistic ones (the Romantic novel).

Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) had been a product, and one of the initiators, of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. The plight of the young hero, Werther, captured the imagination of the late eighteenth century English reading public. He was no valid model for Godwin, due to his extreme, sickly type of sensibility, which he wanted to avoid, yet *Fleetwood* often ails of the same romantic anxieties as Goethe's hero: «*Weltschmerz*», or ill-ease in society and «*Ichschmerz*» or ill-ease with one's self. «I wanted something, I knew not what», laments *Fleetwood*. In an intense passage, he recapitulates the barrenness of twenty years' search of a soul with whom to communicate:

I sought it in solitude and in crowds, in travel and at home, in ambition and in independence. [...] I wandered among mountains and rivers, through verdant plains, and over immense precipices; but nature had no beauties. I plunged into the society of the rich, the gay, the witty, and the eloquent; but I sighed<sup>31</sup>.

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which was clearly «destructive of the ethos of sympathy on which the sentimental novel was based». Gary HANDWERK, «Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education», *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2002, pp. 375-398, p. 376.

<sup>30</sup> William GODWIN, *Fleetwood; Or, The New Man of Feeling* [1805]. In Mark PHILIP (ed.), *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, London, Pickering & Chatto, Vol. 5, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 151.

These mutually exclusive character features (destructive isolation and misanthropy) were harmonised by Rousseau (whose idealism has also been considered one of the starting points of *Sturm und Drang*) by focusing on the relationship between virtue and social correctness. In *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) the trio St Preux-Wolmar-Julie are different from Fleetwood, Kenrick and Mary. Rousseau's trio end up living exemplary lives after the passionate love affair (between St Preux and Julie) has been redirected into a respectable, formally sanctioned, virtuous one (between Wolmar and Julie). Godwin appropriates the diction and ideas of Rousseau, but his narrative application is drastically altered by presenting a protagonist guilty not so much of lack of virtue as the inability to see it in others. Fleetwood's responses to the goodness of people around him are distorted and equivocal. If he is a man of feeling, or rather a *new* man of feeling, it is not because his sensitivity leads him to virtue, but quite the opposite. It is only after his own mistakes about Mary are cleared and Gifford is executed that he can see his wife's worth: «Mary never looked half so beautiful, half so radiant as now. [...] I never till now was sensible of half the merits of my wife». Nothing could be further from benevolence: «Innocence is nothing», Fleetwood concludes, «if it is merely innocence». It needs to be challenged by society and only then declared virtuous, for him to consider it «the most ravishing spectacle that earth can boast»<sup>32</sup>.

In trying to depart from the link between benevolence and sensibility, Godwin encountered the difficulty of making Fleetwood's reactions appear sensible. For an author steeped in the culture of Rational Dissent, this was a difficult habit to shed. In the novel's Preface he pledged to have «added somewhat to the stock of books which should enable a recluse, shut up in his closet, to form an idea of what is passing in the world». Yet he also admitted such commonplace materials had proved insufficient in terms of narrative conflict: «I confess however the inability I found to weave a catastrophe, such as I desired, out of these ordinary incidents»<sup>33</sup>. His «catastrophe» therefore would have to be woven out of more extreme features of characterisation and narrative twists that inevitably detract from the novel's verisimilitude. The best example of this shift is the climax of Fleetwood's rage, the episode in which his monomania is let to run riot: the wax dummies «dinner party», more fully explained below.

In *Fleetwood* Godwin makes use of John Locke's formulation, and David Hartley's adoption and reformulation, of the theory of association of ideas<sup>34</sup>. The theory is parti-

<sup>32</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>33</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* of 1690 served as the starting point for David Hartley to advance his theory of «associationism» in *Observations on Man* (1749). According to Hartley, the ideas that Locke had suggested originate in sensory sensations become associated in a certain necessary order

cularly fitting to the development of irrational jealousy taking hold of the protagonist's mind. On one occasion in Bath, a gossip warns Fleetwood about his wife's improper behaviour with Kenrick in public. Fleetwood's frenzied imagination rises in tumult: «The idea pursued me to my pillow: all night in my slumbers I imagined myself in the Rooms, and saw the indecorums and guilty intelligence of Kenrick and Mary. [...] my whole frame was in the paroxysm of a fever»<sup>35</sup>. Godwin rejected Hutcheson and Shaftesbury's ideas about man's supposedly innate «moral sense» in favour of Locke and Hume's notions of reasoned impressions and reflections. The social side of Locke's theory of idea-association was expanded by Hume, who maintained that sociability triumphed because through sympathy we relate to each other, in spite of every individual's different set of desires, developed through different mental processes<sup>36</sup>. Thus the view that society remains together through sentiments, not rationalism, appears to be endorsed in Fleetwood's story, which is one of mental suffering and forgiven mistakes. Godwin unites both trends of thought, Locke's and Hume's, in Fleetwood's detailed meditation on the nature of friendship:

