

Scepticism and Experience in the Educational Writing of William Godwin

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the educational thought of William Godwin (1756-1836) and how it is expressed through his essays and fiction. Attention here focuses on the *Account of the Seminary* (1783), *The Enquirer* (1797), and the preface to *Bible Stories* (1803). Godwin's key argument is that the imagination must be developed through reading. In this, Godwin saw the potential for subsequent generations to live wiser and happier lives than their predecessors, with reading offering a place for young people to learn without being forced to conform to the models offered by previous generations under the authority Godwin saw as inherent to conventional pedagogy.

This thesis argues that Godwin's education writing represents the convergence of the author's epistemology, his passion for literature, and his vision of the continuous improvement of humanity. Godwin's ideas are rooted in a profoundly sceptical theory of knowledge, and this rejection of certainty contributes both to Godwin's principled rejection of authority and his acknowledgement of its utility in education. The author's search for an ethical solution to this conflict is seen in the contrast between his rejection of Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) and his affection for Fénelon's *Telemachus* (1699), culminating in his own novel *Fleetwood* (1805). Godwin's writing for children, exemplified by his *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1805), shows the author attempting to create texts that teach children to think for themselves – books that reject the mantle of literary authority.

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Introduction

Criticism regarding the literature, life and thought of William Godwin has experienced a renaissance in recent years. In his influential 1984 biography of the author, Peter Marshall was able to describe the weight of commentary on Godwin as 'uneven', and Godwin's deposited papers in the Abinger collection as 'largely untapped' (Pamela Clemit would describe them as still 'unmapped' two decades later).¹ In contrast, the twenty-first century has seen a wealth of criticism. The contemporary discussion has been shaped by a number of seminal works that post-date Marshall's assertion, amongst them Mark Philp's *Godwin's Political Justice* (1986) and Clemit's *The Godwinian Novel* (1993) and the subsequent work of both those scholars (with other collaborators) in the organisation and publication of Godwin's works, letters, and meticulous diaries has shed considerable new light on the field. This study is greatly indebted to those resources, but it also exists in reaction to the particular focus within Godwin criticism that the tireless work of these scholars has encouraged. On one hand, discussion of Godwin as a philosopher and political theorist has been dominated by Philp's reading of *Political Justice* (across its revisions) as a text principally concerned with the morality of private judgment and the relation of this to the Dissenting culture of the period.² On the other, consideration of Godwin as a novelist is often centred on *Caleb Williams* (1794) or *St. Leon* (1799) in relation to *Political Justice* (1793-8),³ or to the author's relationship with Wollstonecraft (a thesis that is sometimes informed by the work of Mitzi Myers, in addition to the scholars already named).⁴ Scholarship is well-served with regard to Godwin's

¹ Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984). p.3 and Pamela Clemit, 'William Godwin's Papers in the Abinger Deposit: An Unmapped Country', *Bodleian Library Record*, 18 (2004), 253–63.

² We see examples of this in Robert Lamb, "Was William Godwin a Utilitarian?," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70 (2008), 119–41; Peter Howell, "Godwin, Contractarianism, and the Political Dead End of Empiricism," *Eighteenth Century Life*, 28 (2004); and Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

³ Evan Radcliffe, 'Godwin from 'Metaphysician' to Novelist: Political Justice, Caleb Williams, and the Tension between Philosophical Argument and Narrative,' *Modern Philology*, 97 (2000), 528–53; Gary Handwerk, "Of Caleb's Guilt and Godwin's Truth: Ideology and Ethics in Caleb Williams," *ELH*, 60 (1993), 939–60; and Ingrid Horrocks, "More Than A Gravestone: *Caleb Williams*, *Udolpho*, and the Politics of the Gothic," *Studies in the Novel*, 39 (2007), 31–47.

⁴ Mitzi Myers, 'Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft: The Shaping of Self and Subject', *Studies in Romanticism*, 20 (1981), 299–316; Mitzi Myers, 'Unfinished Business: Wollstonecraft's *Maria*', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 11 (1980), 107–14. See also Louise Joy, 'St. Leon and the Culture of the

work of the 1790s, and this study was quickly shaped by a desire to explore the writing of the author's 'middle period'.

Accounts of Godwin's later career have historically been narratives of retreat. The author's contemporary critics sneered at the alleged contradictions to the doctrine of *Political Justice* found in other works.⁵ Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century commentators took Godwin's admonishment of Percy Shelley's radical pamphleteering and break with social conformity, revealed in Charles Kegan Paul's biography (1876), as evidence that his philosophical convictions were only weakly held.⁶ There is a convincing case against this. Philp persuasively argues that Godwin's commitment to private judgment is consistent throughout his mature work, though his positions on other matters are not always consistent.⁷ The picture of the author as a fair-weather friend of reform, advanced by Isaac Kramnick, is at odds with the tone and content of some of Godwin's significant later works.⁸ Kramnick's position was criticised vigorously by John P. Clark who, alongside Don Locke (though Locke also sees 'Godwin in retreat'), prompted a gradual re-evaluation of Godwin amongst political philosophers.⁹ Literary critics and intellectual historians of recent years have done much to address the narrative of retreat advanced in late nineteenth-century criticism. This thesis will participate in an ongoing critical discussion regarding the literary, philosophical and educational significance of *The Enquirer*, a debate with its origin frequently attributed to David McCracken's essay 'Godwin's Literary Theory: The Alliance between Fiction and Political Philosophy' (1970) and continuing in the work of

Heart', *History of European Ideas*, 33 (2007), 40–53; Ian Ward, 'A Man of Feelings: William Godwin's Romantic Embrace', *Law and Literature*, 17 (2005), 21–46.

⁵ '...it is necessary to state that the present collection of essays [*The Enquirer*] are materially different from his *Political Justice*. The boldness and even the degree of dogmatism with which some of his schemes of innovation were advanced, are in this publication very properly avoided...' *Critical Review*, S2 20 (1797), 58 in Kenneth W. Graham, *William Godwin Reviewed: A Reception History, 1783-1834* (New York: AMS Press, 2001). See also the *British Critic* (1798) 20-27.

⁶ Edward Dowden, *The French Revolution and English Literature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897); Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937); Edmund Blunden, *Shelley, A Life Story* (London: Collins St. James, 1946).

⁷ Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

⁸ Isaac Kramnick, 'On Anarchism and the Real World: William Godwin and Radical England', *American Political Science Review*, 66 (1972), 114–28. Kramnick's most important legacy to Godwin studies is as the editor of what was, for some time, the most commonly available edition of *Political Justice* (Penguin, 1985).

⁹ Clark attacks Kramnick in John P. Clark, 'An Unreal World: Kramnick's View of Godwin and the Anarchists', *The American Political Science Review*, 69 (1975), 162–67. Clark's major work in the field is John P. Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977). See also Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London: Routledge, 1980).

K.E. Smith (1982), E.M.P. Rodriguez (2003), Gary Handwerk (2002, 2011), and Victoria Myers (2014).¹⁰ There has been a wave of interest in the works of Godwin's middle period (defined loosely as 'after Wollstonecraft and before Shelley', 1797-1812), in recent years. Prior neglect might be explained by the author's willingness to explore new forms and genres of literary endeavour – his interventions into social policy and historiography appear to offer little to literary scholars, while his books for children, plays and life-writing seem only tangentially relevant to those approaching him as a political theorist. Modern interdisciplinary research into Godwin's middle years reveals the depth of his interest in education, a topic that (despite its importance) sits awkwardly with both 'literary' and 'philosophical' considerations of his work. The author's interest in education becomes increasingly more prominent in these years. Godwin discusses education as a principal cause of moral improvement in the first edition of *Political Justice*, alongside 'literature' and 'political justice' itself, but there concludes it to be 'exceedingly incompetent to the great business of reforming mankind'.¹¹ The author is sceptical of how well the (fallible) people of today can educate the (better) people of tomorrow without simply replicating the errors of the present. He revised this significantly in the later editions (though his concerns remain, as I will show) and in later works which display an individual and environmental model of personal improvement.¹² David O'Shaughnessy has argued that we can read, in Godwin's forays into drama, how the author moved from a didactic vision of education to a dialogic one over the course of the 1790s.¹³ This study will challenge O'Shaughnessy's argument by highlighting continuities between

¹⁰ David McCracken, 'Godwin's Literary Theory: The Alliance between Fiction and Political Philosophy', *Philological Quarterly*, 49 (1970), 113–33; KE Smith, 'Autonomy and Perfectibility: The Educational Theory of Godwin's *The Enquirer*', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1982, 217–24; E.M.P. Rodríguez, 'Education, Conversation, and History: Godwin's Search for Style in "*The Enquirer*" and "Of History and Romance"', *Atlantis*, 25 (2003), 81–90; Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's "*Fleetwood*" and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), 375–98; Gary Handwerk, "'Awakening the Mind": William Godwin's *Enquirer*', in *Godwinian Moments from the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, ed. by Robert M Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 103–24; Victoria Myers, 'William Godwin's *Enquirer*: Between Oratory and Conversation', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 41 (2014), 335–78. Handwerk credits McCracken with having originated the conversation, in his 2011 essay.

¹¹ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 18.

¹² The implications of Godwin's first edition model are explored in Burton R. Pollin, *Education and Enlightenment in the Works of William Godwin* (New York: Las Americas, 1962), pp. 115–145.

¹³ David O'Shaughnessy, *William Godwin and the Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 11–12.

Godwin's earliest work on education, the *Account of the Seminary*, (1783) and the work of his middle period.

Discussed at considerable length in *The Enquirer* (1797), education gradually assumes a central place in Godwin's thinking afterward. Even placing his work as a children's publisher (1805-1825) to one side, the novels *Fleetwood* (1805), *Mandeville* (1817) and *Cloudesley* (1830), his biographies of Wollstonecraft (1798), Chaucer (1803), the Philips brothers (1815) and of Cromwell (1828) all betray the author's preoccupation with the formation of character – education, as broadly considered. There is much to suggest that Godwin did, indeed, consider education broadly: *Political Justice* and *The Enquirer* are sceptical about the impact of formal education and tuition, compared with what the individual learns from their environment, but it is clear that the author sees the intellectual and emotional development of the individual as fundamental to human improvement.

The scholarship of Gary Handwerk and Tilottama Rajan has been significant to the project of exploring Godwin's educational theory, and its implications for the author's later novels. Handwerk has argued that *Fleetwood* represents Godwin's demonstration of the ethical case against Rousseau in *Emile* (1762), building upon the issues identified in *The Enquirer*.¹⁴ Rajan, by contrast, has addressed the intellectual aspects of *The Enquirer's* essay on reading, arguing that Godwin's understanding of readerly interpretation destabilises the authority of the text – and his acknowledgment of this in his own fiction (and as editor of Wollstonecraft's unfinished works) constitutes a more genuinely 'revolutionary' form than other Jacobin fictions of the period.¹⁵ This study attempts to build upon existing critical work on *The Enquirer* by connecting Godwin's theory of reading with his writing for children.

Godwin published his work for children pseudonymously, and accounts of these texts are often confused. Marshall's biography notes a number of 'lost' works, at

¹⁴ Gary Handwerk, "Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's 'Fleetwood' and the Staging of Roussevian Education," *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), 375–98; and Gary Handwerk, "'Awakening the Mind': William Godwin's *Enquirer*," in *Godwinian Moments from the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, ed. by Robert M Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 103–24.

¹⁵ Tilottama Rajan, "Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel," *Studies in Romanticism*, 27 (1988), 221–51; later reprinted as, Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990). Page references are derived from the former.

least one of which we now know to be an earlier text reissued with a different title.¹⁶ Others attribute work to Godwin that was more likely written by his second wife, Mary Jane.¹⁷ Editing Godwin's *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1805), Barnett and Gustafson attribute some of the neglect of the author's children's writing to mistakes of attribution (noting how long Godwin's pseudonyms went unrecognised) and the relative scarcity of those works in the modern age (despite their nineteenth-century popularity). More controversially, the editors also argue that Godwin's neglect as a children's author is also a reflection of his failure to fit the established critical dichotomies regarding children's publishing of the period. Godwin fits neither into the pious and didactic stereotype of early children's literature (Janeway, Watts, or arguably, Newbery) that early Romanticism reacted against, nor with the rediscovered women writers (Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth, and Barbauld) that addressed the shortcomings of earlier children's books.¹⁸ Godwin's work for children certainly defies easy categorisation, these texts often treated as an addendum to the author's radicalism, combed through for political principles that the author was attempting to 'sneak through' to the next generation.¹⁹ There has been substantial work on Godwin as a publisher by Margaret Kinnell and Pamela Clemit, and this study concurs with Clemit's view of Godwin's publishing venture as a deliberate continuation of his philosophical programme.²⁰ Following on from the more holistic reading of Godwin's children's writing exemplified by Janet Bottoms, this study approaches works such as *Fables Ancient and Modern* as the practical application of the author's educational theory and attempts to offer a more detailed close reading of this text

¹⁶ *Scripture Histories*, known to be a reissue of Godwin's earlier *Bible Stories*. Marshall. p. 271

¹⁷ Isaac Kramnick, 'Children's Literature and Bourgeois Ideology: Observations on Culture and Industrial Capitalism in the Later Eighteenth-Century', in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. by Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 203–40.

¹⁸ 'Introduction' to Edward Baldwin (William Godwin), *Fables Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Suzanne L. Barnett and Katherine Bennett Gustafson (Romantic Circles, University of Maryland, 2014).

¹⁹ For a lively debate of this matter, see M. O. Grenby, 'Politicizing the Nursery: British Children's Literature and the French Revolution', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 27 (2003), 1–26; Rob Anderson, 'Godwin Disguised: Politics in the Juvenile Library', in *Godwinian Moments from the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, ed. by Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 125–46. Elsewhere in recent scholarship, Susan Manly also attempts to draw direct connections between Godwin's children's books and political events of the period. Susan Clare Manly, 'William Godwin's "School of Morality"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 43 (2012), 135–42.

²⁰ Margaret Kinnell, 'Sceptreless, Free, Uncircumscribed? Radicalism, Dissent and Early Children's Books', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 36 (1988), 49–71; Margaret Kinnell, 'Childhood and Children's Literature: The Case of M.J. Godwin and Co., 1805–25', *Publishing History*, 1988, 77–88. Pamela Clemit, 'William Godwin's Juvenile Library', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS 147 (2009), 90–99.

than has been offered before.²¹ Considering Godwin primarily as an author of imaginative fiction for children, this study will also discuss the author's theory of the imagination and its implications for children's learning.²²

Godwin's educational theory has definite political implications, but to read it so narrowly would do a great disservice to the philosophical and literary principles contained within it. The guiding principle of this study is that Godwin's idea of education, as it developed from *The Enquirer* onwards, is central to understanding the middle period of the author's career. It became apparent that Godwin's idea of education (although gradually refined in his middle years) is rooted in long-held philosophical positions on epistemology, moral reasoning, and the purpose of literature. The implications of these positions are realised in the author's writing of this period, and we see the development of Godwin's ideas on education most clearly in the years 1797-1805. Reading from *The Enquirer* to *Fleetwood*, to *Fables Ancient and Modern*, we see the emergence of a theory (perhaps, more properly, a hypothesis about the philosophy of education), the implications of theory (a playing out in fiction of the ethical consequences of some educational ideas), and theory in practice (children's literature informed by the philosophical working that has gone before). In due course, this specific period became the focus of the research.

This study sets out to argue that Godwin's work on education in this period reveals the convergence of his epistemology, his theory of reading, and his vision of the continuous improvement of humanity. This convergence has been hinted at before: Rajan maintains that the interpretive dimension of Godwin's theory of reading recognises the changing nature and context of readers, rather than insisting on a 'correct' divinatory reading that binds meaning to authorial intent.

By involving the reader in the making of the text it initially creates new possibilities. It allows us not to be locked into the text of things as they are. At the same time, because it creates a form in which meaning does not have to be embodied in the text, it does not fall into the contradiction into

²¹ Janet Bottoms, "Awakening the Mind": The Educational Philosophy of William Godwin', *History of Education*, 33 (2004), 267–82.

²² In which I hope to go beyond the existing work of Margaret Fearn, 'William Godwin and the "wilds of Literature"', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 29 (1981), 247–57; and Malini Roy, 'Celebrating "Wild Tales": Lamb and Godwin's Groundwork for Children's Literature', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS 147 (2009), 122–30.

which the novels of Holcroft fall, where an idealized ending is superimposed on the real world and made to claim mimetic authority.²³

Rajan identifies the essential liberatory potential in Godwin's fiction, a potential created by the way in which Godwin believes it is read, '[making] it possible to act within history as well as read through it'.²⁴ Rajan's argument is discussed in detail in chapter three. Where this study distinguishes itself is in its contention that what Rajan describes as the hermeneutic heuristic form of Godwin's fiction is rooted in the author's profoundly sceptical and empirical understanding of knowledge. This conscious instability contributes to both Godwin's principled rejection of authority and his partial acceptance of the utility of authority in education (in the sense that the impossibility of certainty renders private judgment the only acceptable moral principle, but that the paucity of experience on the part of learners prevents them making informed moral judgments without guidance). After Graham Allen, this study argues that Godwin's theory of reading is the search for a means to cut this Gordian knot – that the text presents an opportunity to guide without imposing (epistemologically dubious) reasoning on the learner.²⁵ Going beyond Allen, however, this study will argue that Godwin's theory is not merely a defence of didactic literature, nor does it simply question the ethics of pedagogy. In the light of the author's epistemological position, reading allows us to move beyond the pedagogic dilemma presented by scepticism: if our own knowledge is intrinsically suspect, what (and how) can we teach? We must communicate meaning to impressionable minds, while also training them to interrogate meaning for themselves. On a practical level, this dilemma forces us to address how we might walk the line between the insistence of pedagogic authority (which we know to be unsound) and the inculcation of a reductive scepticism that regards all evidence as meaningless (a position that is untenable in everyday life). Allen is quick to argue that literature does not itself resolve the problem of pedagogy but instead takes place in a space where these problems are suspended. Allen regards the difficult questions of education as *aporia*, essentially unanswerable issues for Godwin's philosophy. The analogy of the Gordian knot is apt – Godwin's approach appears to bypass the difficult questions of education rather than

²³ Rajan, 'Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel.' p. 249-50.

²⁴ Rajan, 'Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel.' p. 251.

²⁵ Graham Allen, 'Godwin, Fénelon, and the Disappearing Teacher', *History of European Ideas*, 33 (2007), 9–24.

answering them. We should be sympathetic to the notion that Godwin occasionally offers no conclusive answers to the questions he raises. The author suggests that many things are beyond the scope of general rules, and that still others are beyond human comprehension.²⁶ Allen seems to argue that Godwin's understanding of reading represents a conscious instability in the author's thought: Godwin's awareness of both (what Rajan calls) the hermeneutic dimension and of the aporia of education. This may be true, but where this study runs counter to that argument is in the claim that Godwin's writing for children – and, more theoretically, his account of imagination in that context – constitutes Godwin's attempt to answer those questions, or at least to provide a frame within which those questions might be answered.

To consider Godwin as a children's author is to consider his work on a more practical level, and to assess his contribution to the practice of education. As a sceptic, Godwin is unwilling to commit to a hard-and-fast programme or method of education. Where *The Enquirer* is clearly a work of theory, the works of the Juvenile Library are texts to be used. In the context of his many works for children, Godwin's major contribution to education is (to a significant degree) practical, but that is not to say that these works are without their own theoretical weight. *Fables Ancient and Modern* definitely exemplifies principles from the author's theory of reading; a close reading of the text quickly reveals the extent to which the reader is forced to interpret its many narratives, a process that the author insisted took place within all engagements with literature but does so here with an unprecedented transparency amongst children's writing. Godwin here frames the act of reading. While the author does not (and cannot) dictate how reading will take place, he provides fertile ground for the habits of mind (that are developed by reading) to be cultivated. This study argues that Godwin's creation of such a space demonstrates the consistency of the author's children's writing with both his educational theory and the epistemological underpinnings of his philosophical writing. Recognising that neither teaching nor writing can grant certainty, Godwin's writing facilitates the development of the reader's experience. As we shall see, the author is conscious of the shortcomings of such experience but

²⁶ 'To rest in general rules is sometimes a necessity which our imperfection imposes upon us, and sometimes the refuge of our indolence', William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), IV.6. App.1, p. 172. The question of matters beyond human comprehension will be addressed in chapter one.

regards it as the most valid form of knowledge open to human minds. Experience is, however, pivotal in providing a resolution to the problems of education. Though Godwin clearly believes that ideal truths are possible, in most cases ‘truth’ is situational, relative and contingent. Godwin would resist the idea of ‘relative truth’, but we can infer from the revised *Political Justice* that the author would accept the idea that moral good is possible from imperfect knowledge. If this is the case, then what matters for Godwin is the rigour with which such imperfect truths are divined. The author does not presume to offer a solution to the problems of education but rather enables the intellectual, emotional and moral exercise that might make such a solution possible.