The operation [...] is in one view of it mechanical; in another it is purely intellectual and moral. To the happiness of every human creature, at least in a civilised state, it is perhaps necessary that he should esteem himself, that he should regard himself as an object of complacency and honour: but in this, as well as any other species of creed, it should seem almost impossible for any one to be a firm believer, if there are no other persons in the world of the same sect as himself<sup>37</sup>.

The tension between individuality and society was around the 1790s and 1800s a widely debated topic when seen in connection with the interaction of the individual with nature, and the role the latter played in society. In Godwin's case, the influence of Wordsworth is evident. The poet had undergone a change of perspective in his later life, provoked by his disillusion at the outcome of the French Revolution, as a consequence of the Terror, in particular, «unlike his own earlier self, Wordsworth from 1797-8 ceases to see others as social phenomena». The social necessity, Marilyn Butler argues, dilutes amidst the emotional refuge provided by nature. Therefore men, for this altered Wordsworth, «are objects for contemplation, images of apparent alienation which the poet's imagination translates into private emblems of his troubled

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in the brain. See Anthony PAGE, «The Enlightenment and a "Second Reformation": The Religion and Philosophy of John Jebb (1736-86)». *Enlightenment and Dissent*, No. 17, 1998, pp. 48-82, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 233.

<sup>36</sup> See CLEMIT, *Godwinian Novel*, p. 80, and PHILP, *Godwin's Political Justice*, 147-149.

<sup>37</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 150.

communion with nature»<sup>38</sup>. In his adherence to the return to essentials, Wordsworth taught Godwin to deal with «characters of which the elements are simple», as the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* suggests, and «belonging rather to nature than to manners, such as exist now, and will probably always exist»<sup>39</sup>. As natural forces, nature and landscape are presented as something on which the protagonist can rely for security, renewal and escape. A vision of peaceful nature can bring about the appeasement of a spirit in tumult, just as the barrenness of winter's desolation evokes Burkean tones from his *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757):

When the whole heavens are blackened with congregated clouds, I have the sublime sensations of a friendless and deserted adventurer cast alone upon an unknown shore, without the terrible anticipations which fill his heart with anguish; and if at any time, in the midst of this ungenial season, the sun bursts forth with tenfold glory, and seems to diffuse a more resplendent beam than autumn ever knew, I feel that the human species has one friend left – a friend that may gladden the heart, and animate the countenance, of all sadness but despair<sup>40</sup>.

Fleetwood tends to associate his frames of mind with a particular landscape or, at times, to categorise those feelings as dream-like or real. From the beginning of his life he enjoys the pleasures of nature, to which he endows personified traits: the «face of nature» is «the most glorious of all visages», but he differentiates between the reality of the countryside in his native Merionethshire and the dream-like visions at Oxford. The young Fleetwood did not regard his stay at this university as a pleasurable period, and his rejection of cities, which he had admitted already in the first chapter, is increased by the contempt he feels for the company of other men. His «unsocial temper» works also in the direction of boosting what Gary Handwerk calls his «self-gratification and exhibitionism»<sup>41</sup>: even though he insists on his benevolence and humanity, he feels like a superior being when helping out those in need: «this should not have existed but for me»<sup>42</sup>, he affirms after saving a shepherd from drowning and helping his whole family financially.

<sup>38</sup> BUTLER, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> R. L. BRETT and A. R. JONES (eds.), *William Wordsworth and Samuel T. Coleridge. Lyrical Ballads* [1798, 1800], London, Routledge, 1991, p. 248.

<sup>40</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> HANDWERK, «Mapping Misogyny», p. 390.

<sup>42</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 25.