* * *

The first task of this study is to establish the epistemological basis on which Godwin’s philosophy rests. Much is often assumed about the author’s understanding of knowledge, based on his intellectual associations. Though the author acknowledged the influence of ‘the Calvinist system’ on his ideas, he did so to distance himself from it; it seems possible that modern critics have overstated that influence.²⁷ A product of Dissenting culture and moving in Dissenting circles until the mid-1790s, Godwin is frequently grouped with his rationalist contemporaries (Priestley, Price) rather than his empiricist predecessors (Locke, Hume and Smith), much of which can be traced back to F.E.L. Priestley’s influential essay on Platonism in *Political Justice*. Although Priestley rightly identifies the Platonic tone of Godwin’s treatise, his determination to attack the (then) critical consensus regarding Godwin’s debt to Helvétius and Hume encourages him to overstate his case.²⁸ D.H. Monro and John P. Clark, have both also approached Godwin as a rationalist.²⁹ Mark Philp, in *Godwin’s Political Justice*, dismisses Hume’s influence on Godwin despite the author’s own comments on the subject.³⁰ More recently, Roland Weston has argued that Godwin is ‘commonly renowned’ as a rationalist, and considers drawing a

²⁷ An idea discussed at length in Robert M. Maniquis, ‘Godwin’s Calvinist Ghosts: Political Justice and Caleb Williams’, in *Godwinian Moments from the Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. 25–58.

²⁸ See Francis Ethelbert Louis Priestley, ‘Platonism in Godwin’s Political Justice’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 4 (1943), 63–69.

²⁹ D.H. Monro, *Godwin’s Moral Philosophy: An Interpretation of William Godwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 36–56; Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin*, pp. 11–39.

³⁰ Philp, pp. 142–4.

connection with Hume to be 'problematic'. Approaching Hume as an ethicist (as Weston does here), this is reasonable but fails to consider the whole 'picture' of Godwin's thought.³¹ In the first chapter of this study I shall argue that, even placing his self-identification as a sceptic to one side, Godwin's theory of causality and the implications of his epistemology on his account of ethical reasoning and volition show the author intellectually closer to the British empiricist thinkers than the Rational Dissenters with whom he culturally identified.

The second chapter lays a parallel foundation: placing the early ideas espoused in the *Account of the Seminary* (1783) and *The Enquirer* in relation to some of the major trends in British educational thought of the period. The purpose of this is to situate Godwin between the various modes of educational writing, distinguishing the 'pure theory' of the author's early work with the supposedly 'hands on' advice of many other thinkers. Such an opposition is immediately problematic: Godwin's *Account* is a manifesto of educational aims that the author most likely intended to carry out (but was denied the opportunity), while contemporaries cloaked deeper philosophical and political arguments in the trappings of practical parenting. What this serves to do, however, is to demonstrate Godwin's formal (as well as conceptual) distance from other period thinkers, with the notable exception of Maria Edgeworth. Most importantly the chapter illustrates Godwin's early relationship with Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), in Godwin's positioning of his ideas in the *Account*, and in his later dismissal of *Emile* on both a practical and an ethical level.

Godwin's relationship with Rousseau provides this study with an important contrast. Chapter three demonstrates the influence of Fénelon on Godwin's theory of reading, and the juxtaposition of Rousseau and Godwin's responses to didactic literature is revealing of the underlying beliefs behind their respective educational philosophies. This comparison continues in chapter four, using Rousseau's republic in *The Social Contract* (1763) to demonstrate the implications of *Emile's* education. Though Godwin's distance from his predecessor comes as no surprise here, the republic throws the principles of Godwin's educational project into sharp relief. Godwin's fundamental opposition to the principles of Rousseau's republic reminds us that Godwin's idea of

³¹ Rowland Weston, 'History, Memory, and Moral Knowledge: William Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres*, (1809)', *The European Legacy*, 14 (2009), 651–65 (p. 651 and 660).

education begins and ends with the individual. Rousseau's vision is riddled with expediencies performed in the name of a greater good. Godwin not only rejects the morality of this, but also implicitly questions the desirability of Rousseau's goals. Comparison with Rousseau's republic shows that Godwin's idea of education emphasises the freedom of personal growth rather than the moulding of individuals into a more social form.

Chapter five shows Godwin exploring this theme in *Fleetwood*, and questioning that simple dichotomy of individual and societal improvement. What emerges from *Fleetwood* is the author's concern for the socialisation and emotional development of the learner. Godwin's concern provides an important corollary to the notion of individual education and, by extension, the balancing act between private judgment and intellectual humility in Godwin's philosophy as a whole. The author never wavers from the duty of the individual to act according to their own judgment, but is equally convinced that the insight of others should be valued – and is essential to ethical reasoning. *Fleetwood*, indeed, questions how accurate moral judgments are possible if one does not understand the social, emotional and intellectual needs of others. The novel is primarily an attack on *Emile*, showing the solipsism Godwin saw as inherent to Rousseau's method. What this reveals for Godwin's theory of education is the author's understanding of how feeling shapes moral judgments and the extent to which this is a faculty trained by our emotional engagement with other people. Central to this is our ability to feel alongside others, while retaining the ability to think critically about events and the feelings themselves. For Godwin, this faculty is the imagination.

Godwin's idea of the imagination is a simultaneously intellectual and emotional process, the author arguing that it is through our ability to imagine ourselves in the position of others (and to view a situation from an abstract 'outside' in the manner of Adam Smith's impartial spectator) that we make genuine ethical choices. Such an imaginative leap requires emotional literacy and, in Godwin's theory, the term 'literacy' is apt: feeling may develop naturally, but the capacity to use feeling imaginatively (and therefore, ethically) is an essential skill that can be learned and improved. Some of this learning must take place through social experience, and *Fleetwood* makes clear Godwin's view that the limited and artificial socialisation of Emile would leave him emotionally illiterate in the real world. Reading (of which Emile is also deprived) supplies the other part of the

experience needed to improve the emotional faculty. In chapter six we see how Godwin's statements on imagination interact with his contributions to children's literature. Reading is an exercise of both feeling and intellect – necessarily a use of the imagination; providing another kind of emotional and intellectual experience that develops the individual's capacity for moral reason.

This study's conclusion uses the evidence of the previous chapters to define Godwin's understanding of experience itself, and how this understanding links the author's empiricism with both his conception of imagination and his theory of education. I there argue that in Godwin's writing all learning is ultimately reducible to forms of experience, with varying levels of epistemological validity. If this is the case, then learning provides no definite knowledge, but rather a collection of tools to evaluate future experiences. This is, of course, compatible with Godwin's contribution to children's literature – books that provide the opportunity for learning experiences, rather than the knowledge that the author believes children need.

* * *

There are matters within the overlapping fields of period education, children's literature and Godwin studies that have proved themselves beyond the necessarily tight boundaries of this study. Firstly, this thesis does not attempt to situate Godwin amongst contemporary children's authors, nor (more specifically) is there any discussion of those authors who were published as part of the Juvenile Library in relation to Godwin's theories of education. This study is principally concerned with Godwin himself, as a thinker and author. While it is important to place Godwin in context; the focus here is on those thinkers that the author himself acknowledged as major influences on his thought (Hume, Rousseau), in the areas directly relating to the topics at hand. This study's attention to Fénelon is an exception to this rule (Godwin does not *state* his debt to Fénelon), but one justified by Godwin's obvious regard for *Telemachus* in both *Political Justice* and *Cloudesley* (1830) – that is, in both his early and late works. The author clearly regarded the Archbishop as a major moral and intellectual figure. A letter to Godwin's pupil Willis Webb (1787) lists Fénelon alongside

Socrates and Cicero as great examples.³² One of Godwin's apparently autobiographical notes lists Fénelon amongst his childhood reading (both *Telemachus* and *Dialogues of the Dead*) suggesting that he recognised them as formative texts.³³ On the note of influence, though Godwin was undoubtedly of importance to many of the authors he supported as an editor and publisher, the degree of his influence is open to debate.³⁴ A meaningful study of his relationship with Eliza Fenwick, Charles and Mary Lamb, or his wife Mary Jane (often forgotten as a literary professional in her own right), would be a substantial piece of research that deserves greater prominence than as an addendum to a discussion of Godwin's educational philosophy. Secondly, and as a consequence of this position, this study does not directly engage with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. The importance of Wollstonecraft and her work to Godwin is obvious; the exact nature of her importance is a subject on which much has already been written.³⁵ Of Wollstonecraft's influence on Godwin's educational theory, much less has been said. Though Wollstonecraft wrote extensively on the subject of education, Godwin comments little on her ideas. Her 'practical' work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) and her fictional work for children (*Original Stories from Real Life*, 1788) are acknowledged in Godwin's *Memoirs* but receive nothing like the attention devoted to the second *Vindication* (1792) or the unfinished *Maria* (1798). We might wonder what prompted Godwin to pass over these early works, given his interest in education.³⁶ Reading these works with Godwin's ideas on education in mind, however, we find works that the author may have been unsympathetic towards. *Thoughts* is mostly conventional in its advice (insisting on the importance of parental example, critical of 'accomplishments' and formal schooling – more discussion of which can be found in chapter two). *Original Stories* is a consciously unromantic and didactic

³² William Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume I: 1778-1797*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 38-9.

³³ The note is undated, but collected in William Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume II: 1798-1805*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 377.

³⁴ Godwin's correspondence with Charles Lamb over the lurid violence of the latter's *Adventures of Ulysses* (1808) is sometimes cited as an example of Godwin's intervention. It should be noted, however, that the published text preserves most of the gruesome passages that Godwin objected to – suggesting that his direct editorial touch was light. See M. O. Grenby, *The Child Reader, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). p. 53 and Marshall, p. 275-6.

³⁵ Recent discussions of this include Eva M. Perez, 'The Trials of Sincerity: William Godwin's Political Justice v. His Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Connotations*, 13 (2004), 213–29 and Joy, "St. Leon and the Culture of the Heart", pp. 42-44 in particular.

³⁶ We see Godwin reading *Original Stories* in the weeks after Wollstonecraft's death (5th and 12th October 1797).

collection of tales. The title ('real life') implies that Wollstonecraft sought to make the stories relatable, but there is little room for interpretation within the stories themselves – their message is clear. Godwin's belief in the importance of critical reading, and the value of the imaginative and fantastical (which I shall attempt to show in chapter six), implies that the author rejects Wollstonecraft's method.

Wollstonecraft raises the matter of gender to our view. I would argue that Godwin's statements on education contain few deliberately gendered distinctions, although the author uncritically uses the normative language of the period ('the improvement of mankind', the endorsement of 'manly treatment', and the reflexive use of 'he' to indicate the subject) in a manner that would appear exclusionary today. The author appears to assume a male learner and (where relevant) a male tutor. There is, however, no sense that education for women and girls should be any different. Godwin makes no effort to delineate specific gender roles in education. Isolated examples suggest that Godwin recognised the existence of such expectations in period society, but there is little to suggest that he endorsed them. In his correspondence with Charles Lamb on the latter's *Ulysses*, Godwin bases his complaint on the difficulty of selling such gory tales to the parents of young girls.

You or some other wise man I have heard to say, It is children that read children's books (when they are read); but it is parents that choose them. The critical thought of the tradesman puts itself therefore into the place of the parent, & enquires what will please the parent, & what the parent will condemn.

We live in squeamish days. Amidst the beauties of your manuscript, of which no man can think more highly than I do, what will the squeamish say to such expressions as these? [...] You I dare say have no formed plan of excluding the female sex from among your readers, & I, as a bookseller, must consider that, if you have, you exclude one half of the human species.³⁷

³⁷ William Godwin to Charles Lamb, 10th March 1808, in Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb, Volume II (1801-1809)*, ed. by Edwin W. Marris (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 278.

The text that Godwin ultimately published ('till the scalded blood gushed out, and the eye-ball smoked, and the strings of the eye cracked, as the burning rafter broke in it, and the eye hissed, as hot iron hisses when it is plunged into water') implies that Godwin considered such gendered sensibilities (or more precisely, the sensibilities of parents) to be secondary to the integrity of Lamb's text, or less of a concern than Lamb's bitter complaints.³⁸

Godwin does, in fact, claim to 'make no difference between children male and female' in his correspondence.³⁹ The author's language aside, we have no statements to the contrary and must take this claim (at the very least) as a sign of the author's intent. The author's language in *The Enquirer* speaks almost entirely to men and boys, but since the text offers no alternative for women and girls, and since we have strong reasons to believe that Godwin was greatly in favour of women's education, we are forced to assume that the author's ideas are intended for universal application.

Placing *The Enquirer* alongside Wollstonecraft's second *Vindication*, as texts primarily concerned with education, illustrates the immediacy of the latter text (which is framed as a response to Talleyrand's *Report on Public Instruction* (1791). Godwin's *Enquirer*, though a lighter text than *Political Justice*, aspires to the same timelessness as its predecessor. Both works attempt to place themselves above topical concerns. The author compares *Political Justice* with 'the inspection ... of immense and distant objects' and, though Godwin seeks to contrast this with the 'experiment' and 'actual observation' that inspired *The Enquirer*, both works are apparently attempts to extract universal principles from the topics they discuss.⁴⁰ *The Enquirer's* discussion of the opposition between conservatism and radicalism is a useful example of this: although he acknowledges the present controversy, the author presents the matter as a state-of-nature dispute rather than a matter of specific issues.⁴¹ Godwin's eye on posterity may explain his neglect of women's education – he regards it as an

³⁸ Charles Lamb, 'The Adventures of Ulysses', in *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, Volume III: Books for Children*, ed. by E.V. Lucas, AMS Press, (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 211–212.

³⁹ Letter to William Cole, 2nd March 1802. Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume II: 1798-1805*, p. 248.

⁴⁰ Preface to *The Enquirer*, in William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993). p.77

⁴¹ *The Enquirer*, Vol.II, Essay IX, Sect. II in Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*. p. 217

issue of the moment (and one for which the case had been made with much force in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*), and therefore unsuited to the more philosophical argument he was seeking to make.⁴² As we shall see in later chapters, the individualism of Godwin's theory of education does genuinely provide the opportunity to transcend the expectations of a society that would insist on gendered learning. Like so many aspects of Godwin's thought, its radicalism lies in its implications rather than its recommendations.

* * *

We might ask why Godwin's epistemology has been so little considered by subsequent commentators, when it appears to colour so many of the author's arguments on other subjects. The struggle of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century critics to reconcile the ideas of *Political Justice* with the narrative of *Caleb Williams* is instructive: Leslie Stephen's claim that an unassisted reader 'would scarcely perceive Godwin's doctrine between the lines', or Angus Wilson's description of Godwin's 'schizophrenic tendency', melt away if we consider how quickly the author denies the authority of his own arguments.⁴³ Godwin describes himself as a sceptic, and always readily acknowledges that his doctrines may be in error. The author claims that he would rejoice were his arguments to be refuted, '...in having procured to the public the benefit of that refutation, of so much additional disquisition and knowledge'.⁴⁴

Godwin's statements have rarely been taken at face value. On one level they appear reductive and evasive – if all knowledge is open to question, then the author is able to disavow responsibility for their accuracy. On another level, the vanity and high-handedness that we sometimes see in Godwin's private manuscripts and correspondence encourage us to read such statements uncharitably, as examples of false modesty. Godwin's notes in response to Hazlitt's attack on him in *The Plain Speaker* (1826) are interesting in this respect. Rather than brushing off Hazlitt's criticism of his conversational powers, Godwin

⁴² A more jaundiced view might be to suggest that, after the criticism he had received for his attack on marriage in the first edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin was willing to let his views on gender roles lie implicit in his later work.

⁴³ Angus Wilson, 'The Novels of William Godwin', *World Review*, 28 (1951), p. 40; Leslie Stephen, 'William Godwin's Novels', in *Studies of a Biographer* (New York and London, 1902), p. 140.

⁴⁴ *Thoughts occasioned by the perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon* in William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 171.

apparently spent part of his day pedantically listing a series of rebuttals. His biographer, William St. Clair, suggests that Godwin's pride was easily bruised.⁴⁵ Conversely, the author's autobiographical notes show a dry sense of humour about his own sense of self-worth, and his often fractious relationship with Thomas Holcroft suggests that Godwin was well able to receive forceful criticism when it was offered in a generous and open spirit.⁴⁶ At the end of his life, Godwin was able to capture his willingness to revise his opinion (and his passive resistance to authority) in a single phrase: 'I am the person, spoken of in a preceding Essay, who early said to Truth, "Go on: whithersoever thou leadest. I am prepared to follow."' ⁴⁷

As the first chapter of this study details, it is entirely possible to read Godwin's disavowal of intellectual authority as a thread consistent with his epistemological position, and one that sheds light on his educational theory. The purpose of this thesis is not, ultimately, to challenge received notions of Godwin's thought (an unnecessary duty in the context of recent criticism), but to provide philosophical clarity to the discussion and to examine some of the more obscure parts of his prolific writings. While Philp's work has been significant in this area, it has focused on Godwin as an ethicist and political philosopher – leaving a number of seeming mysteries of intellectual history that cannot be addressed through that lens.

⁴⁵ See William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989); Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ Pamela Clemit, 'Self Analysis as Social Critique: The Autobiographical Writings of Godwin and Rousseau', *Romanticism*, 11 (2005), 161–80.

⁴⁷ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 6: Essays*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 219.

Chapter I

Godwin as Sceptic

A trend within twentieth-century criticism presented Godwin as a rationalist and a Platonist, but the author's epistemological principles do not support this, although the language of his early work encourages it.¹ Godwin is a sceptic and a critic in all his mature works. Godwin's 'incoherence' is a willingness to offer qualifications to his own argument, his 'retreat' the acceptance of the need for revision – though in his own eyes, often not a revision of his ideas but of their emphasis and expression. I will argue here that it is possible to discern a philosophically sceptical approach in many of the author's works, beginning with his embrace of a Humean ontology and epistemology in even the first edition of *Political Justice*.

From this first edition of *Political Justice* Godwin advances a form of compatibilist determinism, what the author refers to (in the language of the period) as the 'doctrine of necessity'. Free will is an illusion, our thoughts and actions dictated by their place in causal chains (e.g. an event, leading to a belief, leading to another event). Such a position was not unusual in the period. Godwin cites Hume, as well as Jonathan Edwards, in his argument. Hartley and Priestley advanced similar arguments. Godwin and Hume can be distinguished from their contemporaries by the secular nature of their respective theories. Any discussion of causality needs to address the question of first causes: Edwards, Hartley and Priestley are comfortable with grounding their arguments with God.² Priestley in particular, using the language of Pope's *Essay on Man*, embraces Providential Optimism – a position that Godwin would go on to reject in detail in the third edition of *Political Justice*.³ We should, Godwin argues, take comfort from the

¹ The earliest example of this Platonist trend comes with Henry N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913). Brailsford does not press the association, but his suggestions were taken up by F.E.L. Priestley, and the latter's edition of *Political Justice* remained a standard text for many years.

² David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, ed. by Herman Andrew Pistorius (London: Joseph Johnson, 1791), p. 504. Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* (Michigan: Ann Arbor/University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 15–25.

³ Priestley makes reference to the idea that 'all seeming discord is real harmony and all apparent evil, ultimate good' in Joseph Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated*, p. ix.

inescapable connection between cause and effect. Necessity gives meaning to our actions, while optimism 'is calculated to overturn all distinction between virtue and vice':

... according to the doctrine of optimism, if I do a virtuous action, I contribute to the general good; and, if I do a vicious action, it is still the same. Every man, according to this system, is privileged, as the elect are privileged according to the system of certain religionists: 'he may live as he list, for he cannot commit sin'.⁴

The place of God in Godwin's thought is ambiguous, but the philosopher certainly rejects the idea of a divine plan. Godwin agrees with Hume that, while there may be first causes in the universe, they are beyond our capacity to discern. We can infer a relationship between cause and effect, but:

No experiments we are able to make, no reasonings we are able to deduce, can ever instruct us in the principle of causation, or shew us for what reason it is that one event has, in every instance in which it has been known to occur, been the precursor of another event of a certain given description. Yet we reasonably believe that these events are bound together by a perfect necessity, and exclude from our ideas of matter and motion the supposition of chance or an uncaused event.⁵

The 'only valid ground' of reasoning, Godwin argues, is experience but our understanding of causality defies it. Instead we must align Godwin's position with Hume's idea of 'secret causes':

When we look about us towards external objects, and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connexion; any quality, which binds the effect to the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other. We only find, that the one does actually, in fact, follow the other. The impulse of one billiard-ball is attended with motion in the second.⁶

For all the author's stress in *Political Justice* on a Platonic account of truth (that truth exists as an ideal, independent of our capacity to find it), Godwin seems to accept that certain types of knowledge are not possible because they cannot be

⁴ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 216.

⁵ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 159.

⁶ David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principle of Morals*, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902), sec. VII.

grounded in experience. Though the first edition is often held up as a utopian manifesto typical of the revolutionary period, it contains a core of scepticism. This scepticism is not simply doubt, but a sign of Godwin's developing unease with 'tidy', programmatic philosophy.