### 3. COMPLEX CHARACTERISATION: MONOMANIA AND SELFISHNESS

Fleetwood's inner insecurities manifest themselves in a tendency to see everything as opposites, normally of a tragic nature: Wales was to him like a dream, but one in which nature was in youth. Here he lived like a solitary savage, as in an ideal world; Oxford, however, is in dotage. This in-built pessimism is enhanced after the ill-fated relationships he pursues in Paris. His regeneration takes place amidst the grandiosity of the Alpine scenery, which inspires in him thoughts that allude, again, to Burke and his *On the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*: «the most frightful scenes alone had power to please»<sup>43</sup>. A traumatic rite of passage marks the first step towards his rehabilitation when in this impressive locale Fleetwood hears of his father's death, communicated to him by the only truly benevolent figure in the novel: Mr Ruffigny. He makes an impression on the remorseful Fleetwood, who accepts him as a surrogate father.<sup>44</sup>

This momentous acceptance takes place in one of Switzerland's most representative cantons, and one that would entail recollections dear to the former radical writers of the 1790s in Britain. In the area around the lake of Uri the Swiss liberty was engendered; even Ruffigny's forefathers were the descendants of illustrious figures like William Tell and Walter Furst. Fleetwood then loses his sense of reality: because he has learnt that his father is dead, «the reality of existence is forever gone»<sup>45</sup>. Idealisation thus pervades the chapters that Ruffigny's story occupies. By letting Fleetwood expatiate on the courage, determination and honesty of the old man, Godwin is composing a background of integrity, associated with the recollection of Switzerland's liberty, the respect due to a deceased honourable father and the magnificence of the scenery. In this extensive narrative within a narrative that Ruffigny's story represents, Godwin repeats the effect he had produced with Caleb's reception and amendment of Collins's tale of Falkland: through distance from the first narrator and distortion, idealisation is enhanced<sup>46</sup>.

This implicit message is rounded off by Ruffigny's advice to Fleetwood when he falls back on his former corrupted habits: «Goodness is the cornerstone of all true

<sup>43</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> According to Mona Scheuerman, Ruffigny «is deserving of [his] good fortune, and seems, in fact, the ideal Godwinian man». Mona Scheuerman, «The Study of Mind: The Later Novels of William Godwin», *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 19, No 1, 1983, pp. 16-30, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 74.

<sup>46</sup> For an analysis of the effect provoked by the superimposition of Caleb's narrative on that of Collins's version of Falkland's character, see Tilottama RAJAN, «Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel», *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 27, No 2, 1988, pp. 221-251.

excellence»<sup>47</sup>. Against this back-cloth of virtues, Fleetwood advances what is to be the purpose of the narrative: the recording of his errors is an act of penitence and humiliation. With no hope left for his regeneration, he admits that his education and his travels have made him a misanthrope. His return to Wales at the heart of the novel marks the nature of his disillusion: being back in his native land heightens his sensitivity, but the recognition of his own vices makes him more intolerant towards those of the rest of the species. Even if he has repented, his heart is not happy because his «contamination» cannot be extirpated, and once again in a Godwinian narrative the acquisition of knowledge leads to isolation, rather than liberty: «Innocence is a sort of magnetism by which one good heart understands another»; yet Fleetwood has “lost this touchstone”, and as a consequence, suffers discomfort in both loneliness and company: “In solitude I was disconsolate; and [...] in the most populous resorts and crowded assemblies, I was perfectly and consummately alone»<sup>48</sup>.

At this point marked by bitter isolation and disillusion, we see Fleetwood once more echoing Burke, this time not the aesthetics philosopher but the political writer. Godwin mentions Burke’s speech on the repeal of the Stamp Act and says moments like this were scarce in the present days of British Parliamentary life. Just as St Leon had done, affirms Pamela Clemit, Fleetwood «[envisages] personal fulfilment in terms of public fame», but his «in-built sense of a heroic past» is incompatible with «the present state of society»<sup>49</sup>. Indeed, Fleetwood’s words on the loss of England’s best public character sound remarkably like Burke’s denunciation of the new social and political order which the French Revolution threatened to inaugurate<sup>50</sup>. This is Fleetwood ranting against «the shopkeeping and traffic-trained character [he] deplore[s]»: «Contractors, directors and upstarts, – men fattened on the vitals of their fellow-citizens, – have taken the place which was once filled by the Wentworths, the Seldens, and the Pym»<sup>51</sup>.

However, Fleetwood’s «Burkean» sentiments are preceded by a very unflattering portrayal of himself as a hypocritical, interested loyalist: «instead of despising myself for what I did, I esteemed myself the more, [...] as I was able thus stoically to adapt my-

<sup>47</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 134.

<sup>48</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> CLEMIT, *Godwinian Novel*, p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> Burke despaired at the news of the imprisonment of Marie Antoinette, queen of France, in 1790: «the age of chivalry is gone. – That of sophisters, economists and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever». Edmund Burke quoted from Marilyn BUTLER, *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 44.

<sup>51</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, pp. 146-147.

self to a certain object, and pursue it to the end»<sup>52</sup>. In this light, his appraisal of bygone political times reads rather like Godwin's contention that political associations are no medium for the communication of truth, but the arena for the «mischievous» struggle for power and the frivolous choice of «plausible topics of declamation»: «I saw that [the opposition's] aim was to thrust the ministers in possession out of office, that they might take their places»<sup>53</sup>. Disappointed in the political career, he tries the marriage knot. It is not surprising then that at the same household he entered in search of a friend he should find an object to love. The application of the term «object» to Mary acquires force when the tragic death of her family occurs. A change is effected in Fleetwood's insecure affections for the orphan: he thinks he has a stronger obligation to marry Mary, whilst feeling a more confident and freer suitor now that she is penniless. In such a strained situation, Mary reveres him as with religious feeling, which makes him in turn feel superior towards his «adorable ward», like a beneficent creator: «This is my work», he says, which the dutiful girl corroborates by affirming that «in all partnership engagements there must be a subordination»<sup>54</sup>.

The third volume, although focused on the jealousy aroused in Fleetwood by Mary's outings and by the intercession of Gifford and Kenrick, has little to do with the exploration of sensibility, characterised as it is by Godwin's abuse of extreme dichotomies and contraries. As an example, when Mary leaves Fleetwood in the middle of a reading of one of Fletcher's plays for a herbs-picking excursion, Fleetwood turns from imprecation: «A curse on all mosses and botanical specimens!» to conversion: «I will turn botanist myself»<sup>55</sup>. He is realistic enough to admit to Mary she should have married a man nearer to her age, but the very thought that his reputation and peace of mind depend on the conduct of another drives him to despair. This failure is parallel to that of aspiring too high in his marriage, which he had started like a covenant between creator and creature. Nowhere is this more evident than when Mary falls ill mourning her relatives, to the extent of approaching insanity. Fleetwood feels he is responsible for it since she is (he thinks) the creation of his hands, dependent for

<sup>52</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 144.

<sup>53</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 145. Godwin himself was critical of political membership, to the extent that, as Mark Philp affirms, his «strictures against party and political associations effectively cut him off from the arena in which much of the serious practical political activity of the decade took place». PHILP, *Godwin's Political Justice*, p. 196.

<sup>54</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 187. Anne Chandler points out the close similarity in phrasing between Fleetwood's words and Rousseau's in his educational treatise *Emile*, where the tutor says to the ward: «You are my property, my child, my work. It is from your happiness that I expect my own». J. J. Rousseau quoted in ANNE CHANDLER, «A Tissue of Fables»: Rousseau, Gender and Sexuality in *Fleetwood*», *Keats-Shelley Journal*, No. 53, 2004, pp. 39-60, p. 43.

<sup>55</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 201.

her existence on his breath. There are echoes of God's creation of Adam and Eve here, as in Fleetwood's ensuing moment of repentance: «You are an angel, and I treated you like a mortal»<sup>56</sup>.

Again, the continuous fluctuation of his emotions is reflected in a duality, as he feels with Mary «the joys of heaven and the torments of the damned»<sup>57</sup>. All this religious imagery is as much a leftover from Godwin's early religious upbringing in strict Calvinism as a result of his conversion to theism by Coleridge's intercession. The poet, Godwin's «fourth principal oral instructor»<sup>58</sup>, identified God with nature itself and taught him to find divinity in all things. «There is still a Power which cares for the creatures it has made»<sup>59</sup>, thinks Fleetwood, when he ponders on the beauty of a wintry landscape: «At times when the whole world, both land and water, is bound up in iron, [...] I am filled with admiration at the extraordinary scene, so unlike that universal pregnancy and growth which form our most familiar idea of the globe we inhabit»<sup>60</sup>. According to Ian Ward, «the very heart of the novel lies here, in the search [...] to discover the “living” universe» that is «animated by a mysterious power»<sup>61</sup>.

The novel's most lyrical passages may in effect be those that illustrate Fleetwood's and by extension Godwin's theism, but they also provoke the character's least realistic or palatable feature: Nature is used here, through contrast, to vilify the female sex in general and Mary in particular. At this point, Ruffigny's tutorship has ceased to exert a beneficial influence, since there are no traces of philanthropy in Fleetwood<sup>62</sup>. When he considers how deceitful an innocent countenance like Mary's can be, he reverts to metaphors of the natural world, with words Godwin could have taken straight from

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<sup>56</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 218. Anne Chandler mentions how Godwin “provides Miltonic descriptions of Mary, conflating her with the objects of her study”, i.e. flowers. She likewise stresses the presence of extreme, «gendered dualisms [...] in the service of a befuddled misogyny». CHANDLER, «Tissue of Fables», p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 213.