Moving into the second and third editions of *Political Justice*, Godwin adopts more from the empiricist school. The author was conscious of this, citing his encounter with Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* (in 1794) as a pivotal influence on the revisions. Philp finds Godwin's claim puzzling, pointing to the second edition's rejection of a Humean ethical analysis and its more apparent debt to Adam Smith (and more subtly, Hutcheson and Joseph Butler); but while Godwin's ethics do cleave closer to those of the British Moralists, it is possible to interpret the author's claim as an expanded commitment to Humean ontological and epistemological scepticism. We may draw this from Godwin's revised ideas on the motivation behind human actions.

In the first edition, the author advanced a binary distinction between voluntary acts (those that were reasoned) and involuntary acts (those that derived from sensation). The dichotomy was problematic because Godwin considered acts that were insufficiently reasoned (perhaps the result of passion) in the same category as those that were the result of instinct. Furthermore, it was the author's conviction that a fully reasoned action would lead to a benevolent conclusion – an actor aware of all relevant factors could not fail to make benevolent decisions, since these were self-evidently superior to selfish ones. Selfish and vicious actions could only be the result of insufficient consideration (and so, involuntary); the result of factors beyond the individual's control. The theory was insufficient to the task of distinguishing between the simplest of knee-jerk responses and a considered action taken on faulty premises. In the second edition, Godwin revised this binary into three categories: the involuntary (now conceived as purely instinctive acts), the perfectly voluntary (an ideal action based on perfect knowledge and reasoning) and the imperfectly voluntary. Imperfectly voluntary actions were those based on intention and foresight, but derived from insufficiently reasoned motives. Such actions made up the majority of human decisions. Where Godwin's scepticism is crucial is that the author expresses doubt that perfectly voluntary actions exist as anything other than an ideal. The key point is that the author questions whether personal experience (which he had

identified as the only sound basis for knowledge) is an appropriate guide for decision making. To rely on precedent, to establish general rules, tried-and-tested routines, is to substitute habit for critical thinking. Godwin, however, accepts that such compromises are unavoidable ('sometimes a necessity which our imperfection imposes upon us'),⁷ and questions whether it is possible to escape our reliance on experience at all:

Perhaps no action of a man arrived at years of maturity is, in the sense above defined, perfectly voluntary: as there is no demonstration in the higher branches of mathematics, which contains the whole of the proof within itself, and does not depend upon former propositions, the proofs of which are not present to the mind of the learner.⁸

We should not, however, take Godwin's critique of his own position as a sign of either incoherence or a lack of intellectual confidence. Godwin's perfectly voluntary act could be turned profitably back to the discussion of necessity, asking whether a decision taken on the basis of pure reason (in a Kantian sense) could be held to be outside the boundaries of the causal chain. In every edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin dismisses the idea of a self-causing act – an identifiable 'first cause' – completely: 'That act, which gives the character of freedom to the whole, can never be discovered; and, if it could, in its own nature includes a contradiction'.⁹ Godwin's commitment to the doctrine of necessity remains unwavering in the later *Thoughts on Man*. In both texts, this reading hints at a deliberate philosophical scepticism.

Godwin appears to see no contradiction between his scepticism and the ethical and political arguments advanced in *Political Justice*. We might question how one might reconcile the duty to act according to moral truth established in the text, with our awareness that certain truths are unknowable. Godwin's language on the subject is ambiguous enough to make the author's position appear uncertain, though it is possible to read suggestions of a compatible (and compatibilist) stance across some of Godwin's works. In the *Reply to Parr*, Godwin expressed regret at having been free with the term 'perfectibility' in *Political Justice*, 'what I

⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 172.

⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 34.

⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 165.

would now wish to call, changing the term, without changing a particle of the meaning, the progressive nature of man, in knowledge, in virtuous propensities, and in social institutions'.¹⁰ We should take this to mean that the emphasis in Godwin's famous statement lies not in that, 'Man is perfectible', but in that he is 'susceptible of perpetual improvement.' As the author put it more emphatically in the revised editions:

Do you tell me, "that human society can never arrive at this improvement?" I do not stay to dispute that point with you. We can come nearer it than we are. We can come nearer and nearer yet. This will not be the first time that persons, engaged in the indefatigable pursuit of some accomplishment, have arrived at an excellence that surpassed their most sanguine expectations.¹¹

If progression and development are the real substance of Godwin's argument, then his revision of perfectly voluntary actions into an ideal becomes considerably less problematic, as does placing his scepticism alongside it. Godwin clearly argues that the attempt at moral action is itself valuable, even when it fails to meet his ideal of either ethics or reasoning.

We find Godwin's sceptical note continued in *The Enquirer*. In his discussion of impartiality and opinion (Volume II, Essay IX), the author claims it impossible for an individual to accurately establish their own motives for an action. There are simply too many variables to contemplate:

Every incident of our lives contributes to form our temper, our character and our understanding; and the mass thus formed modifies every one of our actions. All in man is association and habit. It may be objected indeed that our voluntary actions are thus influenced, but not our judgments, which are purely an affair of the understanding. But this is a groundless distinction. Volition and understanding, in the structure of the human mind, do not possess provinces thus separate and independent.¹²

Since we cannot perfectly understand the reasons behind our judgments, we cannot claim to be impartial in any matter of opinion. Furthermore, because the

¹⁰ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 190.

¹¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 212.

¹² William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 215.

causes of our mental habits are obscure, it is possible for an individual to be convinced by weak or erroneous reasoning (some unknown factor has made them receptive to it) and to remain so in the face of better arguments to the contrary. 'A candid mind', Godwin says will, 'feel itself impressed with the difficulties which bear upon its sentiments, especially if they are forcibly brought forward in argument; and will hastily discard its own system for another,' but the mind's capacity for self-deception allows it to become the most vehement partisan of a position initially adopted for vulgar reasons (such as bribery or ambition).¹³ 'A man who habitually defends a sentiment, commonly ends with becoming a convert. Pride and shame fix him in his new faith'.¹⁴ In the second part of the essay, Godwin takes this notion of pride and shame to task. The author suggests that we are quick to see dishonesty when we observe inconsistency in another's statements and laments the apparent need for legislators to defend their consistency to the house. A contradiction 'between one branch of a man's creed and another' is 'undoubtedly a defect', Godwin argues, but to have simply changed one's mind on a subject is undoubtedly not, 'Yet this is the sort of inconsistency, the charge of which is most frequently and vehemently repelled'.¹⁵ We should instead assert that inconsistency, in the sense of altering one's opinions in line with better arguments or new evidence '...is glorious, instead of being shameful'.¹⁶ To assign merit to the inflexibility of one's opinions is, Godwin says, a prejudice of the vulgar. To lend aid to the prejudices of the vulgar, the author concludes, is to make oneself an enemy of 'the improvement and happiness of mankind'.¹⁷

The unpublished essay, 'Of Scepticism', originally written for an additional volume of *The Enquirer*, illustrates how Godwin defined the sceptical aspects of his thought:

¹³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 214.

¹⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 215.

¹⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 220.

¹⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 220.

¹⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 221.

A sceptic, they say, is a man who sets out, previously to examination, with an arrogant resolution of believing nothing: he holds all opinions to be equally uncertain: he confines himself to the easy and specious task of raising objections to all systems, while he adheres to none.¹⁸

The author dismisses this as a caricature and equates scepticism with open-mindedness and critical thought. Tellingly, Godwin makes an explicit link between scepticism and the use of sensory evidence.

The sceptic begins with considering that the only thing of which he is certain is his present sensation, and that next to this in point of evidence, is the recollection of past sensation. He holds that his senses never deceive him, but that his recollection and his inferences may deceive him.¹⁹

The author's explanation of scepticism is, in the terminology of modern epistemology, incorrect (in that scepticism is today defined as the position that no evidence can meet the epistemological standard necessary to eliminate fundamental doubts). What Godwin defines here is a form of empiricism, but the philosopher presumably avoids that term because of its (period) connotations of folk wisdom.²⁰ That Godwin's avowed scepticism is, in fact, empiricism does mean that the author is not *also* a sceptic. Godwin argues here that our current sensory evidence (as distinguished from our memory of sensory evidence) is ultimately reliable and constitutes some kind of definite knowledge, but this makes no effort to account for types of knowledge that cannot be accessed through sense experience - first causes, or the nature of the connection between cause and effect. Since the author appears to argue elsewhere that these kinds of knowledge are genuinely not possible, it follows that the knowledge derived from sense experience is (to some degree) relative. Elsewhere in 'Of Scepticism', Godwin confronts the problem of induction:

He [the sceptic] is aware that experience may be a ground of probability, never of certainty. If I have experienced a given event or succession five times, I have some reason to expect that under similar circumstances it will take place again.

¹⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 302.

¹⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 302.

²⁰ We see Wollstonecraft's use of the word in that context in Letter 19 of *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*. Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Volume 6*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

[...]

A sober and just scepticism, as has already been observed, consists in an accurate attention to and weighing of the opposite appearances of evidence in every case that falls under consideration. Now this circumstance has a tendency in every instance to preclude absolute indifference. It is scarcely possible that relative to any question the opposite appearances of evidence should be exactly equal. The balance will have an inclination one way, and the mind of the sceptic accommodates itself to this inclination.²¹

If only our current sensory experiences are reliable, then any conclusions drawn from previous experience are based on unreliable information and therefore subject to doubt. Godwin seems to regard this doubt as unproblematic in the majority of cases, so long as its existence is acknowledged, but we must infer that different types of knowledge are subject to different epistemological standards. Indeed, Godwin claims that 'scepticism... consists not in indifference, but in a nice perception of the degrees of evidence'.²² In that all but one of these epistemological standards are based on fundamentally uncertain premises, a range of standards that stretches from reasoned and justified beliefs to the entirely ineffable, we can establish that Godwin is both an empiricist and a sceptic. Godwin is an empiricist because he argues that certain knowledge may be possible, within narrowly defined boundaries of empirical support, and other types of knowledge can be evaluated against that standard. Conversely, Godwin is a sceptic because he accepts the impossibility of verifying certain (necessary, compelling, and sometimes fundamental) propositions arrived at through the application of reason. This distinction is significant, as it demonstrates the author's debt to both Locke (in his empiricism) and Hume (in his scepticism). It would seem that the essay itself is not well-known, but the text is significant because it articulates Godwin's rejection of *a priori* knowledge (direct sense experience is the only thing that cannot deceive us) and, by extension, his philosophical distance from his Rational Dissenting contemporaries. We might consider the distance Godwin had travelled through reference to the author's correspondence and autobiographical notes:

²¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 304.

²² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 308.

In the last year of my academical life I entered into a curious paper war with my fellow student, Mr. Richard Evans [...] the subject, the being of a God – our papers were I believe seen by no one but ourselves. – I took the negative side, in this instance as always, with great sincerity hoping that my friend would enable me to remove the difficulties I apprehended. [...] I had not the courage however to persist in such an objection, and finally took refuge in the argument *a priori*, as outlined in Dr. Samuel Clarke's Discourse on the Attributes.²³

The author's language is telling, casting Clarke's argument as something protective rather than necessarily intellectually rigorous. What exactly Godwin's rueful hindsight pertains to is unclear – for having retreated into an intellectually weak argument, or for not having had the courage to take his (devil's advocate) position to its logical conclusion. In the correspondence itself, the author refers to 'the Berkleian & the Pyrrhonist' in a way that suggests (in 1778) that he regarded them as 'other'.²⁴ So much in Godwin's later writing demonstrates how he had revised that position.

We see Godwin's self-identification as a sceptic in the *Reply to Parr*:

Every impartial person who knows me, or has attentively considered my writings, will acknowledge that it is the fault of my character, rather to be too sceptical, than to incline too much to play the dogmatist. I was by no means assured of the truth of my own system. I wrote indeed with ardour; but I published with diffidence. I knew that my speculations had led me out of the beaten track; and I waited to be instructed by the comment of others as to the degree of value which should be stamped upon them. That comment in the first instance was highly flattering; yet I was not satisfied. I did not cease to revise, to reconsider, or to enquire. [...] If my doctrines were formed to abide the test of scrutiny, it was well: if they were refuted, I should still have occasion to rejoice, in having procured to the public the benefit of that refutation, of so much additional disquisition and knowledge.²⁵

²³ William Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 1: Memoirs*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: William Pickering, 1992), pp. 42–3.

²⁴ William Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume I: 1778-1797*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 6.

²⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, p. 171.

Godwin's somewhat prickly defence of his work in the *Reply* is sometimes taken as a manifestation of the author's wounded pride, or a eulogy for the revolutionary period. The language veers between the mournful (the revolutionary societies have 'perished' or have 'shrunk to a skeleton')²⁶ and the indignant (castigating Mackintosh for having overstepped 'the bounds of propriety and decency').²⁷ The author's waspish depiction of Parr does him little credit ('I have always found him the advocate of old establishments, and what appeared to me old abuses')²⁸ and his defence of the 'Fénelon dilemma' from *Political Justice* is a long-winded series of qualifications that serve only to obscure the author's original illustration of (in Philp's description) first-order ethical duty.²⁹ It is possible to explain away some of the inarticulacy of the text through attention to the social context that Godwin was writing into. It is clear from the language of the *Reply* that the author felt Mackintosh and Parr had violated the conventions of eighteenth-century sociability through their veiled and disingenuous hostility towards him ('is it the soundest and most manly way [?]', and that he lacked the willingness to respond in kind.³⁰ That Godwin had courted Parr's daughter only a few years previously probably complicated matters further. In the light of the sceptical thread in the author's earlier works, however, we should be more inclined to take his gestures towards intellectual humility (if not at face value) with a degree more sympathy.

A discussion of Godwin's scepticism offers much to the long-standing debate regarding the author's turn to fiction after *Political Justice*. The extent to which Godwin really did 'turn' from philosopher to novelist is questionable: he had published three novels (*Italian Letters*, *Damon and Delia* and *Imogen*) before he

²⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, p. 169.

²⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, p. 176.

²⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, p. 176.

²⁹ William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. xi–xiii.

³⁰ Quotation from Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, p. 174. The boundaries of period sociability have been explored extensively in the work of Lawrence E. Klein, Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), 869–98. See also Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jon Mee, "'The Use of Conversation": William Godwin's Conversable World and Romantic Sensibility', *Studies in Romanticism*, 50 (2011), 567–90.

began his philosophical magnum opus and remained a controversial essayist long after the publication of *Caleb Williams*. I would argue that the author saw himself in the polymathic ‘man of letters’ tradition – his attempts at verse drama suggest this – regardless of his public image. Furthermore, I would also argue that the author maintains a commitment to the exploration of philosophical issues throughout his oeuvre, regardless of the medium or genre of the piece in question. The perception of Godwin in some way ‘abandoning’ philosophy continues, however, a result of the critical dismissal of Godwin’s later works and an overbearing focus on his earlier ones. Clemit gently argues that ‘Godwin’s later novels lack the formal innovation needed to explore [the epistemological issues raised in his earlier novels] to the full’, but other scholars have been less kind.³¹ Adam Rounce’s description of the author’s work is telling:

Parts of his huge *oeuvre* (particularly the works of history and biography) are little read, yet the works that Hazlitt so admired, *Political Justice* and the novels *Caleb Williams* and (to a lesser extent) *St. Leon*, continue to play their part in discussions of the literary history and politics of the Romantic period.³²

At the time of writing, no modern single-volume edition of either of Godwin’s two latest novels exists. A lack of scholarly interest does not, of course, constitute a perception that Godwin had moved away from philosophy. Rather this, with a tendency to overstate the author’s leap from *Political Justice* to *Caleb Williams* (and the relationship between those works), has encouraged readers to believe that the interiority of the later novels renders them somehow less philosophical or political.³³ Mona Scheuermann’s often-cited survey of Godwin’s post-1800 novels begins from a dichotomy between the ‘social’ *Caleb Williams* and the ‘psychological’ later novels, and there is a vein of criticism on *Fleetwood* and *Cloudesley* that treats the sexual (and homosocial) dimensions of those novels in isolation to their social commentary.³⁴ The assumption of a dichotomy between

³¹ Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 102. P.N. Furbank refers to Godwin’s later novels as ‘almost intolerably bleak’ and of *Cloudesley* and *Deloraine* as without ‘the stir of life’. P.N. Furbank, ‘Godwin’s Novels’, *Essays in Criticism*, 5 (1955), 214–28 (p. 215).

³² Adam Rounce, ‘William Godwin: the novel, philosophy, and history’, *History of European Ideas* 33 (2007), 1-8, (p.1).

³³ A similar complaint might be found in Mitzi Myers, ‘Godwin’s Changing Conception of *Caleb Williams*’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 12 (1972), 591–628.

³⁴ Mona Scheuermann, ‘The Study of Mind: The Later Novels of William Godwin’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 1 (1983), 16–30. Steven Bruhm, ‘William Godwin’s *Fleetwood*: The

interiority and politics in Godwin's fiction has been challenged, however, most prominently in Marilyn Butler and Mark Philp's introduction to the Pickering *Novels and Memoirs* (1992) which argues that:

The distance which Godwin establishes between the narrator's and the reader's understanding has both a literary and a political purpose. Readers are forced to become active and to exercise independent judgement; in political terms, to question the objectivity of the narrator's perspective and his beliefs.³⁵

We might read the author's unpublished essay 'Of History and Romance' with regard to both scepticism and the increased prominence of fiction in Godwin's work after *Political Justice*. Like 'Of Scepticism', 'Of History and Romance' was written for a further volume of *The Enquirer* but was left unpublished until the late twentieth century.³⁶ In it Godwin rejects the expansive historical narrative, exemplified by Hume's *History of England*, as a kind of abstraction. 'He who would study the history of nations abstracted from individuals whose passions and peculiarities are interesting to our minds, will find it a dry and frigid science'.³⁷ Furthermore, its obfuscation of detail encourages a kind of intellectual complacency:

Pretenders indeed to universal science, who examine nothing, but imagine they understand everything, are ready from the slightest glance to decipher the whole character. Not so the genuine scholar. His curiosity is never satiated. He is ever upon the watch for further and still further

Epistemology of the Tortured Body', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 16 (1992), 25–43; William D. Brewer, 'Male Rivalry and Friendship in the Novels of William Godwin', in *Mapping Male Sexuality: Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. by Jay Losey (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2000), pp. 49–68; Colin Carman, 'Godwin's Fleetwood: Shame and the Sexuality of Feeling', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 41 (2014), 225–54. A.A. Markley succeeds in synthesising a discussion of same-sex relations with their social and political implications in A.A. Markley, "The Success of Gentleness": Homosocial Desire and the Homosexual Personality in the Novels of William Godwin', *Romanticism on the Net*, 36-37 (2004-5).

³⁵ Marilyn Butler and Mark Philp, 'Introduction', in *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 1: Memoirs*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: William Pickering, 1992), pp. 7–46 (pp. 43–4).

³⁶ Godwin annotates the intended destination for the piece (another volume of the *The Enquirer*) on the manuscript itself (m/s dep. b. 226/15), cited in Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 290.

³⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 292.

particulars. Trembling for his own fallibility and frailty, he employs every precaution to guard himself against them.³⁸

Again, we see a note of intellectual humility in Godwin's writing. A 'genuine scholar' is conscious of his ignorance and pursues the minute detail of subject, rather than pronouncing from general principles. It is in this, Godwin argues, that the study of individuals in history leads to a greater understanding of history than the study of nations.

There are characters in history that may almost be said to be worth an eternal study. They are epitomes of the of its (sic) best and most exalted features, purified from their grossness. I am not contented to observe such a man upon the public stage, I would follow him into his closet. I would see the friend and the father of a family, as well as the patriot. [...] I believe I should be better employed in studying one man, than in perusing the abridgement of Universal History in sixty volumes. I would rather be acquainted with a few trivial particulars of the actions and disposition of Virgil and Horace, than with the lives of many men, and the history of many nations.³⁹

Godwin argues that the moral superiority of the ancients makes them a better subject for study than figures from English history, but it is the author's response to the issue of accuracy in ancient history that is most remarkable. Godwin acknowledges that the 'disparity' between the character of the ancients and the moderns might be ascribed to 'exaggeration and fable'. Perhaps so, the author replies, but:

Are all fables unworthy of regard? Ancient history, says Rousseau, is a tissue of such fables, as have a moral perfectly adapted to the human heart. I ask not, as a principle point, whether it be true or false? My first enquiry is, "Can I derive instruction from it? [...] If so, I had rather be profoundly versed in this fable, than in all the genuine histories that ever existed."

The same is true of all history, or of evidence given in court. 'Nothing is more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfactory than the evidence of facts.' While the 'chronicle of facts, places and dates' may approach truth, it is of little use in understanding the human spirit. If this is so, Godwin concludes, then why

³⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 294.

³⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 294–5.

should it matter if a 'history' be a fabrication? If as the author says, the bare facts of history provide only a skeleton on which to hang a narrative, then it is the historical *romance* that represents 'the noblest and most excellent' expression of the historical muse. By extension, Godwin argues, the novel is of equal (if not greater) value with the history as a text of moral instruction. To wit: the historian must assemble the facts of history and then make sense of them through interpretation and invention, and must rationalise those events that are known to have happened against whatever thesis they have set out to argue. The novelist, by contrast, can assemble a narrative from the best examples they are able to portray and which they calculate will have the maximum effect on the reader.