<sup>58</sup> The four «oral instructors», or individuals whose ideas inspired Godwin throughout his life, are Joseph Fawcett, one of Godwin's early parishioners; Thomas Holcroft, radical author and playwright and Godwin's lifelong friend; George Dyson, an hedonist with whom Godwin discussed self-interest, and S. T. Coleridge, who claims the merit of Godwin's conversion to a sort of pantheism in 1800. See LOCKE, *A Fantasy of Reason*, p. 139.

<sup>59</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 244.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, pp. 58-59. Ian WARD, «A Man of Feelings: William Godwin's Romantic Embrace», *Law and Literature*, No. 17, 1, 2005, pp. 21-46, pp. 38-39.

<sup>62</sup> According to critic Gary Handwerk, it is actually «the repressed impact of Lake Uri [which] helps to explain Fleetwood's irrational and excessive rage towards his wife as a consequence of his failure to move past the period of [Ruffigny's] tutelage». HANDWERK, «Mapping Misogyny», p. 393.

Burke's pages on the sublime: «this is the very character of the world in which I live. Storms, and tempests, and volcanoes are all beautiful or majestic». Nature is no source of enjoyment anymore, described as it is as «the great parent-hypocrite, deluding us onward from the cradle to the grave». Making the sort of sexist segregation that earned Rousseau the animadversion of Wollstonecraft and many other writers, Fleetwood affirms that «[Nature's] daughters», i.e. women, «do but inherit the same treacherous smiles, and tempt us to damnation!»<sup>63</sup>

This paranoia of jealousy culminates in the most bizarre and extreme scene in the whole novel: madness' «voluptuous banquet» on the couple's anniversary. Fleetwood sets up the scene of a dinner-party with life-size wax figures of Mary and Kenrick in the shape of a fiend. To the music of tunes Mary and Kenrick had sung in Bath and which Fleetwood is playing at a barrel-organ, he starts to serve them food, but he is soon unable to «distinguish fiction from reality». In this state, he imagines he sees the figures move. «Instantly a full and proper madness seized [him]», and he starts talking to the wax Mary and Kenrick, only that «it was not words that [he] heard or uttered; it was murmurs, and hissings, and lowings, and howls»<sup>64</sup>. The first person narrative clearly presents problems here, for telling the story of one's own madness has its limitations. However, Godwin contrived his stories in the confessional style, so the protagonist's errors would be reflected on from a position of lucidity, while warning the readers not to make the same mistakes. The communication of truth, and learning through experience are Godwin's ideological foundation in his major novels. He also illustrates his insistence that the exercise of private judgement should be accompanied by the salutary effects of the clash of mind upon mind. As Mark Philp maintains, «the eponymous "heroes" of *Caleb Williams*, *St Leon*, *Fleetwood* and *Mandeville*, are each cut off from society in a way which prevents their meeting with others as equals and engaging in the free and unrestrained exercise of their intellectual powers»<sup>65</sup>. Particularly in the case of *Fleetwood*, this insistence on social interaction is heightened by the repetitive stress of the pernicious effect of self-centredness.

The «dummy dinner party» is the novel's climactic episode, but the resolution of the plot does not live up to it. This failure lies in Godwin's accumulation of coincidences, and in his reliance on an omniscient narrator, almost like a *deus-ex-machina*: Mr Scarborough, who supplies all the missing bits of information. His narrative functionality is so evident that this alone takes away all his verisimilitude. The story of his life is one of misanthropy in the family itself, or rather, a lack of sensibility in

<sup>63</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 238.

<sup>64</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, pp. 264-265.

<sup>65</sup> PHILP, *Godwin's Political Justice*, pp. 35-36.

the word's first sense. His stern treatment of his son, of whom he expected no less than perfection, drove the boy to suicide, an episode which provoked the ultimate quarrel between Holcroft and Godwin: one of Holcroft's children had also committed suicide, and Godwin's lifelong friend took the incident as a personal reference. Mr Scarborough's lesson to Fleetwood is that of the need to safeguard one's domestic relations. He warns Fleetwood, before it happens to him, too: «To be thus left totally alone, wife, son, and daughter, to be successively lost, and all by my own fault, – it was too much!»<sup>66</sup>.