In the context of the author's scepticism elsewhere, Godwin's essay is revealing. The argument rests on the implication that knowledge not derived from direct experience is dubious (the historian cannot definitively say how or why an event happened, both because of the distance of time and the difficulty of determining the motivations of others). Concrete facts (places, dates) offer only a rough impression of events and give no access to the feelings of those taking part in them – the psychological truth of an incident. Such 'truth' can be reconstructed, to an extent, but this 'truth' is dependent on artifice. In what Godwin considers every meaningful sense – as an accurate representation of events and a morally instructive example – a history is no more valuable than a novel. Since the novel can be more easily shaped for moral instruction without misleading the reader (implicitly, since we are under no illusions regarding the 'truth' of fiction), 'The man of taste and discrimination, who has properly weighed these causes, will be apt to exclaim, Dismiss me from the falsehood and impossibility of history, and deliver me over to the reality of romance'.⁴⁰

Godwin's argument appears no more than rhetoric (a perfect solution fallacy), unless we consider it representative of his overarching scepticism. If causes can rarely be known and second-hand knowledge is epistemologically suspect, then the value of a text lies not in its content (which is open to question) but its effect on the reader (which is experienced and so, empirically valid). Godwin had addressed this subject previously, in his discussion of the 'moral' and 'tendency'

⁴⁰ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 300.

of a written work in *The Enquirer*. The topic will be addressed more fully in a later chapter, where it is pivotal to the author's engagement with Fénelon's *Telemachus*. Suffice to say here, that we might look on Godwin's growing interest in the reception of fiction as an attempt to identify a route out of the sceptical-empirical cul-de-sac – and one that is in line with the author's compatibilism. The feeling that the individual experiences in reading a text provides a pseudo-cathartic training ground that allows that individual to form general rules of behaviour to guide their actions in real life and, while these rules fall short of the perfectly reasoned ideal, they facilitate the improvement of the individual's moral reasoning. The simulation of experience is not a replacement for experience (and experience itself is a far from perfect guide), but it is better than the absence of experience – which contains no grounds for improvement.

Jon Klancher has presented 'Of History and Romance' as an example of Godwin's reflexivity alongside his much earlier pastiche 'The Herald of Literature'. Though Klancher does not define this reflexivity, we might interpret it in both texts as Godwin's attempt to write about writing and the commentary on genre that we might infer from 'The Herald' and is stated in 'Of History and Romance'. Klancher argues that, in the latter text, Godwin sets out to construct a new genre – the republican romance – where the novelist's privileged position (having perfect knowledge of events as a result of having created them) enables them to draw a perfectly reasoned picture of moral action in the narrative. The intellectual leap at the core of Klancher's essay is a considerable one, but it is not without foundation. Godwin does not claim that the 'delineation of consistent, human character' for the purposes of moral instruction will naturally lead to works of a progressive, communitarian character as Klancher implies. Read alongside Godwin's statements regarding the inevitably positive moral character of perfect voluntary action in *Political Justice* however (and the effect of a work's intellectual tendency discussed in *The Enquirer*), we should regard Klancher's inference with some sympathy. Where we might criticise the argument is in Klancher's insistence that *The Enquirer* and 'Of History' represent a retreat from principles established in the first edition of *Political Justice*:

... in a major self-revision, Godwin renounced the theoretical discourse on necessity and introduced in much of the *Enquirer* project a more polite and reflexive Godwin on Possibility. Forgotten republics and lost opportunities

in history could be recovered in that discourse, under the sign of fiction and its possible or virtual worlds.⁴¹

At the risk of taking Klancher too literally; at no point does Godwin appear to renounce necessity. The revisions of the second and third editions of *Political Justice* (the author worked on the third edition simultaneously with *The Enquirer*) take the same determinist line as the original text, as does the retrospective *Thoughts on Man*. Nor should we simply look on *The Enquirer* and 'Of History' as a sidestep in approach that places Godwin's ontological and epistemological principles to one side. Godwin argues in every edition, after Hume, that the doctrine of necessity is required to make learning meaningful ('Can it be imagined that any man by the inspection and analysis of gunpowder would have been enabled, previously to experience, to predict its explosion?').⁴² Furthermore, the author's argument regarding effect is actually strengthened by the revised *Political Justice's* qualification of voluntary action. Godwin's distinction between the perfect and imperfect voluntary allows him to explore the utility of formulating general rules and principles to guide our actions. In the second edition, the author notes that such formulations may be unavoidable whenever we 'compare cases, and infer' but the more sophisticated distinction of the revisions means that those decisions not taken from a position of perfect reason (that is, relying on precedent) are not categorised alongside instinctive or unconscious actions.⁴³ Indeed, if we read Godwin as allowing that moral actions do occur without perfect reasoning (an undefined category of morally acceptable but epistemologically imperfect acts), then such formulations are necessary for everyday moral functioning.⁴⁴ Since no individual can be expected to have the range of personal experience needed to devise appropriate principles for every situation (and since Godwin considers induction suspect), then experience must be supplemented

⁴¹ Jon Klancher, 'Godwin and the Republican Romance: Genre, Politics, and the Contingency in Cultural History', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 56 (1995), 145–66 (p. 165).

⁴² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, pp. 158–9.

⁴³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 172.

⁴⁴ It is necessary to infer Godwin's position here. While the author clearly regards 'good' as an absolute (explicitly rejecting Richard Price's idea of relative good based on what is achievable for the actor) and perfect voluntary action as an ideal, his language suggests that he regards the 'virtuous individual' as an unproblematic concept. For this to be coherent, we must allow that individuals are able to perform just and positive moral actions without meeting the author's ideal of the voluntary. See Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (London: T.Cadell, 1787), p. 297. Godwin's response can be seen in Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 59.

with moral instruction and theoretical reasoning. The reading of fiction, as outlined in 'Of History', provides the tools for these.

Klancher's argument is seduced by the narrative of 'Godwin in retreat', and by the characterisation of Godwin as an idealist. In his conclusion, Klancher conceives the author as a visionary who he says rejects what Žižek calls the 'pacified contingency' of a conservative 'possible', real or material (the 'facts' of history) in favour of an imaginative possible with transformative potential.⁴⁵ I would not seek to challenge the conclusion that Godwin saw literature as a vehicle for the (ultimately) radical moral and intellectual improvement of human society, but I would question the conception it proceeds from. I would argue that 'Of History and Romance' reinforces the picture of a critical, sceptical Godwin. The essay dismisses history's claims to authority and questions the importance of factuality as anything more than a framework for discourse. It is not that the truth and accuracy of a work are not important, but that Godwin is uncertain that they are achievable in any meaningful sense. As this chapter has demonstrated, the sentiment is not unique to the essay in question and in fact exemplifies a trend that runs through a number of Godwin's major works. For all the author's critics may have wished to characterise his revisions and qualifications as a desire to recant the bold statements of his early work, the evidence seems to suggest that Godwin's revisions and willingness to qualify his arguments (sometimes at the risk of undermining them) are part of a meditated paradigm – that the author casts deliberate doubt on certain knowledge (at the most basic level) and that this informs his approach to literature.

If we regard Godwin's apparent belief that we have no grounds on which to claim certain knowledge as central to his philosophy, then the author's principles of candour and open-mindedness gain new weight. We have a duty, Godwin says in *Political Justice*, both to listen to the counsel of others and provide advice to those who seek it. We must also, however, respect that no individual is obliged to follow counsel and that all must ultimately act according to their private judgment: '...each must have his sphere of discretion. No man must encroach upon my province, nor I upon his. He may advise me, moderately and without

⁴⁵ Klancher, p. 165.

pertinaciousness, but he must not expect to dictate to me'.⁴⁶ We might physically compel another to follow our guidance, or trick them into doing what we want, but this would achieve nothing in the cause of human improvement – we can only do that through reason, through the strength of our argument. Godwin's position comes with an associated, parallel duty: to keep a mind alive to reason and willing to adjust its ideas in the face of new information. We must accept that this process cannot always be a smooth one. We cannot definitively say that our advice or our decisions are the correct ones, only judge with hindsight whether or not they contributed to happiness. This being the case, we must look for the potential for improvement every time an individual reaches for it, but we must respect that they have a right to fail on their own terms.

Reviewing Godwin's work through this lens, more and more of his philosophy appears as not a blueprint for perfection (or even improvement) but as a series of arguments advanced against 'things as they are'. If we accept the position that Godwin intentionally casts doubt on what is commonly held as knowledge, then the idea that the author offers any detailed programme of thought begins to appear untenable. Instead, we should see a set of critical core principles that the author applies to a range of existing institutions and finds wanting. We may synthesise a 'Godwinian system' from this, but it is a system defined more by the absence of programs than the programs it offers. Godwin is often categorised with the 'classical' anarchists, his ideas claimed prominently for anarchism by Kropotkin as early as 1910.⁴⁷ Godwin's anarchism, however, derives from the author's critical principle of scepticism – he is unable to offer answers, but able to identify the logical flaws with the answers that already exist, and considers it a civic duty to advance these criticisms with 'republican boldness'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ Pyotr Kropotkin, 'Anarchism', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. by Hugh Chisholm and Walter Alison Phillips, 11th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), pp. 914–19 (p. 915). A recent discussion of Godwin's place in anarchist theory can be found in Jared McGeough, "'So Variable and Inconstant a System": Rereading the Anarchism of William Godwin's Political Justice', *Studies in Romanticism*, 52 (2013), 275–309. McGeough implicitly rejects the division of 'classical' and 'post-anarchist' thought by pointing to Godwin's pre-figuring of post-anarchist epistemology.

⁴⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 82.

What does this mean for the critical study of Godwin's oeuvre? In subsequent chapters, I intend to show how the author's critical principle appears in his writing on both intellectual and moral education. Though it initially seems counterintuitive that Godwin's discussion of learning would best exemplify his doubts regarding the possibility of certain knowledge, I will argue here that those doubts form the backbone of the author's ideas regarding trial-and-error, the spirit to learn from failure and the relationships that must be developed in order that the individual might do so. Moreover, Godwin's sceptical spirit implicitly brings into question the ethics of educational authority – for how might a teacher effectively and ethically instruct when their claim to wisdom is based on uncertain foundations?

Chapter II

Godwin as an Educational Thinker

In this chapter I intend to outline some of the issues presented in British educational thought during the long eighteenth century, in order to illustrate the debates that Godwin sought to engage with in his work. Pivotal to these debates is Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and my discussion here will address how Locke's text set the boundaries of educational discourse in the period. Rousseau's *Émile* also formed a crucial influence on Godwin's educational ideas and here I shall identify Rousseau's own debt to Locke, before discussing the response of other British thinkers to Rousseau's ideas.

Educational discourse before Locke cannot be characterised solely as conduct literature, but the genre was prevalent and even the more high-minded treatises of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries show the influence of its functional approach. A number of studies have shown a genre concerned mainly with the ordering of behaviour and the inculcation of socially useful skills, and one content to harness moral development to religious indoctrination.¹ We might look upon Milton's pamphlet *Of Education* (1644) as a text particularly concerned with the formation of moral character, but one that typifies the functional approach of the period:

I call therefore a compleat and generous Education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices both private and publick of Peace and War. And how all this may be done between twelve, and one and twenty, less time then is now bestow'd in pure trifling at Grammar and *Sophistry*, is to be thus order'd.²

Milton would instruct young men in Latin, so that they might read the classics and extract useful knowledge from them. Though Milton recommends that the pupils learn virtue from the example of Roman patriots, he places no more emphasis on

¹ See *Conduct Literature for Women, 1640–1710*, eds. William St Clair and Irmgard Maassen (6 Volumes) (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002); George C. Brauer Jr., *The Education of a Gentleman: Theories of Gentlemanly Education in England 1660-1775* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959); and the introduction to Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

²John Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Volume II 1643-48*, ed. by Ernest Sirluck (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 382.

this than of them learning the practice of agriculture from other Classical authors.³ Milton binds up further study of ethics with the study of law, recommending the moral works of Plato and Cicero alongside Moses, Lycurgus and the common laws and statutes of England. Most remarkable of all, Milton endorses the study of poetry less for its intrinsic value and more for the training it provides in eloquence. Milton's tractate is representative of a consensus in early modern educational discourse that had established what literature was 'for'.⁴

Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* was revolutionary for outlining a developmental approach to intellectual, social and moral education. Proceeding from his conception of the infant mind as a *tabula rasa*, defined in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke's *Thoughts* dictated only a loose curriculum, and showed little concern for the social aspirations articulated in earlier educational writing (either the norms of polite society as seen in the conduct book, or Milton's notion of what a young gentleman might contribute to the republic).⁵ Locke advocated the development of a child's powers of reason through honest and patient engagement. The text, originally a collection of letters to Edward Clarke, stressed that education was a matter that parents should be intimately involved with. While a good tutor might be employed (a better investment than land, Locke says), such a man must act as a second father, and be respected by the parents, but can never replace them. The child was to be treated with respect, in order to engender reciprocal respect, and the father should provide a role model for the virtues he wishes the child to learn. This was also true in a broader sense: central to Locke's approach was the conviction that a teacher or parent's role was to encourage the child to love the things they wished them to learn, be they particular values, behaviours, or skills. Locke's text argued that the child's enthusiasm and imagination should be harnessed to

³ Though how much Milton's text was shaped by its apparent original purpose – as a letter to the famous teacher and scholar of agriculture, Hartlib – is open to debate.

⁴ Milton's tractate shares elements with works by Sir Thomas Elyot, Henry Peacham, and John Brinsley. Discussed in Sirluck's annotations to the Yale *Complete Prose Works* (pp.400-415) and in Oliver Morley Ainsworth, *Milton on Education, the Tractate Of Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928).

⁵ Republic defined here in the looser sense of 'the public body', rather than in an attempt to project the Commonwealth into Milton's earlier works.

produce an adult with mental fortitude and rationality, conscious of the virtues of truthfulness, kindness and piety.⁶

Significantly, *Some Thoughts* does not dwell on the question of obedience – either to parents, or to social expectations. Locke held that children who were threatened into compliance learned only to hide their unwelcome behaviour (n.50), and those that were bribed were taught to value material things over virtue (n.52). Rather, it is the author’s conviction that children who are loved, respected and reasoned with will return those things in equal measure. Rejecting simple reward and punishment, ‘*Esteem and Disgrace* are, of all others, the most powerful incentives to the Mind, when once it is brought to relish them’ (n.56).⁷

Locke’s text was not without its shortcomings, either for modern or period readers. The author assumes a male pupil – his precepts ‘will not so perfectly suit the education of daughters’, ‘though where the difference of sex requires different treatment, ‘twill be no hard matter to distinguish’ (n.6) – and a gentleman, at that.⁸ Mary Astell’s *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694) might be seen as a response to Locke’s ambivalence, but as a manifesto for an educational institution (rather than a discourse on the development of children) that text is closer in genre to Milton’s than Locke’s. *Some Thoughts*’ assumptions about class, and of the manner in which formal education should be conducted, speak much about Locke’s own experience of the subject. The author, who had been tutor to the future third Earl of Shaftesbury, is critical of schooling (‘public’ education) for its absence of parental influence and for the false confidence that the social engagement of the school encourages:

But Fathers observing, that Fortune is often most successfully courted by bold and bustling men are glad to see their sons pure and forward betimes; take it for a happy omen, that they will be free and happy men, and look on the tricks they play their school-fellows, or learn from them, as a

⁶ Though the impact of Locke’s work was such that we might describe his work as revolutionary, he was not without like-minded contemporaries. Obadiah Walker’s *Of Education, Especially of Young Gentlemen* (1673) pre-dates Locke in advocating parental involvement, close observation, and persuasion over punishment; but Walker’s text did not have the seminal influence in public discourse that Locke’s did.

⁷ Notes (n.) pertain to Locke’s use of numbered paragraphs. The numbers differ between editions, thanks to the author’s practice of amending and revising the text over a course of years. The best-known critical edition (Yolton) conflates several editions, though it uses the third edition (1695) as its copy text. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 116.

⁸ Locke, p. 86.

proficiency in the art of living, and making their way through the world. But I must take the liberty to say, that he that lays the foundation of his son's fortune in vertue and good breeding, takes the only sure and warrantable way.⁹

The mentor-learner partnership is another central element to Locke's thesis, one that conventional schooling (with the teacher's attention divided between many) cannot replicate. Locke recommends that the child's social engagement beyond the family be carefully managed, for fear of bringing them into contact with negative role models. The tutor himself must be a man of the highest character, of enough wisdom and experience to gradually prepare his pupil for the moral dangers of adult life. The school, Locke seems to imply, was a sink-or-swim approach to the same problem.

Some Thoughts was not received without controversy. Unlike many of his predecessors, Locke showed little concern for formal religious education. The author could think of no worse text than the Bible for the guidance of children's religion, and only those passages most suitable to a child's 'capacity and notions' (n.158) were worth providing for them to read.¹⁰ Locke's piety was the simple love of God the creator (n.136) and the author blamed early religious education (forcing the undeveloped mind to address questions regarding the nature of the deity that a more mature one could accept as ineffable) for the spread of atheism. Richardson's well-known critique of *Some Thoughts* in *Pamela II* (1741) specifically indicts this aspect of the text and decries Locke's assertion that moral education is not dependent on religious. More precisely, Richardson has his protagonist criticise Locke's 'failure' to specify the correct doctrinal (for Richardson, Anglican) elements for the child's ultimate salvation.¹¹ This would become a recurring theme in attacks on those thinkers that followed Locke, and will be addressed again subsequently.

Despite such accusations of heterodoxy, Locke's text was widely read and widely discussed. The book ran to twenty five editions (in English, with as many more in French, German, Italian, Dutch and Swedish) over the course of the eighteenth

⁹ Locke, p. 131.

¹⁰ Locke, p. 213.

¹¹ Chaber, "From Moral Man to Godly Man" (1988) and Aikins, "Pamela's Use of Locke's Words" (1996)

century, with Locke expanding the text on five separate occasions.¹² In Britain, the author's ideas on education infiltrated the public consciousness through *The Spectator*, where Eustace Budgell used the text as the basis for a number of essays (no. 307, 313 and 337). Locke's language was repeated in a variety of other works, the author's metaphor of the infant mind as 'white paper' and 'wax to be moulded' appearing verbatim in Boyer's *The English Theophrastus* and in the work of Oswald Dykes.

Locke was enlisted in a variety of debates. Advocates of private education (centred in the home) made much use of the author's stress on the tutor-pupil relationship and the management of the child's exposure to moral danger. For these partisans the school was, as it had been for Locke, a potentially lawless place where the social pressure inherent to an assembly of boys would overpower the wisdom of even the best teacher.¹³ The semblance of order was only maintained through strict discipline, a subject that critics of schooling found equally problematic. Locke's disciples were frequently troubled by the inculcation of obedience – it was unnecessary to force a reasoning, ethically aware child into compliance, as such a child would willingly carry out a reasonable, ethically sound request without protest (or be able to explain why they could not). To train the habit of obedience was to teach a generation not to value critical thought. As Percival Stockdale wrote in 1782, 'If we rule boys with the discipline of *slaves*, should we wonder that they are never *men*?'.¹⁴ We see earlier condemnations in Swift ('Whipping breaks the Spirits of Lads well born' in *An Essay on Modern Education*, 1729) and in Richard Hurd's *Dialogues on Foreign Travel* (1764).¹⁵ A number of thinkers attempted to define a third route between public and private education, supporting small boarding schools or academies where a select group of children could be educated under the guidance of a small number of masters. The reformer John Clarke, in *An Essay upon the Education of Youth in Grammar-*

¹² Pickering, Samuel F.; Jr. *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England*. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), p.10

¹³ Budgell quotes Locke directly in *The Spectator* 337 (27 March, 1712), on the subject of schooling: '...you have a strange value for words, when preferring the languages of the ancient Greeks and Romans, to that which made them such brave men, you think it worth while to hazard your son's innocence and virtue for a little Greek and Latin.' (originally Locke, *Some Thoughts*, n.70)

¹⁴ The charge is repeated in his *Memoirs*. Percival Stockdale, *The Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Percival Stockdale, Volume II* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1809), pp. 413–4.

¹⁵ Quotation from the *Intelligencer* IX, p.99. Jonathan Swift and Thomas Sheridan, *The Intelligencer*, ed. by James Woolley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

Schools (1720, revised 1730) is the best known of the earlier advocates, James Burgh's *The Dignity of Human Nature* (1754) continued the trend, as did Thomas Sheridan's *British Education* (1756), though the latter text is dominated by the author's preoccupation with the forms of spoken English (which he considered to be Locke's major omission).

The fear of the young being led astray without supervision was a recurring feature in discussions of the Grand Tour and tutors frequently accompanied young men on the journey across Europe. Richard Hurd's *Dialogues* again enlisted Locke in the argument, framing his treatise as a discussion between Locke and his pupil, Shaftesbury. Hurd's dialogues reflect how the purpose of the Grand Tour had gradually shifted from an exercise in diplomatic networking by the elite, to a more common gentlemanly pursuit, valued for what it had to offer in terms of intellectual and social development. Such a context inevitably heightened fears regarding (negative) moral development, and this became a theme in accounts of Grand Tourism.

Though we might consider *Some Thoughts* to have been responsible for a paradigmatic shift in educational thought, this is not to say that the more prescriptive genres of educational writing faded away over the course of the eighteenth century. The conduct book moved in and out of fashion during the period but it is possible to identify the influence of Locke, even here.¹⁶ The conduct book in the latter half of the eighteenth century shows a greater interest in the moral education of the young, in Locke's sense of controlled exposure to vice (in order to show its deficiencies), rather than placing its faith in maintaining children's innocence – an idea that comes increasingly under fire in the period. Conduct literature also frequently adopted the format and tone of Locke's text, as did the 'curriculum piece', and 'letters on education' became a distinct and recognisable format of their own. These letters were presented, as Locke's were, as the advice of family or friends and provided a degree of contrast with the more formal treatise on education (which in some cases makes use of the Classical dialogue). In general, the epistolary format assumed familial relations and home-centred education. The formal treatise more often favoured the school or

¹⁶ St. Clair argues that ebb and flow of conduct literature is a response to widespread social anxiety, and links the proliferation of such works with periods of economic downturn and political strife. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 280–282.

academy. It is possible to observe emerging genres of educational writing here – ‘the letter of advice’ or ‘practical manual’ (usually aimed at parents) distinct from the ‘plan for a school’, either of which might incorporate a curriculum piece, though these existed as discrete texts also.¹⁷

This balance of genres was also often gendered, with conduct books tending towards advice for the education of daughters and the curriculum piece and formal treatise catering towards that of young men. The implied distinction in age here is not accidental, as we see a range of texts aimed at educating boys beyond the threshold of what we would now consider childhood (into their twenties), while it is often assumed that girls will be ready to leave the home by their late teens.¹⁸ The gendering of education in this manner was far from universal, however. One of the best known collections of the later period, Chesterfield’s *Letters to His Son on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman* (published 1774, but written between the years 1737-68) resembles both the ‘conduct’ and epistolary models, both of which were genre associated with female writers and readers. Chesterfield’s text is a series of highly prescriptive advisory epistles that, beginning in childhood, continued long into the recipient’s thirties. Chesterfield’s *Letters* were notorious, less for their prescriptiveness but for their perceived amorality. The letters embodied the unreasoned acceptance of social conventions that had characterised the conduct literature in the previous century, but changes in attitudes (and the author’s obvious ambivalence regarding the ethics of those conventions) made the book a *bête noire* for education commentators. Chesterfield also illustrates that, while the content of educational works was frequently gendered, its approach was frequently not – both betray a preoccupation with making young people ‘useful’ and successful, rather than indulging any notion of psychological growth.

¹⁷ For a collection of letters, including a curriculum piece, see Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on Education: with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects*, (London: C. Dilly, 1790). For an extended collection of dialogues, see David Fordyce’s *Dialogues Concerning Education* (London: E. Dilly, 1757). An extended standalone curriculum piece can be seen in Joseph Priestley’s *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life*, (London: C.Henderson, 1765). Practical plans for schools are a major feature of Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education, as it respects the industrious classes* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1805) and Andrew Bell, *The Madras School, or, Elements of Tuition* (London: T. Bensley, 1808).

¹⁸ Macaulay’s *Letters on Education* is notable in that it insists ... ‘the same rules of education in all respects are to be observed to the female...’ (p.142), while its curriculum extends at least to the age of 21.

We might consider Rousseau to be Locke's successor, though this would be a contentious claim. Though Rousseau's *Émile, or, On Education* (1762) was widely read and widely commented on in the period, its reception was much more guarded. It became a commonplace to praise Rousseau's eloquence, but to pick on some particular aspect of his argument for criticism, as if this allowed for the dismissal of the whole. Overtly hostile readings of the text regularly descended into ad hominem dismissal, with the praise of the author's rhetorical style reversed into evidence of his excessive sensibility. In progressive (and later, radical) circles, Rousseau's assertions regarding the education of women were deservedly attacked. Boswell was one of the few willing to defend Rousseau's ideas in the periodicals of the time, but never took to them with the enthusiasm that Budgell had with Locke's.¹⁹ Even without advocates, however, *Émile* presented a powerful challenge to mainstream ideas of education. Rousseau may be considered Locke's successor through his conscious engagement with Locke, his retrenchment of his predecessor's religious (doctrinal) ambivalence and his lasting impact on the educational discourse of the period.

Rousseau's debt to Locke is extensive. The fundamental principles of Emile's education – the necessity of a close personal relationship between mentor and pupil, the eschewal of external discipline in favour of self-discipline, and the utility of training the child in critical and practical skills over the imprinting of knowledge – would be undeniably Lockeian ones, were they not points of agreement between Locke and his contemporary, Fénelon. Rousseau's engagement with Locke however, is often a conscious interrogation of his predecessor's ideas; the influence of Fénelon, an undercurrent of inspiration that I will address in the next chapter. Where Rousseau favours Locke over Fénelon is in his conviction that the mind is there to be shaped by interaction with others. The author complicates matters by placing a defence of innate conscience ('divine instinct') in the mouth of *Émile's* Savoyard Vicar but Rousseau does not directly confront the principle

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of Rousseau's reception in England, the reader is referred to: James H. Warner, 'The Basis of J.-J. Rousseau's Contemporaneous Reputation in England', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol.55 No.4 (April 1940), pp.270-80; and 'Émile in Eighteenth-Century England', *PMLA*, Vol.59 No.3 (September 1944), pp.773-791; Edward Duffy, *Rousseau in England: the Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

of innate ideas.²⁰ The hypothetical ‘savage’ of the *Second Discourse* and *Émile* is a reactive creature – ‘wax to be moulded’, rather than one naturally compelled to a purpose. Fénelon’s belief that the good in humanity was ‘borrowed’ from God, and that we were born with the knowledge of God as an ideal, has no straightforward reconciliation with Rousseau’s position.²¹

Rousseau cites Locke throughout *Émile*, paraphrasing his words on children’s fear of the unknown (or absence thereof), on callousness, and on the versatility of simple toys.²² Like Locke, Rousseau is ambivalent about the details of religious education but takes a considerably more combative line in his indifference. Where Locke merely argued that the specifics of religious thought and practice were too difficult a subject for the very young, Rousseau dismissed their importance entirely. The Savoyard Vicar goes so far as to claim that the adoration of God can be found in ‘the book of nature’ and suggests there is little to choose between Christianity, Islam and Judaism.²³ Unlike the author’s ambiguous position on innate ideas, Rousseau reiterates this Indifferentism in his discussion of women’s education in Book V: ‘Every girl ought to have her mother’s religion, and every woman her husband’s. If this religion is false, the docility which subjects mother and daughter to the order of nature erases from God’s sight the sin of the error’.²⁴

Rousseau consciously parts company with Locke on the subject of reason:

To reason with children was Locke’s great maxim. It is the one most in vogue today. Its success, however, does not appear to me such as to establish its reputation; and as for me, I see nothing more stupid than these children who have been reasoned with so much. Of all the faculties of man, reason, which is, so to speak, only a composite of all the others, is the one that develops with the most difficulty and latest. And it is this one which they want to use in order to develop the first faculties! The masterpiece of a good education is to make a reasonable man, and they claim they raise a child by reason! This is to begin with the end, to want to make the product the instrument. If children understood reason, they would not need to be raised. But by speaking to them from an early age a

²⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, ed. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 290.

²¹ See François Fénelon, *The Existence of God*, ed. by Henry Morley (London and New York: Cassell & Co., 1889), sec. 62–5. Terence Marshall, ‘Epistemology and Political Perception in the Case of Rousseau’, in *The Challenge of Rousseau*, ed. by Eve Grace and Christopher Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 76–122 (p. 82).

²² Locke, p. 173, p. 178 and p.199. In relation to Rousseau, p. 63, p.153 and p.70.

²³ Rousseau, p. 306.

²⁴ Rousseau, p. 377.

language which they do not understand, one accustoms them to show off with words, to control all that is said to them, to believe themselves as wise as their masters...²⁵

We might consider Rousseau broadly pessimistic about the intellectual capacity of children. They are not capable of reason, they do not understand property²⁶ or value,²⁷ nor do they have the foresight to recognise the consequences of their actions (see Rousseau's account of 'lying *de jure*').²⁸ Conversely, we might characterise the author's vision as *optimistic* in that it assumes the development of reason occurs naturally in response to everyday challenges, and that heavy-handed tuition will only retard it. It is possible that the author misunderstood Locke because, for all his criticism, their respective positions are not incompatible. Rousseau laments that the 'civilised' child is constantly at work, that 'habit and obedience take the place of reason'; the savage, by contrast, is forced to exercise his reason in the absence of anyone to tell him what to do.²⁹ Locke's rejection of rules for children and insistence on compulsion only as a method of last resort sit easily with this. The authors perhaps differ in their conception of reason itself: for Locke it is a skill that should be trained; for Rousseau, a faculty that must be allowed to develop. Locke would have reason consciously practised; Rousseau apparently fears that to do so risks smothering the child's nascent reason under the tutor's greater faculty. Rousseau's system of education contains as many deliberate exercises in reason as Locke's does, however – the author merely disguises these as 'everyday challenges' rather than allowing the tutor to frame the rational process. The wisdom of this (and its ethical dimension) would later be criticised by Godwin, a point that I will return to below.

Rousseau's impact prompted rebuttals from a number of thinkers in the late eighteenth century. The majority of these were, predictably, attacks on the author's doctrinal ambivalence (not Christian enough for John Wesley or James Beattie, too Christian for David Hume).³⁰ Notably, however, Kames' *Loose Hints Upon Education and the Culture of the Heart* (1781) attempts to confront

²⁵ Rousseau, p. 89.

²⁶ Rousseau, p. 99.

²⁷ Rousseau, p. 103.

²⁸ Rousseau, p. 101.

²⁹ Rousseau, p. 118.

³⁰ Wesley in Sermon 114, 'The Unity of the Divine Being' in *Sermons on Several Occasions* (London, 1825); Beattie in 'On the Nature and Immutability of Truth' in *Essays* (Edinburgh, 1776); Hume's comment that Rousseau had 'a hankering after the Bible' is attributed to him by Lord Charlemont in the latter's *Memoirs* (1812).

Rousseau on his own terms. Kames concurs on the importance of cultivating and regulating the natural passions (and expresses similar concerns regarding the corrupting influence of society), but takes an altogether more optimistic line on children's reason.³¹ Rousseau's positive influence on British discourse is less obvious than his negative. Godwin's *Account of the Seminary* (1783) calls Rousseau an unequalled thinker, and confesses that, 'I have borrowed so many of my ideas from this admirable writer, that I thought (sic) it necessary to make this acknowledgment in the outset'.³² Godwin's pamphlet is more at odds with Rousseau than such a statement suggests, however. The *Account* concerns itself primarily with the virtues of a literary education (Rousseau would have Emile read only one book – *Robinson Crusoe* – in childhood) and the merits of classical literature. Indeed, while Godwin closely paraphrases Rousseau's argument regarding children's inability to reason, he seems to suggest that imagination and earnestness supply its place until the mind has developed experience sufficient to the cognitive process:

Rousseau has told us, in his animated language, that if a child could escape a whipping, or obtain a paper of sweetness, by promising to throw himself out at window tomorrow, the promise would instantly be made. Nothing is more contrary to experience than this. It is true, death, or any such evils, of which he has no clear conception, do not strongly affect him in prospect. But by the view of that which is palpable and striking, he is as much influenced as any man, however extensive his knowledge, however large his experience.³³

We should read 'experience' here as part of a characteristically Godwinian note of dismissal; 'contrary to experience' would become the author's favoured euphemism for that which he considers to be impossible.³⁴ For all Godwin's suggestions to the contrary, those points on which the *Account* aligns with Rousseau (its rejection of schooling, the need for a tutor to act as a moral guardian, its warnings against the tutor acting with seemingly arbitrary authority)

³¹ Lord Kames, *Loose Hints Upon Education, Chiefly Concerning the Culture of the Heart* (Edinburgh: John Bell, George Robinson and John Murray, 1782), p. 145 and 277.

³² William Godwin, *Account of the Seminary in Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 6.

³³ Godwin, *Account of the Seminary*, p. 19.

³⁴ 'If any man were to tell me that, if I pull the trigger of my gun, a swift and beautiful horse will immediately appear starting from the mouth of the tube; I can only answer that I do not expect it, and that it is contrary to the tenor of my former experience' (*The Enquirer*, Vol.1 Essay IV, 'Of the Sources of Genius'). Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 90–1.

are rarely unique to that author. There is an identifiably Rousseavian hint in Godwin's caution against vanity and pride, but few of the text's sentiments would be out of place in any post-Locke defence of private tuition. The pamphlet associates schooling with slavery, exhorts tutors to allow the learner to proceed at their own pace and, most tellingly of all, makes use of the 'white paper' metaphor that had become a commonplace of that camp. It is worthy of note that the Rousseavian position that Godwin most closely associates himself with – children's reason – is one that the author complicates with statements elsewhere in the text (the charge that modern education 'undermines their reason' suggests that Godwin considers it a developing faculty in children; his outline of how a tutor should encourage the pupil to give a reasoned opinion of their reading material suggests that the author sees it as a faculty that can be actively *developed*).

On one hand, the above emphasises how easily a critical reader might draw the line of influence from Locke, through Rousseau, to the late eighteenth century education debate; on the other, we are forced to ask why Godwin felt the need to embellish his conventionally post-Locke pamphlet with claims of Rousseau's influence. We might be drawn initially to the conclusion that Godwin, at such an early stage in his career, was not conscious of the debt that *Émile* owed to its predecessors in the field – but this summation fails to acknowledge the signifiers ('white paper', or the author's citation of Sir Richard Steele) of Godwin's wider reading on the topic. A better argument would be to claim that the author chooses to emphasise his engagement with Rousseau, citing Rousseau to support those positions on which they agree, while holding back criticism upon the areas in which they differ. The evidence of the text alone does not supply an answer as to why Godwin does this, and the education debate in the pamphlets, periodicals and treatise of the period is orientated towards (at best) only guarded endorsement of Rousseau's ideas – there is nothing to imply an audience likely to be swayed by the author's appeal to Rousseau as an authority. A look at contemporaneous fictional discourse tells a different story. A spate of novels inspired (or perceived to be inspired) by *Émile* were published in the years prior to Godwin's pamphlet: Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765-70) was the best known of these, its rejection of modern decadence and message of benevolence taken up by the early Methodists (Wesley himself producing a revised edition of the text in 1781). Contemporary with the *Account* was Thomas

Day's *The History of Sandford and Merton* (1783-89). While Day's Harry Sandford is the very model of the virtues Rousseau sought to instil in Emile (his blunt incomprehension of anything that lacks practical or moral utility recalls a number of passages from Rousseau's text), the text pastiches Brooke alongside Thomas Percival's *A Father's Instructions* (1781), *Robinson Crusoe* and a range of classical texts. Day would later become renowned for his devotion to Rousseau's ideals, an affectionate caricature of Day appearing as the character of Forester in Maria Edgeworth's *Moral Tales* (1801). Edgeworth's father (Richard Lovell Edgeworth) had been a close friend of Day's and party to his attempt to educate a model wife, allegedly inspired by *Émile*. Richard Edgeworth's memoirs (edited by Maria) reprint some of Day's letters from his residence in France, where he had taken two foundling girls so that he might instruct them away from negative influences, with a view to instilling the traits he considered ideal in a wife and mother:

Were all the books in the world to be destroyed, except scientific books (which I except, not to affront you) the second book I should wish to save, after the Bible, would be Rousseau's Emilius. It is indeed a most extraordinary work – the more I read, the more I admire – Rousseau alone, with a perspicuity more than mortal, has been able at once to look through the human heart, and discover the secret sources and combinations of the passions. Every page is big with important truth.³⁵

We may question how significant Rousseau's influence on Day was for, although his letters reveal him as an enthusiastic reader of that author's work, Edgeworth's account of Day's 'experiment' does not press the connection. In an editorial footnote, Maria Edgeworth goes so far as to observe that Day recanted the force of his enthusiasm for Rousseau in later years, as her father had done in the main text of the *Memoirs*. Anna Seward's description of Day's experiment with the foundling girls (in her memoir of Erasmus Darwin, published in 1804) makes no link to *Émile* at all, describing only the young Day's inclination towards an idealised Roman or Spartan conception of virtue.³⁶ While this clearly demonstrates common ground between Day and Rousseau, Seward does not

³⁵ Letter from Thomas Day to Richard Edgeworth dated '1769', reproduced in Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth* (London: R. Hunter, 1821), p. 221.

³⁶ Seward claims that Day sought to implant 'the characteristic virtues of Arria, Portia, and Cornelia' and that his children would 'emulate the Gracchi'. Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804), pp. 39–40.

suggest such. The earliest public claim of a direct link between Day and Rousseau comes from Day's first biographer, James Keir. Keir describes Rousseau's theories as 'absurd' but argues that Day, 'inflamed with the enthusiasm of virtue' was easily led by the 'seductive eloquence' of the Swiss philosopher.³⁷ The biographer takes pains to establish moral distance between his subject and Rousseau, contrasting Day's 'protection' of the foundling girls with Rousseau's abandonment of his own children. In her correspondence Maria Edgeworth wrote that she might 'easily alter a sentence or two' in her father's memoirs in order to gloss over the episode, having heard the distress experienced by the family of Sabrina Bicknall (*née* Sidney, once one of the foundling girls) when Seward's biography of Darwin was published.³⁸

Distancing is a recurring theme in discussions of Rousseau throughout the period, not simply in texts that post-date the conservative backlash of the late 1790s. Kames, in his 1781 treatise *Loose Hints Upon Education*, is even-handed in his criticism of Rousseau but his tone is revealing regarding the reception of *Émile* among British readers:

I am acquainted with a very respectable couple, disciples of Rousseau; more however, I conjecture, from inclination than from conviction. They seldom hitherto have employed any means for restraining their children but promises and entreaties. [...] I would have such parents consider, whether they are not here misled by self-deceit. Their motive they imagine is tenderness for their poor babes. But the real motive is their own weakness, which they indulge at the expence of their babes; for must it not even to them be evident, that to indulge irregular fancies in creatures destitute of reason, is to invest fancy with absolute authority, and to dethrone virtue.³⁹

The author's language here places him at one remove from the 'error' of following Rousseau, but then further distances his 'respectable couple' by insisting that their indulgence is more a product of natural soft-heartedness than a stringent adherence to Rousseau's tenets. Kames goes on to 'reform' Rousseau's

³⁷ James Keir, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq.* (London: John Stockdale, 1791), p. 25.

³⁸ Letter from Maria Edgeworth to Frances Anne Edgeworth, 15th October 1818 in Maria Edgeworth, *Maria Edgeworth: Letters from England 1813-1844*, ed. by Christina Colvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 77.

³⁹ Kames, pp. 54–5.

doctrine, claiming that the author cannot have meant that children be allowed to harm themselves or others in following their whims.

And thus a doctrine ushered in with solemnity as a leading principle in the education of children, and seeming at first view of great importance, does, upon a more narrow inspection, vanish into smoke.⁴⁰

Rousseau's more controversial statements can be 'tamed' by British common sense, Kames implies, but we should not adopt his ideas uncritically. There is, however, the sense of a constituency – the 'disciples of Rousseau' – that Kames seeks to use as a rhetorical prop in his argument. We might consider the possibility that this constituency existed only as a rhetorical device, created to illustrate the follies of early parental enthusiasm, but this nonetheless might have created the impression of an audience for works (or tuition) inspired by Rousseavian thinking.⁴¹ If this is so, then we might read Godwin's pamphlet as orientating itself towards a perceived audience: those readers (specifically, parents) who had responded positively to the ideas of *Émile* but were not active in the print culture of the time.

If the *Account* represents Godwin's qualified endorsement of Rousseau, *The Enquirer* should be seen as a conscious break with his predecessor's ideas. While making the apparently obligatory concession to his energy and originality, Godwin's words on Rousseau border on the dismissive, and are certainly highly critical, even hostile. The system of *Émile* is that of, 'fictitious equality' and 'incessant hypocrisy and lying'.⁴² For all the value of Rousseau's insights, Godwin argues that his system is untenable:

The treatise of Rousseau upon education is probably a work of the highest value. It contains a series of most important speculations upon the history and structure of the human mind; and many of his hints and remarks upon the direct topic of education, will be found of inestimable value. But in the article here referred to, whatever may be its merit as a vehicle of fundamental truths, as a guide of practice it will be found of the most pernicious tendency. The deception he prescribes would be in hourly

⁴⁰ Kames, pp. 56–7.

⁴¹ The elder Edgeworth confesses to such enthusiasm in his memoirs, though he argues that even older and wiser readers had been 'dazzled by the eloquence of Rousseau'. Edgeworth and Edgeworth, p. 269.

⁴² Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 131.

danger of discovery, and could not fail of being in a confused and indistinct manner suspected by the pupil...⁴³

The Enquirer does not make a thoroughgoing rebuttal to *Émile*, but it is clear that Godwin rejects its system for fundamental reasons – it violates the principles of truthfulness and candour established in *Political Justice* and reiterated in the later text. Not only this, but the consequences of the tutor's deception being revealed (the child's willingness to trust would be shattered) would be infinitely greater than those of the child simply refusing to take part in the lessons the tutor sought to impart (as might be the case were the tutor to openly request the child's participation rather than attempting to trick them into it).