Godwin's treatment of the figure of Gifford is slightly more accomplished. Tysdahl sees in him traits of sensibility albeit of the malevolent type<sup>67</sup>, which is perhaps another phrase for evil nature. At certain moments at the end of the story he is presented as an evil creature, with a «characteristic, wherever he goes, to scatter darkness around him, and every man who comes within his circle, is smitten with blindness»<sup>68</sup>. Like Falkland or Gines in *Caleb Williams*, he is compared with «the devil himself [who] sometimes grows tired of the character of a deceiver, and appears in his true colours»<sup>69</sup>. By contrast, McNeil is the philanthropist *par excellence*, and a figure enhanced by his supposed personal connection with Rousseau. The *philosophe* is through this connection granted an apology, since he had been often insulted, McNeil says, after his «sober mind» deteriorated<sup>70</sup>. The «exquisite sensibility» that characterised him was passed on to McNeil, who expresses his philanthropy in absolute terms: «Whenever I see a man, I see something to love»<sup>71</sup>, the epitome of the philanthropic spirit Godwin strove to convey through *Fleetwood*.

Perhaps it is appropriate to conclude as we started, with a reference to Godwin's personal life. It is Ruffigny that advises Fleetwood to marry, in a passage that, surprisingly, also reveals Godwin's wariness either as a result of his loss of Mary Wollstonecraft or, more possibly, his new life with Mrs Clairmont: «God knows, all marriage is a risk – is the deepest game that can be played in this sublunary scene»<sup>72</sup>. This statement taken from the novel could very well belong in Godwin's private documents: his diaries or

<sup>66</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 281.

<sup>67</sup> TYSDAHL, *Godwin as Novelist*, p. 106.

<sup>68</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 282.

<sup>69</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>70</sup> Rousseau acknowledged that «wrenched somehow out of the natural order, I have plunged into an incomprehensible chaos where I can make nothing out, and the more I think about my present situation, the less I can understand what has become of me». Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *Meditations of a Solitary Walker* [1782], trans. Peter France, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1995, pp. 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 163.

<sup>72</sup> GODWIN, *Fleetwood*, p. 169.

one of his personal letters. That the turn of the eighteenth century was a pivotal moment for Godwin not only personally but also in his literary profession is summed up by Gary Kelly in *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*. To him, Godwin was «one of the most important artists and thinkers of the early Romantic novel – indeed, or early Romantic literature, and especially the transition from Enlightenment and Sensibility to Romantic culture»<sup>73</sup>. With the new century, Godwin adjusted to a number of new roles, although he would never regain that of primary literary personality (perhaps with the exception to a limited extent of his *Thoughts on Man* of 1831). According to Don Locke, in the decade 1805-1815 only two of the many works he published could be «properly call[ed] his own»: the tragedy *Faulkener* and «the curious little *Essay on Sepulchres*»<sup>74</sup>. For many years to follow, Godwin was plagued by huge debt and by the need to protect his own reputation and that of his daughters, whose lives were far from uneventful<sup>75</sup>. By the time Mary Godwin (now Mary Shelley) returned to England in 1823, she did so as the famous author of *Frankenstein*, which she had dedicated to her father. It was a fitting tribute, featuring in one of Romanticism's foundational texts, to one of the key figures of the previous philosophical and literary movement.

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Eva Pérez Rodríguez es Profesora Titular de Filología Inglesa en la Universidad de las Islas Baleares. Es coautora de *Commenting on Texts. Literature, History and the Media* (Ediciones UIB, 2006), *English Language Practice Advanced* (Ediciones UIB, 2009), *How the Second World War is Depicted by British Novelists since 1990: The Passage of Time Changes of Portrayal of Traumatic Events* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), así como numerosos artículos sobre William Godwin, el siglo XVIII inglés y la novela inglesa de postguerra.

Dirección: Departamento de Filología Española, Moderna y Clásica, Universidad de las Islas Baleares, Carretera de Valldemossa, km 7,5; Palma (Islas Baleares), España.  
Tel.: +34-971173135

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<sup>73</sup> KELLY, *English Fiction*, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> LOCKE, *A Fantasy of Reason*, pp. 222-223.

<sup>75</sup> Fanny Imlay, prone to dejection like her mother, committed suicide in 1816; Mary Godwin eloped with the then married Percy B. Shelley; Jane Clairmont bore the illegitimate daughter of the notorious Lord Byron.