Godwin does not shrug off Rousseau's influence entirely. *The Enquirer* returns to the subject of children's reason. The author argues that while it is wrong to compel an individual to a course of action they have not freely chosen, and wrong to punish an individual for a course of action they can make a reasoned justification of, we must not pretend that children and adults are capable of debating such things on an equal footing. Not only does the form of such debate frequently place the onus of persuasion on the child (the child can expect to be punished if they cannot justify their conduct, the parent is not expected to demonstrate why the child should accept punishment in the first place), the balance of experience and rhetorical skill lies with the adult. Furthermore, Godwin argues, the child that has been educated in unequal debate will learn to resent the authority of their parents and to respect only the sophistry of winning arguments rather than truth for its own sake.⁴⁴

The way to avoid this error in the treatment of youth, is to fix in our mind those points from which we may perceive that we shall not ultimately recede, and, whenever they occur, to prescribe them with mildness of behaviour, but with firmness of decision.⁴⁵

Children should be allowed as much independence as possible, Godwin argues, but the boundaries of this independence should be 'clear, evident and unequivocal'.⁴⁶ In doing so, the author echoes Rousseau's idea of 'well-regulated

⁴³ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 126.

⁴⁴ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 123.

⁴⁶ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 123.

freedom',⁴⁷ but also reinforces one of the central problems of education implied throughout *The Enquirer*: how do we reconcile the insufficiency of children's reason and the need to control their behaviour for their own good, with the desired end-goal of producing an adult independent enough to rely on their own judgment but receptive to the thoughts and feelings of others? A child that has been forced into shape by the authority of parents and tutors will know only obedience and received wisdom, never developing the genius of an enquiring mind;⁴⁸ a child who has been encouraged to follow nothing but their own whims will have little understanding of perseverance and rigour and little regard for the counsel of others.⁴⁹ It is on these grounds that Godwin recommends public education, though he does not specify the exact form this should take. Children need peers, Godwin says, so that they might engage with the ideas of others on an equal footing. As close as child and tutor might be (and Godwin stresses the importance of this relationship), their obvious lack of equality means that the tutor's statements will always carry with them the shadow of authority:

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.⁵⁰

A tutor with a single pupil must struggle against the temptation to superintend the child's every action, to set them on the right course rather than to help them find it for themselves. A child educated among other children has a space away from the tutor where they are not subject to the tutor's authority and where the shared experience of being taught helps to develop the child's relations to others as equals.

Despite this, Godwin acknowledges the importance and difficulty of the tutor's role. The author is sympathetic to the position most strongly argued in Fénelon and Rousseau: that it is the tutor's duty to provide a motive for the child's learning, and to 'smooth the difficulties' that present themselves in learning, rather than to

⁴⁷ Rousseau, p. 92.

⁴⁸ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 89.

⁴⁹ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, pp. 235–8.

⁵⁰ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 107.

compel the child to one course or another.⁵¹ To do so effectively, Godwin argues, requires that the tutor win the trust and confidence of their pupil. The tutor's authority over the learner has the potential to estrange them; the tutor who has the child's confidence knows when their guidance is needed and when they can step back. Moreover, a tutor who has the child's sympathy will frequently not need to exert authority at all – the child's desire to emulate the tutor will guide them to the correct course.⁵² Rousseau's error is to manufacture this trust through deception. Such a process is, Godwin argues, both practically untenable and ethically unsound.

There is a remarkable level of empathy for both student and tutor in Godwin's essays. Godwin reflected often on his childhood experiences, and had been a private tutor on two occasions. His ability to discuss his experiences in the abstract was probably well-developed, yet it is a common theme in critical literature on *The Enquirer* to see it as a significant point of transition in his views. K. E. Smith refers to *Political Justice* as 'the high point in absolute faith in reason' and regards *The Enquirer* as a step down the road of 'the culture of the heart' which reaches its apotheosis in the preface to *St. Leon*.⁵³ David O'Shaughnessy places *The Enquirer* on a similar continuum of Godwin's increasingly sophisticated understanding of how ideas could be communicated to the public. Smith argues that while writing *The Enquirer* Godwin's thought 'had not caught up with his experiences' but still managed to recognise the importance of sympathy, failing to note that Godwin had made his most significant revisions to *Political Justice* (with major new discussions of sympathy and feeling) before ever beginning *The Enquirer*.⁵⁴ O'Shaughnessy's argument is more complex, placing Godwin's novels and (oft neglected) plays in parallel to demonstrate the author's journey from a didactic method of disseminating truth (in the first edition of *Political Justice*) to a dialogic method of discovering it (in *The Enquirer* and later works). The case that O'Shaughnessy puts forward is a strong one, but I feel that the continuities between *The Enquirer* and the *Account* – and how quickly Godwin

⁵¹ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 115. See also François Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', in *Fénelon on Education*, ed. by H. C. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 10–16; Rousseau, pp. 90–94.

⁵² Godwin, *The Enquirer*, pp. 132–3.

⁵³ K.E. Smith, 'Autonomy and Perfectibility: The Educational Theory of Godwin's *The Enquirer*', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 5 (1982), 217–24 (p. 219).

⁵⁴ Smith, p. 219.

saw the need to revise *Political Justice* – are problematic for O’Shaughnessy’s argument. In essence, Godwin’s awareness of the ethical problems inherent to didactic forms of education (an awareness he seems to show throughout his mature work) leave me unpersuaded by O’Shaughnessy’s reading of the author’s early work.

* * *

In contrast to Godwin, Maria Edgeworth’s early work provides a detailed criticism of both *Émile* and its perceived supporters. *Practical Education* was published by Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth in 1798. As part of the Edgeworth family’s practice of having the elder children superintend the younger, Maria continued the observations of children begun by her first stepmother, Honora Sneyd. In recording these, Edgeworth pursued a semi-experimental method, noting her younger siblings’ responses to particular activities, interactions and methods of discipline.⁵⁵ The result is a strikingly original text, going beyond the harnessing of children’s enthusiasm (as endorsed by Locke, Fénelon and Rousseau) to a detailed account of how such enthusiasm might be turned to the development of inquisitive, critical thought. Edgeworth believed that her observations demonstrated that, if children could be encouraged to gradually apply greater and greater rigour to their natural curiosity, the resulting adults would be trained with the habits of scientific inquiry.

Edgeworth’s debt to Locke is clear and acknowledged, references to his work are numerous and Edgeworth comments that her predecessor had ‘done mankind an essential service’ in his explanation of how the mind develops an understanding of logic without formal training.⁵⁶ Edgeworth’s relationship with Rousseau is considerably more antagonistic: on more than one occasion the author cites Rousseau in order to specifically contradict him. Edgeworth also cites Godwin (in *The Enquirer*) suggesting that Godwin’s thoughts on education had at least some influence in the period. The arguments of *Practical Education* are frequently in agreement with those in Godwin’s work, but the former text’s long gestation suggests that *The Enquirer* was a useful supplement to Edgeworth’s writing

⁵⁵ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 64–5; Susan Clare Manly, ‘Artifice, Autonomy, Authority in Practical Education (1798)’, *Corvey Women Writers on the Web (CW3)*, 2007.

⁵⁶ Maria Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, ed. by Susan Manly (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p. 375.

rather than a seminal influence. Ironically, Godwin was not impressed by *Practical Education*: ‘...the great care of the lady is to make her pupils natural philosophers & logicians in the egg-shell, while the more spiritualised ingredients of the human character, imagination, enthusiasm & heroic virtue, are utterly neglected.’⁵⁷

Practical Education was a more influential text on the continent than in Britain. At home, Edgeworth’s book faced the now predictable backlash against a text that openly refused to take a position on doctrinal education (the author citing the experience of sectarian problems in Ireland), coupled with the public suspicion of any text that might be associated with Godwin, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft or Priestley (all of whom are cited in the text).⁵⁸ Ironically, modern scholarship has often portrayed Edgeworth as a conservative figure for her emphasis on practical skills, compromise, and what is considered her failure to criticise gendered education.⁵⁹

Where Edgeworth’s text is distinctive is in its emphasis on children’s intellectual development, suggesting (as Godwin does) that moral behaviour will follow if the critical faculty is sufficiently developed. Rousseau’s *Emile* must be ‘uncommonly deficient in penetration’ to not see through the tutor’s deception, she argues and, like Godwin, argues that the exercise of authority or compulsion towards children should be directly proportional to their capacity for reason.⁶⁰ A child too young to understand the logic behind why they must go to bed should be *put* to bed (without direction or discussion), not *sent*, but: ‘whenever we can use reason, we should never use force; it is only whilst children are too young to comprehend reason, that we should expect from them implicit submission’.⁶¹ Where Edgeworth is explicit in her criticism of Rousseau (and Madame de Genlis) is in

⁵⁷ Letter to George Tuthill, 14th September 1799, William Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume II: 1798-1805*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 100.

⁵⁸ Manly, para. 20–24.

⁵⁹ Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, ‘Rousseau and British Romanticism: Women and the Legacy of Male Radicalism’, in *Cultural Interactions in the Romantic Age: Critical Essays in Comparative Literature*, ed. by Gregory Maertz (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 145; Julia Douthwaite, ‘Experimental Child-Rearing After Rousseau: Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education* and *Belinda*’, *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies*, 2 (1997), 35–56 (p. 51).

⁶⁰ Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, p. 106.

⁶¹ Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, p. 106.

her attack on their 'dangerous counsel' of attempting to teach virtue by falsehood. Again echoing Godwin, Edgeworth writes:

When once a child detects you in falsehood, you lose his confidence; his incredulity will then be as extravagant as his former belief was gratuitous. It is in vain to expect, by the most eloquent manifestoes, or by secret leagues offensive and defensive, to conceal your real views, sentiments, and actions, from children. Their interest keeps their attention continually awake; not a word, not a look, in which they are concerned, escapes them...⁶²

The author goes on to suggest that children should be formed to the habit of speaking the truth, both directly and with candour.⁶³ Edgeworth argues that where a person fears the consequences of their answer, so they learn the habit of equivocation. If a child is brought up to believe that the honest answer is always the right one, they will learn to love truth for its own sake.

Edgeworth expands upon moral education in her novel *Belinda* (1801). Critical attention towards the novel has often focused on the text's depiction of an unworldly girl educated to be a virtuous wife, emphasising the parallels with Rousseau's Sophie and with Day's pseudo-Roussevian experiment.⁶⁴ *Belinda* also offers criticism of the conduct-book genre. The protagonist's aunt, who provides pragmatic advice on how Belinda should 'make her way in the world', is named Stanhope - the family name of the famous Earl of Chesterfield. As Edgeworth implied in *Practical Education*, the flaw of the 'Chesterfieldian system' was to suggest that 'pleasing' (by any means) was a virtue and the novel appears to draw parallels between the mainstream literature of women's education (often focused on preparing a young woman for the marriage-market) and Chesterfield's letters (focused on preparing a young man for public life).⁶⁵

⁶² Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, p. 114.

⁶³ Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Most recently, Cliona Ó Gallchoir's *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment and Nation*, (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005), pp.40-5; also Catherine Toal, 'Control Experiment: Edgeworth's Critique of Rousseau's Educational Theory' in *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and her Contexts* (Heidi Kaufman and Chris Fauske, eds.), (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, p. 116.

The author seems to take inspiration from Godwin in the novel's conclusion. Acknowledging the artificiality of Captain Sutherland's appearance in providing a tidy resolution to Virginia's plot, Edgeworth constructs her final scene in the manner of a sentimental comedy. The barriers between character, author and reader are archly questioned:

'And now, my good friends,' continued lady Delacour, 'shall I finish the novel for you?'

'If your ladyship pleases; nobody can do it better,' said Clarence Hervey.

'But I hope you will remember, dear lady Delacour,' said Belinda, 'that there is nothing in which novelists are so apt to err, as in hurrying things toward the conclusion. In not allowing time enough for that change of feeling, which change of situation cannot easily produce'.⁶⁶

In the final lines of the text Lady Delacour challenges the reader to find the moral of the story, '...and, no doubt/You all have wit enough to find it out' but perhaps also making a gesture to *The Enquirer's* argument regarding the moral and tendency of a work.⁶⁷ If this is so, it suggests a sophisticated response (on Edgeworth's part) to the 'marriage plot' novel. The reader is invited to construct their own resolution to the narrative, as the author foregrounds the apparent triviality of her own. The resolution is not of significant importance except as a signifier of the overall tendency of the work, or a repudiation of it (as conventionally moral explanations are tacked onto picaresque tales to make them 'safe' for readers). Edgeworth's novel insists on analysis, validating the reader's capacity for interpretation and making it clear that there is more to be found in the text than is easily summed up in a concluding chapter. It is a point seemingly inspired by Godwin but also perhaps deliberately contra-Rousseau. *Belinda* is certainly not a children's book (Edgeworth's writing for children was recognisably designated so), but its intended audience must have included the sort of young women the narrative depicts – readers perceived as sentimental and immature subjects who might still benefit from 'educational' reading. Rousseau was dismissive of the analytic powers of both children and women.⁶⁸ In his attack on La Fontaine's Fables, Rousseau argues that children left to interpret the moral of

⁶⁶ Maria Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 2 (Belinda)*, ed. by Siobhán Kilfeather (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p. 364.

⁶⁷ Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 2 (Belinda)*, p. 366. Kilfeather suggests this is an oblique reference to Johnson's 'point a Moral, or adorn a Tale' in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (l.222).

⁶⁸ Rousseau, p. 113 and p. 409.

a tale for themselves will almost always apply the moral opposite to the author's intention.⁶⁹ In doing so the author reveals a narrowly didactic conception of literature, one where any work can be reduced to a handful of principles the author meant to communicate. It is a position that Godwin rejects completely. While Rousseau voices his concerns that unsophisticated readers might sympathise with the villain of a piece, if allowed to read of their success, Godwin argues that:

The intellectual tendency of any book is perhaps a consideration of much greater importance, than its direct moral tendency. *Gilblas* is a book not very pure in its moral tendency; its subject is the success and good fortune of a kind of sharper, at least, of a man not much fettered and burthened with the strictness of his principles; its scenes are a tissue of knavery and profligacy, touched with a light and exquisite pencil. [...] It would be an instructive enquiry to consider what sort of devastation we should commit in our libraries, if we were to pronounce upon the volumes by their moral, or even by their direct moral tendency.⁷⁰

Edgeworth's position is more guarded, recommending that pupils not have morally complex reading until they are mature enough to analyse their own feelings regarding it. The author's admiration for *Gil Blas* sees it used allusively (along with other works by Lesage) throughout *Belinda*. Edgeworth makes a parallel comment to Godwin's in *Practical Education*:

When *Gil Blas* lays open his whole heart to us, and tells us all his sins, unwhipt of justice, we give him credit for making us his confidant, and we forget that this sincerity, and these liberal confessions are not characteristic of the hero's disposition, but essential only to the novel. The novel writer could not tell us all he had to say without this dying confession, and inconsistent openness from his accomplished villain; the reader is ready enough to forgive, having never been duped. When young people can make all these reflections for themselves, they may read *Gil Blas* with as much safety as the life of Franklin, or any other the most moral performance.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Rousseau, p. 115.

⁷⁰ Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 140.

⁷¹ Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, p. 128.

Notably, both Godwin and Edgeworth paraphrase St. Paul's epistle to Titus, 'unto the pure all things are pure' in their justification, though Edgeworth's use derives from a secondary source (Madame de Sevigné's letters, rendered as 'Tout est sain aux sains').⁷² The position of either author sits in stark contrast to Rousseau, who calls reading 'the plague of childhood'.⁷³

Any account of eighteenth-century educational discourse is necessarily selective. The chapter above focuses on a single thread, derived from Locke, with the intention of bringing a number of issues to the fore: the concerns of many major thinkers regarding the inculcation of obedience and the development of independent moral reasoning; the value attributed to reading as an educational practice; and the ambiguous status of Rousseau as an influence acknowledged by writers but visibly kept at arm's length. In focusing heuristically on a 'school of Locke' we see the growth of a trend in educational discourse emphasising personal improvement (the development of individual reason and the cultivation of wise sentiment) as the route to virtuous conduct. This trend represents a move away from models of education that focused on social convention (the conduct book) or the development of a kind of civic humanism (as in many discussions of schooling). We might observe that this new trend does much to blur the strong gender and class assumptions of other kinds of educational writing. A method of education principally concerned with the development of empathy and critical thought has the luxury of treating the skills necessary for the marriage-market, or matters of state, as mere 'accomplishments' to be developed according to a young person's interests (they are, in theory, equally well-prepared for any field of endeavour they set their minds to). Certainly Locke and his direct disciples frequently betray an assumption of children raised amongst ease and plenty, where it is possible to devote the entirety of one's energies to nurturing one's offspring (or employ an expert to guide them); but these thinkers also give rise to a greater interest in the psychology of education, the observations of which promise a utility that transcends gender and class boundaries. We see this most

⁷² Godwin, *The Enquirer*, p. 143. Edgeworth, *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth, Volume 11 (Practical Education)*, p. 128.

⁷³ Rousseau, p. 116.

strongly in Edgeworth, and for this reason might question her characterisation as a conservative thinker – her observational, responsive method and endorsement of investigation and enquiry have more potential to challenge cultural norms than to reinforce them.

We see a similar idea developing in Godwin's educational writing. It is evident from *Political Justice* that its author believes the universal exercise of private judgment, in accordance with the dictates of reason, would challenge many (if not all) of the institutions of eighteenth-century society. *The Enquirer* asks how we might then develop in young people the capacity for independent reason that would make this possible. It is too easy, *The Enquirer* suggests, to simply train young people to perpetuate the conventions their parents and tutors live with. Equally, though Godwin regards the civic humanist strain with a great deal of affection (evidenced by the author's worship of both the great Classical legislators and the Commonwealth-men), he obviously rejects it as a model for social reform. Neither of these models has much potential to develop genuinely independent critical thought, instead offering frameworks with which to understand the world. These frameworks may be socially positive or negative but they in no way constitute, for Godwin, independent thinking. We see, in *The Enquirer*, that the author is troubled by the dilemma of how to encourage independent thinking without blindly indulging (or trampling over) the desires of as-yet undisciplined minds. The answer Godwin arrives at is reading, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter III

Reading, Interpretation and ‘Minerva Revealed’

The previous chapter focused on issues prevalent in British educational discourse, placing to one side a major influence on Godwin’s educational writing – the work of François Salignac de Mothe Fénelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, and his successors in the field of French educational thought. The importance of Rousseau has already been touched upon, but in this chapter I shall endeavour to explain Godwin’s differing response to Fénelon and Rousseau’s ideas, despite the many shared assumptions in their work. Godwin argues that Rousseau’s education of Emile is ‘a series of tricks, a puppet-show exhibition’,¹ but it is Fénelon that Godwin would have us save from the burning building ‘at the moment he conceived the project of his immortal Telemachus’, and so ‘[promote] the benefit of thousands’.² Yet the education of Telemachus is fundamentally similar to the education of Emile: the orchestration of moral lessons in which the subject ‘discovers’ the truth the tutor sought to communicate. Here I intend to argue that, for Godwin, the crucial distinction between Fénelonian and Rousseavian pedagogy is the former’s ultimate transparency and that this transparency is a seminal influence on Godwin’s theory of reading. Previous studies of the author’s theory have usually considered Godwin alone, with Graham Allen’s essay on *Telemachus* as the notable exception.³ Here I intend to engage with Fénelon’s ideas in order to throw those of Rousseau into relief, a necessary precursor to showing Godwin’s near total rejection of the latter in later parts of this study. This chapter will also touch on Madame de Genlis in relation to Fénelon and Godwin, as Godwin was certainly familiar with her ideas.

¹ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 126.

² William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 50.

³ David McCracken, ‘Godwin’s Literary Theory: The Alliance between Fiction and Political Philosophy’, *Philological Quarterly*, 49 (1970), 113–33; Gary Handwerk, “Awakening the Mind”: William Godwin’s Enquirer’, in *Godwinian Moments from the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, ed. by Robert M Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 103–24; David O’Shaughnessy, *William Godwin and the Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). Graham Allen, ‘Godwin, Fénelon, and the Disappearing Teacher’, *History of European Ideas*, 33 (2007), 9–24.

Fénelon's two major works on education, *The Education of Girls* (1687) and *Telemachus, Son of Ulysses* (composed 1693-4, published 1699), book-end Locke's *Thoughts* and share a handful of important principles. Though Fénelon advances no *tabula rasa* model of the human mind (and argues elsewhere in favour of innate, divine goodness in the soul); *The Education of Girls* begins from the position of a pliant, impressionable infant mind.⁴ The author implies that reason is an ever-developing faculty and is explicit regarding the need to teach through explanation and demonstration rather than authority.⁵ Finally, both Locke and Fénelon stress the value of learning through play, an idea expressed in one of Fénelon's many references to St. Augustine: 'Untrammelled curiosity... develops a child's intellect far more effectively than a rule or a necessity imposed by fear'.⁶

The Education of Girls does not elide distinctions between male and female education and, while conceding the alleged intellectual and physical inferiority of women, emphasises their central domestic role and argues that a great many of adult women's flaws stem from the inadequacy of their early education. The key point that the author makes but does not foreground is that it is women who are, in the most part, made responsible for the education of children – women who have been educated wisely will educate wisely in turn.⁷ For the first half of the text however, Fénelon makes few gender distinctions and writes on the needs and behaviour of 'children' in general. We might consider the author's advice here to hint at his general theory of education, before the more specific (and strongly gendered) later chapters. Central to Fénelon's theory is 'indirect instruction'. Children are impressionable and imitative, the author says. Provided with good role models, they will emulate them. A tutor that is mostly virtuous, but open about their failings, can show a child how to overcome their own. A tutor that appears a hypocrite, following the line of 'do as I say, not as I do', will encourage the child to see 'virtue' as merely restrictions on their behaviour.⁸ Godwin makes a very similar argument in *The Enquirer* (Vol.I, Essays XI and XV), one of many

⁴ This chapter uses one of the few modern translations of Fénelon's *Education of Girls*, that contained in H. C. Barnard, *Fénelon on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), the passage under discussion occurs on p. 15.

⁵ Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', pp. 18–22.

⁶ Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', p. 24.

⁷ Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', pp. 92–94.

⁸ Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', pp. 17–19.

examples of the author's debt to his predecessor. Even more important to Fénelon's indirect instruction is the need to follow the child's curiosity and enthusiasm:

For example, in the country they see a mill, they want to know what it is. You should show them how the food on which they live is prepared. They see the reapers, and you should explain what they are doing – how the corn is sown and how it grows in the earth. [...] One should never be wearied by their questions; these are opportunities which nature offers you to facilitate their instruction. Show that you are pleased by them; in so doing you will imperceptibly teach them the various processes which are of service to man and upon which commerce depends.⁹

The indirect method is made necessary by the child's short attention span. Fénelon compares a child's mind to a flickering flame, bright but at the mercy of the wind.¹⁰ A young mind that is not allowed to wander will feel as if it is imprisoned, the author says, and so a tutor should be prepared to step back and allow the child to make their own connections between the things they have learned (though they should still be ready to correct fallacious reasoning when they perceive it).

The education of Telemachus, in Fénelon's novel of the same name, continues this line of thought to another level. The prince's tutor is divine: the ageing Mentor is Minerva, goddess of wisdom, in disguise. Mentor's divine foresight places Telemachus in situations where he can learn the virtues a future king will need – economy, chastity, resistance to flattery, respect for the common people and martial heroism balanced against scepticism of martial glory. In contrast to Fénelon's indulgent attitude to the enthusiasms of children, many of Mentor's lessons have an authoritarian character. In his reform of Idomenaus and Salente, the author has Mentor endorse rigid class boundaries, sumptuary laws and the idea that children belong to the state as much as they do their parents. 'The authority of the king over the subject is absolute,' the author tells us, 'but the authority of the law is absolute over him; his power to do good is unlimited, but he is restrained from doing evil'.¹¹ The example of *Telemachus* reinforces the authoritarian aspects noted in *The Education of Girls* and suggesting that, while

⁹ Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', p. 12.

¹⁰ Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', p. 16.

¹¹ François Fénelon, *Telemachus*, ed. by Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 71.

we might describe Fénelon's method as child-centred, we should not characterise it as in any sense 'liberal'. Fénelon may advise that a tutor answer any question a child puts to them, but he warns against engaging them on matters they should be ignorant of: 'The limits of a woman's learning – like that of a man – should be determined by her duties'.¹² Fénelon stresses the importance of friendship for children, but insists that these friendships be regulated (and offers specific guidance on preventing girls from becoming too enamoured of 'quite ordinary' people or things).¹³ A significant portion of *The Education* is given over, perhaps unsurprisingly, to how children should be taught scripture (the author recommends the use of narrative and theatre to develop children's religious knowledge) and the inculcation of particular religious practices.

We might be puzzled by Godwin's affection for Fénelon's clearly authoritarian strain of educational discourse, but considering *Telemachus* as a piece of educational discourse we must consider the circumstances of its creation: as a didactic novel for one very specific reader (Louis, Duke of Burgundy). Written with the expectation that its reader would one day become king, *Telemachus* was in part written to counter the example of kingship presented by the Duke's grandfather, Louis XIV. Accordingly the author has Mentor speak critically of absolutism, ostentation and military adventurism. Telemachus' moral lessons relate frequently to the idea of a compact between a king and his people. It is perhaps for this reason that we might think of the text as a model of Fénelon's indirect instruction, as we imagine the difficulties faced in educating a child of superior social rank to ourselves – and in educating against the grain of the only tangible authority we might hold over them, for how could one invoke the power of the king (a part of which Fénelon was theoretically invested with as part of his appointment) while remaining critical of the king's power?

Mentor/Minerva 'teaches' by setting Telemachus on adventures that will bring out the heroic qualities he seems to already possess. The prince is already clever, brave and charismatic – his flaws are the symptoms of youth and inexperience. The goddess' divine power allows Mentor to orchestrate these lessons and to provide guidance when the prince appears to falter but the tutor does not shy away from direct intervention when necessary, as we see in Book VII when

¹² Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', p. 75.

¹³ Fénelon, 'The Education of Girls', p. 32.

Mentor throws Telemachus into the sea in order to separate him from the nymph, Eucharis. Fénelon seems to argue throughout the text that people can be made virtuous through law, authority and compulsion; it is perhaps the tutor's flattery to his pupil to suggest that a hero requires only the occasional (and literal) push. In reading the text as allegorical we see the operation of Fénelon's indirect method: the author provides his pupil with a heroic version of their own relationship that the pupil might both emulate (for Telemachus is, by the end of the novel, unambiguously a hero in his own right) and criticise (recognising Telemachus' youthful mistakes as his own, without feeling his own conduct being censured). Saint-Simon, usually among Fénelon's detractors, testifies to the success of the tutor's approach in his memoirs:

The Duke of Burgundy was born terrible, and in his early youth he made everyone tremble. Hard and irascible to the utmost passion, incapable of bearing the slightest resistance without flying into a rage which made people fear that his physical frame would entirely give way [...] in a very short space of time, devotion and grace made quite another being of him, and changed his many and dreadful faults into the entirely opposite virtues.¹⁴

The apparent success of Fénelon's indirect instruction should, again, not be interpreted as evidence of his indulgence as an educator. The author's biographer, Janet, reports that he was quick to assert his moral and intellectual authority over the Duke, in spite of the Petit Dauphin's protestations of his social superiority.¹⁵ Fénelon's precarious position as both royal appointee and royal critic no doubt mediated his authority over the Prince, but he was clearly not afraid to assert himself as an educator.

In the work of Fénelon's follower, Madame de Genlis, we see the idea of the tutor's moral and intellectual authority extended into intellectual control. In Genlis' *Adelaide and Theodore; or, Letters on Education* (1782, tr. 1783) the fictionalised 'author', the Baroness, writes or compiles the only reading material she allows her children to encounter in early childhood. The majority of writing available to children is dismissed as too complex, or lacking in any moral tendency (Vol.I, Letter XIV). This control continues into the child's teenage years. Concerned at

¹⁴ Quoted in Paul Janet, *Fénelon: His Life and Works*, ed. by Victor Leuliette (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1914), pp. 47–8.

¹⁵ Janet, p. 49.

the possibility that her daughter Adelaide may encounter immoral texts, the Baroness contrives a lesson (under the guise of aiding her in writing a novel) in which extracts from questionable works are framed as letters that Adelaide must answer and their immoral ideas refute (with notes provided by the Baroness indicating where these ideas contradict themselves). The Baroness argues that, having been primed with arguments against the problematic content of those works, Adelaide is exposed to those works safely, free from the ‘shame’ of having read them.¹⁶

Thus I shall at the same time form her style, her mind, and her reason; I shall guard her against those dangerous impressions which might have been made at a future period; I shall *enable* her to reason with good sense on all sorts of subjects...¹⁷

Genlis’ work is contemporary with that of Rousseau and, while both authors clearly display the influence of Fénelon in their embrace of the indirect method, there are a number of reasons to consider Genlis more directly the philosophical inheritor of Fénelon’s ideas. *Adelaide and Theodore* pays considerable homage to *Telemachus*: the Baroness’ education of her daughter is paralleled by the Count de Roseville’s education of a foreign prince, whom he leads through a number of episodes intended to develop his sensibility. The simplicity the family encounter at Lagaraye recalls that of Fénelon’s utopias, Bétique and (with Mentor’s guidance) Salente.¹⁸ Genlis’ most important inheritance from Fénelon, however, is *Adelaide and Theodore*’s final revelation – as the Baroness places in her children’s hands copies of her self-authored work that reveals ‘all the secrets of education’.¹⁹ The book is entitled *Letters on Education*, implicitly a text that parallels the one in the reader’s hands, and implicitly one that explains the orchestration of the many moral lessons the titular characters experienced throughout childhood. It is, on one level, a nod to Fénelon’s allegory – Genlis invites us to read the Baroness as the author’s voice, as Mentor represents Fénelon’s – but more importantly, the Baroness’ revelation represents the same watershed moment as Mentor/Minerva’s final act in *Telemachus*. The truth of the

¹⁶ Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis, *Adelaide and Theodore; Or, Letters on Education. Volume III* (Dublin: W. Jones, 1794), p. 41.

¹⁷ de Genlis, pp. 44–5.

¹⁸ What distinguishes Lagaraye as a specifically Fénelonian utopia, rather than an exemplar of more general virtuous simplicity, is its uniform dress – recalling Mentor’s organisation of the social classes by the colour of their garb.

¹⁹ de Genlis, p. 284.

Prince's education is revealed, signifying the end of childhood. He has been led by divine wisdom until this point, but 'It is now time that [he] should try to walk alone'.²⁰

It is here that we arrive at the ultimate distinction between Fénelonian and Rousseavian education: Minerva revealed. The respective childhoods of Telemachus, Adelaide and Emile have each followed a course of instruction that saw the children led from one learning experience to another by their tutors. These learning experiences were manufactured – in Rousseau, the deception is clear; in Genlis it stems from the tutor's control over the child's environment; in Fénelon the orchestration is only implied, but it requires no great leap of the imagination to see Minerva's divine hand in each of Telemachus' adventures. Where Fénelon and Genlis differ from Rousseau, is in having the tutor conclude their instruction by revealing its method. In Fénelon and Genlis, there is a clear break between childhood and adult life or, rather, the recognition that the child has become a reasoning adult and that the deceptions and restrictions that it was necessary to place on a child are no longer appropriate. Rousseau never accords Emile the same respect, though tellingly he provides the tools for Emile to discover the principles of control himself. Where Emile's only childhood reading is *Robinson Crusoe* (conceived by Rousseau as a manual of self-reliance), his future wife Sophie's is *Telemachus*, and the tutor has the two exchange books as part of their courtship. 'How many times have I declared', wrote Rousseau in a footnote to another episode in the text, 'that I did not write for people who have to be told everything?'²¹ Rousseau's approach is perhaps suited to the purpose he imagines that Emile's education serves: raised in such a way as to maintain the spirit of his independence, Emile must discover the secrets of education independently. By contrast, Fénelon and Genlis pass on a torch of adult responsibility. Telemachus is judged worthy of learning from his father and of becoming king after him; Adelaide stands on the cusp of motherhood and will soon be responsible for the education of her own children. There is no corresponding sense that Emile 'becomes' an adult, as the tutor signals his apparent retirement by passing 'governorship' of his pupil over to Sophie.²² Emile,

²⁰ Fénelon, *Telemachus*, p. 333.

²¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, ed. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 487.

²² Rousseau, p. 479.

however, regards his tutor as indispensable and when his own son is conceived begs to be taught once more, 'guide me so that I can imitate you' in the final lines of the book.²³ We might read this as the tutor's cue to explain the method that Rousseau had laid out in the text but the tutor's continuing superintendence and manipulation of Emile and Sophie, even after their marriage, gives us little reason to assume that this will be the case. The troubles the couple experience without the tutor, in the unfinished *Emile and Sophie*, suggest that Rousseau did not envision a straightforward cycle of transition. The comparison with Genlis' 'passing of the torch' is interesting: the Baroness reveals her method and steps away; we have no sense that Rousseau's tutor does the same.

The absence of a dividing line between child and adult illustrates a dichotomy between what Fénelon and Rousseau see as the fundamental purpose of education. In Fénelon we see an uncomplicated sense of what it means to become an adult. Certainly, education plays an important role in grooming young people for the role they will fulfil as adults but there is the unstated assumption in Fénelon (rendered more explicitly in Genlis) that successful education forms a complete, happy, grown-up. This assumption is only rendered apparent in contrast with Rousseau.

Where Telemachus and Adelaide are expected to inherit adult authority (as a king, or parent), Emile is not. Trained to be an independent being, Emile has no authority to receive – and there is much in the text to suggest that Emile would not recognise authority were it handed to him because, though he has been subject to the tutor's power all his life, he has never knowingly been compelled to a course of action. Rousseau does not, however, regard the adult Emile as a truly independent being. Such a thing is impossible in civilised society, the author tells us, though we should hope to rely on others as little as possible. Married, and made a father, Emile is simply one element (though Rousseau is sure, the most important element) in the family unit, the family unit simply one building block in the republic. 'Laws and society have plunged us once more into childhood', the author tells us, pessimistic regarding the place of individual virtue in wider society.²⁴ Rousseau had many fears about the morally warping effects of society's interdependence but, even in the 'ideal' society depicted in *The Social*

²³ Rousseau, p. 480.

²⁴ Rousseau, p. 85.

Contract, individual will is subsumed into a larger whole.²⁵ It is, to some extent, a Fénelonian idea of apotheosis. The self melts away, becoming part of something greater – a recurring idea in Fénelon’s writing. In *Telemachus* Minerva ascends to the heavens but, as she explains, her wisdom will never leave the Prince. In *Adelaide and Theodore*, the Baroness’ wisdom is contained in her book; if death deprives her children of her guidance, all the advice she could have rendered is there. The moral certitude that comes from Emile’s education in independence allows him to become the leader of a family and part of the General Will. The crux of this is that, for all his valorisation of independence, Rousseau considers the individual to be essentially incomplete. The need for completion is a recurring theme in the author’s work: in *La Nouvelle Heloise*, Saint-Preux is a man broken by his experiences and healed by his assimilation into the greater project of Clarens; Rousseau’s language in *The Confessions* suggests that the author saw himself in similar terms, though he never found the same acceptance as his fictional counterpart. The sense that we are, even as adults, incomplete, reinforces the dichotomy between a Fénelonian ‘end’ to education and Emile’s recognition that he will always need his tutor’s guidance.

* * *

We might expect Godwin to reject Fénelon, Genlis and Rousseau equally. All three espouse elaborate deception, intellectual control and the ultimate annihilation of the self in the continuation of a noble cause. Godwin’s faith in honesty, the open exchange of ideas and the primacy of individual reason and judgment, would seem at odds with the arguments contained in their works. What is remarkable, however, is that while we have seen Godwin’s acknowledgment and rejection of Rousseau in the *Account* and *The Enquirer*, his references to Fénelon’s contribution to education (though brief) are glowing, and scattered throughout his work. The author’s description of Genlis, though more guarded, remains commendatory:

²⁵ It would be unwise to claim that the republic of *The Social Contract* was Rousseau’s idea of utopia. I would instead argue that the text presents the author’s vision of the best society achievable from the civilization we already have. Rousseau accepts that a return to the state of nature (or a golden age of individual families) is neither possible nor desirable; the General Will and the Great Legislator are needed to address the moral compromises that the republic necessitates.

Madame de Genlis, a woman of uncommon talents and comprehensive views, though herself infected with a considerable number of errors, corrected these defects in the young princes. But few princes have the good fortune to be educated by a mind so powerful and wise as that of madame de Genlis, and we may safely take our standard for the average calculation rather from her predecessors than herself. She forms the exception, they the rule. Even were it otherwise, we have already seen what it is that a preceptor can do in the education of a prince. Nor should it be forgotten that these were not the class of princes destined to a throne.²⁶

Genlis' method in *Adelaide and Theodore* seems to exemplify Godwin's concerns over the excessive control afforded to the private tutor, as discussed in the previous chapter. With the Baroness able to control every aspect of their lives, the children are dragooned into virtue (the few opportunities they have for misbehaviour as children seem to be traps laid by their mother to illustrate the negative consequences of disobedience). We should however, restrain ourselves from reading too deep a response by Godwin to any single Genlis text. Though he was clearly familiar with her work (he noted her death in his diary, as he did for many major thinkers), Godwin makes only brief reference to Genlis' works on education, though a meticulous recorder of his own reading.²⁷ It still remains, however, that Godwin appears to endorse Fénelonian methods of education, in contradiction with many of the central principles in his thought.

The key to resolving this ambiguity is the concept of 'Minerva revealed'. The tutor's orchestration, deception and compulsion are resolved in what I would argue Godwin sees as a moment of redemptive candour. The method is laid out before the (newly adult) learner, where it can be scrutinised, endorsed or rejected. To reiterate what was noted in earlier chapters, Godwin accepts that the reason of children is only a developing faculty and that certain matters might be kept from them rather engaging in artificial debate. In this context, we see how the author might accept the wisdom of stage-managing learning experiences, if the tutor were to (at the appropriate time) 'come clean' about the method of instruction.

²⁶ History would render Godwin's statement ironic, as one of the two young princes would take the throne after the July Revolution of 1830. We might speculate as to whether the author intended to make a point of this in his proposed fourth edition of *Political Justice*, on which he worked sporadically in 1832 and 1834. Quotation from Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 215.

²⁷ We see in his diary that Godwin read Genlis' *Lessons of a Governess to her Pupils* (noted under her married name of Sillery-Brûlart) over the 9th, 10th and 15th November, 1791. It is most likely the source of the anecdote quoted above.

Fénelon's method is clearly an ethical compromise, but Godwin's writing suggests that he sees no ethically pure option in this area. Recognising that the child will be presented with many ethical dilemmas before they are mature enough to compose their own morally sound response, the author implies that to debate the topic with the child (in order to demonstrate what a sound response would be) would inculcate the wrong habits of mind. The child is still essentially unprepared for the matter at hand and the tutor would be forced to rely on rhetorical superiority or blunt authority to insist on the conclusion they expected the child to draw. No matter how morally correct that conclusion might be, Godwin argues that what the child has actually learned are lessons in sophistry and unwilling obedience.²⁸ The method employed by all three of Godwin's predecessors, of experiencing the dilemma within (invisible) regulated boundaries, has great potential but it can only be considered both ethical and successful (the 'debate' is ethically transparent but ultimately an educational failure if it teaches immoral lessons) if the deception can be revealed and its necessity interrogated after the fact.

The importance of revelation over discovery is an important distinction between the Fénelonian and Rousseavian approaches, one which Godwin hints at in *The Enquirer*. The author's indictment of Rousseau hinges on the precariousness of the tutor's deception. Children are imitative, the author says, and the tutor's secrecy will encourage secrecy in their charges. Most importantly, we can infer that Godwin imagines disaster were the learner to uncover the tutor's secret. The author writes passionately in Essay XII on the use of specious admonishments to frighten children into good behaviour:

But this rotten morality will not abide the slightest impartial examination; and, when it is removed, the dissipated and thoughtless imagine they have detected the fallacy of every thing that bears the much injured name of morality.²⁹

For the child to discern that the tutor was actively manipulating them would, by that logic, be a very serious thing. We might also infer that Godwin rejects Rousseau's attempt to place the tools of discovery in Emile's hands (his

²⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 123.

²⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 125.

introduction to *Telemachus* as a young adult), if indeed he had observed that element of the text. Emile may recognise his own education in *Telemachus*, but he is unlikely to realise that Sophie's education, and their courtship, are equally the products of the tutor's strategy. Even if Emile were to make that intellectual leap, what sort of anagnorisis would result from learning that one's entire life had been a 'puppet-show exhibition' at the mercy of a seemingly omnipotent teacher – without the dignity of an explanation, or any sign that it will end?

...to obtain the voluntary confidence of a young person is a point of the greatest difficulty, that the preceptor ought probably to prepare his mind for the event of a failure, and to ascertain to himself the benefits that may be derived from the other advantages of education, when this is denied. So frail is man, so imperfect are his wisest designs, and so easily are we made the dupes of a love of power, that the most skilful instructor may often be expected to fail, in this most arduous of problems, this opprobrium of the art of education. It were better that he should not attempt it, than that he should attempt it by illiberal and forbidden means.³⁰

By contrast, Mentor/Minerva's instruction is divinely perfect (it will never be detected), its purpose is explained (to make Telemachus ready to learn from his father), and its course ultimately finite (the Prince is free from supervision). Telemachus is shaped by his education, but walks away from it able to exercise his own judgment and to accept or reject the means by which he was educated with full knowledge of its method (though this is rendered more explicitly in *Genlis*). For this reason, Fénelon escapes Godwin's censure.

Telemachus clearly had significant value for Godwin as a didactic novel. References to the text occur in Godwin's own novels: explicitly in *Cloudesley*, and the intertextual connections between Fénelon's text and *Fleetwood* will be noted further in a later chapter. Beyond this, however, *Telemachus* read through the lens of Godwin's ideas on the value and purpose of educational reading provides a useful insight into their development. The valorisation of literature is an ever-present theme in Godwin's work, stretching from his juxtaposition of Bardic tradition and literary translation in *Imogen* (1784) to his essay on literary fame in *Thoughts on Man* (1831). In *The Enquirer's* essay 'Of Choice in Reading' we see

³⁰ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 134.

the author's most detailed discussion of reading as a practice, and of how an author's ideas are interpreted by the reader. Godwin is critical of the desire to censor children's reading, arguing that it erects a further barrier between the young and the old, reiterating his point from earlier essays that to restrain a child for reasons that they lack the maturity to grasp will only engender resentment and alienation. Equally, there is no guarantee that a parent's efforts will succeed in denying the child access to forbidden material – and the deceptions and secrecy the child will likely practise in obtaining the material (and keeping knowledge of its presence hidden from their guardians) will be to the further detriment of their character. It is a mistake, Godwin argues, to fear the content of books. The ideas contained in a text are subject to interpretation by the reader. What one reader finds to be immoral in a book may go unnoticed by another reader; the 'use' that an author intends for a work may be very different to that which readers observe.

To ascertain the moral of a story, or the genuine tendency of a book, is a science peculiarly abstruse. As many controversies might be raised upon some questions of this sort, as about the number six hundred and sixty six in the book of Revelations.³¹

Godwin distinguishes between the moral and tendency of a work, that is, between its stated argument and the argument the reader interprets from the text.³² Like Rousseau, Godwin uses the example of didactic fables where the explicit moral (printed at the end of the story) is at odds with the conclusions the reader is likely to draw from the narrative. The author makes a further distinction: between the ethical and intellectual value of a text, arguing that a work of great artistic merit remains valuable and instructive, regardless of how questionable its moral content. Great works are frequently ambiguous ones, Godwin implies.³³

The principal praise is certainly due to those authors, who have a talent to "create a soul under the ribs of death;" whose composition is fraught with irresistible enchantment; who pour their whole souls into mine, and raise me as it were to the seventh heaven; who furnish me with "food for contemplation even to madness;" who raise my ambition, expand my faculties, invigorate my resolutions, and seem to double my existence. For authors of this sort I am provided with an ample licence; and, so they

³¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 137.

³² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 139.

³³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 140.

confer upon me benefits thus inestimable and divine, I will never contend with them about the choice of their vehicle, or the incidental accompaniments of their gift.³⁴

If the ethical content of a work is frequently a matter of a reader's interpretation, Godwin argues, we should have few fears about children's reading. To 'extract poison' from books would require a mind 'already debauched',³⁵ but since vice exists in the world it would be wrong to prevent a child from learning about it in books.

It is not good, that he should be shut up for ever in imaginary scenes, and that ... he should be wholly ignorant of the perverseness of the human heart, and the springs that regulate the conduct of mankind.³⁶

Reading then, is the opportunity to learn something from vice without experiencing vice itself. We might draw a parallel between Godwin's argument here and Genlis' letter-writing 'lesson' in *Adelaide and Theodore*. In either case, reading provides a safe arena for the contemplation of immoral acts but Godwin's considerably more laissez faire attitude to this form of learning illustrates the author's faith in private judgment. Where Genlis' Baroness is careful to regulate the child's interpretation and response, Godwin is more concerned to stress the importance of a child or young person being free to choose their own reading.

There is a principle in the human mind by which a man seems to know his own time, and it will sometimes be much better that he should engage in the perusal of books at the period of his own choice, than at the time that you may recollect to put them in his hands.³⁷

Godwin concludes that the aim of education is not 'to render the pupil the mere copy of his preceptor', and so lauds a free choice in children's reading as a means to improvement – opening up 'new mines of science and new incentives to virtue' that may have been unknown to the teacher.³⁸

³⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 140–1.

³⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 141.

³⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 142.

³⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 142–3.

³⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 143.

Godwin's argument here lays the groundwork for his proactive defence of fiction in 'Of History and Romance'. The author essentially claims that reading can never, in itself, be harmful. It may excite the imagination, but Godwin seems convinced that this is always a positive development when it occurs in a healthy mind. If we agree with Godwin that literature has instructive value, we are led towards his argument in 'Of History' that fiction is (or at least, has the potential to be) the most instructive form of literature because its composition is governed only by the desire to create something of intellectual and moral merit.

It is only by comparison that we come to know any thing of mind or ourselves. We go forth into the world; we see what man is; we enquire what he was; and when we return home to engage in the solemn act of self-investigation, our most useful employment is to produce the materials we have collected abroad, and, by a sort of magnetism, cause those particulars to start out to view in ourselves, which might otherwise have laid for ever undetected.³⁹

Literature provides materials, to use Godwin's phrase in the preface to *The Enquirer*, 'the materials of thinking'.⁴⁰ While the author goes on, in 'Of History' to valorise those instructive examples that reading provides ('While we admire the poet and the hero, and sympathize with his generous ambition or his ardent expressions, we insensibly imbibe the same spirit, and burn with kindred fires' [Of History]), we should note that Godwin's argument implies that it is the act of *critical* reading that provides self-knowledge. We must examine the materials collected (either from lived experience, or from books) against what we already know of ourselves.⁴¹ This principle reinforces the author's conviction that the tendency of a work is largely dictated by the spirit in which it is read – a work read uncritically appears to contain only its moral – and recognises the importance of intellectually challenging texts over narrowly focused ones. As Godwin says in *The Enquirer*, there are many texts of negative moral tendency from which we might derive 'discernment, and refinement, and activity', compared with more

³⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 292.

⁴⁰ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 78.

⁴¹ With this in mind, we should consider our 'sympathy with generous ambition' in critical terms too – reminding us of the influence of Adam Smith on Godwin, and the former's use of the 'impartial spectator' as a critical principle in the exercise of sympathy.

wholesome works and authors, 'who have no other characteristic attribute but that of the torpedo'.⁴²

The topic has been much discussed in Godwin scholarship. Tilottama Rajan presents a contrast between Godwin's fiction and that of his friend, Thomas Holcroft. Holcroft's novel *Hugh Trevor* (1794-97) is explicit regarding the argument advanced in the text, using chapter headings to guide the reader's interpretation of the narrative. 'Holcroft simply uses fiction to illustrate ideology and render it persuasive',⁴³ whereas Godwin embraces the uncertainty of a potential reader's understanding of the text. This is not to depict Godwin as a relativist, Rajan argues, pointing to the author's revealing description of the 'genuine tendency' of a work.⁴⁴ Rather, Rajan claims, Godwin's description of a work's tendency discovered through 'experiment'⁴⁵ constitutes the 'historicizing of intention' as a form of 'divinatory hermeneutics'.⁴⁶ Opposing mimetic and hermeneutic readings of texts (to some extent, Rajan's replacements for Godwin's 'moral' and 'tendency'), Rajan goes on to argue that Godwin's approach to textual interpretation is less hermeneutic than it is heuristic – Godwin recognises that 'truth' interpreted from the text is 'always the representation of a particular ideological will'.⁴⁷ This idea is explored in *Caleb Williams*. Reading is a major theme in the text; Caleb is initially employed as Falkland's librarian, Rajan notes, tasked with surveying texts for his master and discerning their value for further study. The events of the narrative prove reading to be a more complex matter than the simple transmission of ideas, Caleb's adventures providing 'a half told and mangled tale'.⁴⁸ The protagonist's interpretive struggles reveal, Rajan argues, the author's complication of any straightforward model of reading. The novel's original ending, with Falkland's triumph illustrating the injustice of 'things as they are' represents:

⁴² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 140.

⁴³ Tilottama Rajan, 'Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel', *Studies in Romanticism*, 27 (1988), 221–51 (p. 223).

⁴⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 137.

⁴⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 139.

⁴⁶ Rajan, p. 224.

⁴⁷ Rajan, p. 225.

⁴⁸ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 326.

...an almost naïve model of reading, in which our role is to reverse the grammar or plot of the novel so as to actualize a psychological meaning (the triumph of truth) which is quite clearly present in the text as desire. In the second version [the published ending] he actually acts out a complication of this model which is more genuinely akin to a divinatory hermeneutics: he invites us to reverse the plot of the novel in order to grasp the tendency behind its psychological meaning, the desire for honesty based on reconciliation that underlies Caleb's defensive desire for vindication.⁴⁹

The reliance on the reader to produce meaning is, however, 'an ambiguous blessing', Rajan concludes.⁵⁰ Such a text is 'always under the arrest of further interpretation' but, if we agree that Godwin rejects relativism, we must take the author to mean that the value of interpretive reading lies in its historical and critical dimensions, not the prophetic.

In the context of a work's application to moral instruction, we might draw from Rajan's argument the conclusion that Godwin values texts for what they do for the reader and not for the ideas they appear to contain. An act of reading can be historically situated (the cultural moment in which it takes place) and intellectually critical (the text is actively interpreted, rather than received), but there is no guarantee that a text's prophetic meaning (in some regards, a synonym for its moral) will be conveyed. As Rajan identifies, Godwin's use of the word 'tendency' suggests the reader's impression of a work rather than any revelatory discovery of meaning.⁵¹ If the meaning inferred from a text is indeterminate (as a 'tendency' rather than an identifiable argument), and the meaning intended in a text is of lesser importance than that found, we are led to the conclusion that the truth of a work is found in the process of interpretation (of critical reading) and the effect of this on the reader. Such a reading chimes with Godwin's scepticism (or empiricism) elsewhere: knowledge of what the text means (or is supposed to mean) is elusive, but the text's effect can be felt – it is 'real' within the boundaries of a Godwinian notion of experience.

Following Rajan, Graham Allen has raised questions regarding the instability of Godwin's heuristic reading. Working from the principle that education has (as Allen puts it) the potential both to inform and in-form (that is, both to improve and

⁴⁹ Rajan, p. 245.

⁵⁰ Rajan, p. 250.

⁵¹ Rajan, p. 225.

to shape the learner negatively), but that Godwin sees literature as outside the hierarchical structures that cause in-formation, Allen argues that:

Even if we allow for the principle of reason, and to understand that principle in terms of the idea of reason's ability to render itself, the recognition of the historical contingency of the contents of reason – reason's forms and presentations – would suggest that a heuristic hermeneutics, a vision of education as able to instruct beyond power and mastery, could not possibly calculate the results of its future readings.⁵²

In short, the author has no power to dictate how their work is interpreted – raising the spectre that a text might be 'wrongly' interpreted. This uncertainty is played out in a number of scenes throughout Godwin's oeuvre, with Allen illustrating his point with scenes that make intertextual use of *Telemachus* found in *Cloudesley*, *Fleetwood* and *St. Leon*. *Fleetwood* is of particular interest, as Allen argues for the novel as an 'anti-Telemachus' that depicts the protagonist's failure to learn the lessons placed before him by his mentors.⁵³ It is, however, Godwin's conviction that reading can, in Allen's words, inform but not in-form ('to the pure, all things are pure'). How a reader interprets a text is of secondary consideration to the act of interpretation itself and so, unlike the teacher, the text cannot force the reader into a new negative shape. 'Literature can never say what it wants to say without or outside of the double structure of allegory', Allen writes, from which I interpret him to mean that allegory is the only method by which literature can dictate meaning ('this stands for that') but this is itself uncertain, with no guarantee that allegory will be recognised or accepted as meaningful. 'All literature can do is to suspend such tensions, such duplicities, in the sense of raising them to the view of the pupil, of our pupils'.⁵⁴ This may be the crux of the matter – literature cannot in-form because it cannot force its acceptance or reception. The reader is always free to reject what the text attempts to disclose (or what they have inferred from it), either because of their existing beliefs or from subsequent discussion of the subject. Regardless of this, the reader has learned, grown intellectually or been challenged by the 'work' of interpretation – and Godwin is adamant that to improve one's mind is the foundation of positive moral action.

⁵² Allen, p. 15.

⁵³ Allen, pp. 18–9.

⁵⁴ Allen, p. 23.

If we are right to conclude that Godwin believes the principal value of texts is found in the interpretive process, and that the text itself is powerless to insist on how it is interpreted, we shed light on a further reason for the author's apparent embrace of Fénelon and rejection of Rousseau. Godwin's affection for the Archbishop is perhaps more properly an affection for *Telemachus*. Ultimately, for all we might wish to read *Telemachus* as a statement of Fénelon's ideas – a companion manifesto to *The Education of Girls* – the fact remains that *Telemachus* is a novel. A novel is, in Godwin's terms, a text to be read, interpreted and criticised. We are not required to accept its conclusions and we, as readers, stand to gain from our engagement with its ideas even were we to reject them completely. As critics, we are able to evaluate what it has to say on the ethical duty of kings while rejecting the idea of monarchy, and respect the courage of Fénelon's critique of absolutism without accepting the rigid oligarchy the author would use to replace it. Godwin would not deny that this was true of any text – it is the essential 'work' of reading, the intellectual process taking place at the first level beyond the simple decoding of text. Some readers are clearly more advanced critics than others, and some texts have greater potential for interpretation than others, but it seems implicit to me that any text that appears to hold meaning (that is, any non-random collection of words) is subject to interpretation by readers on some level – even if it is only to accept or reject the validity of the statement the text appears to make.

The difference is the use to which a didactic novel such as *Telemachus* is put. A didactic novel is given to (or taken up by) potential learners with a view to their edification, but the learner interprets the text according to their own frame of mind. A tutor might superintend the reading and attempt to dictate how it is interpreted, but this serves as a criticism of pedagogy rather than the text itself. Godwin would also say that intellectual compulsion is, in a literal sense, impossible. We cannot dictate the thoughts of others, though we might persuade them through reason or rhetoric. An individual might adopt the position of another, without accepting its rational basis, but Godwin argues that this requires the individual's acquiescence rather than it being the direct result of external influence.⁵⁵ *Telemachus* is a great work because it raises a plethora of important moral

⁵⁵ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), pp. 108–14.

issues, but leaves the reader free to accept or reject the text's argument for how these might be resolved. In contrast, *Émile* does not.

Émile is a text about education but it is not, in the same sense as *Telemachus*, a didactic text. Both texts present philosophical arguments that the reader may interrogate but the reader is not the end-recipient of Rousseau's argument. Where *Telemachus* is a text *for* children, *Émile* is a text to be used *on* children. Rousseau's treatise recommends a method of education that the child will perhaps never be aware of, will perhaps never be able to interrogate for themselves. The author's dismissal of children's rationality means that he sees no reason to involve them in the critical evaluation of the teaching and learning programme. Viewed through Godwin's theory of reading, *Telemachus* offers the opportunity for such an evaluation. Though *Telemachus* can be enjoyed as a story of adventure, or as a celebration of teaching, the very fact that it raises the mechanics of (heroic) pedagogy before 'the view of the pupil' means that the reader is free to question that pedagogy in a way that Rousseau goes to great lengths to prevent. In this regard, *Émile* is a problematic (perhaps even morally dangerous) text for Godwin. The education *Émile* seeks to impart has a life beyond the text and so, although reading the text can never in-form the reader, its advice has that potential (and Godwin is convinced that an education so fundamentally based on deception cannot but cause problems). We may, of course, attempt to emulate the education depicted in *Telemachus* but that depiction's status as an ideal is more readily apparent – as teachers, we cannot hope to employ divine wisdom in planning our lessons, nor are our pupils mythic heroes in training. Conversely, *Émile* is presented as an ordinary child and the tutor's manipulation of him is supposedly made possible by his lack of worldliness. This is clearly a point of tension for Godwin and, as we have seen, the author questions both the ethics and the practicality of this. The comparison with *Telemachus* adds a new dimension to Godwin's concerns: Rousseau's tutor displays the same divine wisdom as Fénelon's Mentor, but Rousseau seems to deny that his text presents an ideal. The argument of *Émile* is, like much of Rousseau's thought, an argument about the best that is achievable in the real world. For all that the author rails against civilisation, *Émile* advises on how to mitigate its harm, not on how to escape it. If this is the case, then it reinforces how problematic the text is for Godwin in comparison with *Telemachus* – for

Rousseau seems to present a practical course of instruction that relies on quasi-divine guidance for its success. It is enough to say here that Godwin regards such a system as untenable, but I shall explore the significance of the divine mentor-figure in Rousseau's work (and Godwin's response to it) in the next chapter.

Whatever the implications for Rousseau's wider thought, I would argue that Godwin recognised the tensions behind *Émile's* 'ordinariness'. If, as suggested in chapter two, Godwin had identified an audience of 'Rousseau disciples' among contemporary readers, then we might have visions of Godwin's distress upon contemplating the implications of a generation of children raised according to a literal reading of *Émile*. Over the next two chapters, I intend to demonstrate both the author's fundamental differences from Rousseau as to the purpose of education and argue that *Fleetwood* was conceived of as the author's response to his predecessor's ideas – that the novel aims to show the negative moral consequences of a Rousseavian education, and the potential for tragedy therein. That Godwin chose the novel as the medium for his argument is unsurprising: presenting the argument in fictional form accords both with the conclusions drawn in 'Of History and Romance' and with the implications of the author's valorisation of Fénelon. Not only does the freedom of writing fiction facilitate greater moral instruction, but the freedom of reading fiction grounds the argument ethically. For all the author seeks to render his argument persuasive, the author is aware that the reader can simply put the book down. The real work and value of reading lie in interpretation, an act almost entirely beyond the author's control.

Chapter IV

The Illusion of Freedom, the Fantasy of Submission and the Exercise of Private Judgment

Let him always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom. Thus the will itself is made captive.¹

Emile's childhood freedom is an illusion. What he believes to be his own ideas and deductions are things he has been led to by the tutor, yet Rousseau argues that Emile's education trains him in independence. Rousseau argues that children are not capable of reasoning for themselves, but that to pass down lessons from a position of authority will foreground the child's impotence – breeding resentment and encouraging them to rebel against the imposition of otherwise good and moral lessons that they currently lack the ability to understand. Godwin, as we have seen, rejects Rousseau's deception but implies an element of paradox: he agrees that the reason of children is only a nascent faculty, and that the tutor frequently does know what lessons the child should learn, but to use this as the bedrock of a pedagogic method is to the detriment of real education. Godwin is critical of the idea that we can teach children reason through denying them the opportunity to practice it.

In this chapter, I intend to contrast what I believe Rousseau and Godwin see as the 'purpose' of education. I will argue that Rousseau's stated aim in *Émile* – to create a reasoning, independent adult – is contradicted by the details of his method, and his ultimate vision of the society that the adult will enter into. Conversely, Godwin offers us mostly negative observations regarding method (he is sure as to how we should *not* raise children, but far less focused on how we should), but a clear picture of the 'finished adult' that is consistent with the overarching principles of his philosophy. What I shall argue here is that, for all the superficial similarities between the Rousseavian and Godwinian theories of education, there is a fundamental dichotomy regarding their ultimate goals. For Rousseau, an illusion of freedom in childhood is acceptable because freedom in

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, ed. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 120.

adult life is an illusion too – Emile’s training in independence is to make him a useful member of the republic. For Godwin, developing a free but self-disciplined mind is not a means to an end, but the entire point of education. The compromises we make in forging the developed mind will be seen in the final adult.

Rousseau frequently presents himself as both a primitivist and an anti-authoritarian. In the second *Discourse*, the author tells us that civilisation is a trick perpetuated by the ‘haves’ on the ‘have nots’.

Humanity would have been spared infinite crimes, wars, homicides, murders, if only someone had ripped up the fences or filled in the ditches and said, ‘Do not listen to this pretender! You are eternally lost if you do not remember that the fruits of the earth are everyone’s property and that the land is no-one’s property!’²

It has long been recognised that Rousseau’s primitivism is ambiguous, an issue first identified by Arthur Lovelace and most recently discussed by Frederick Neuhouser.³ What I intend to argue here is that, while Rousseau is highly critical of modern civilisation, he advocates the (admittedly fundamental) reform of society rather than the rejection of it. Furthermore, I will argue that the author’s desire for reform is born out of a particular kind of pessimism. Rousseau seems to believe that any kind of retreat from society is impossible, and that the only cure for the corrupting interdependence of civilisation is the embrace of a virtuous *total* interdependence, one that never satisfactorily resolves the place of the individual will within it – thus casting doubt on Rousseau’s anti-authoritarian rhetoric also. The author is consistent in arguing that society’s influence on humanity is to the detriment of our autonomy, our interaction with others gives us needs that cannot be satisfied in the (solitary) state of nature. Rousseau accepts that these needs, and the benefits that accrue from association with others, are what make us human.

...although in civil society man surrenders some of the advantages that belong to the state of nature, he gains in return far greater ones; his faculties are so exercised and developed, his mind so enlarged, his

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 161.

³ Arthur O. Lovejoy, ‘The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau’s “Discourse on Inequality”’, *Modern Philology*, 21 (1923), 165–86; Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935); Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau’s Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality and the Drive for Recognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

sentiments so ennobled, and his whole spirit so elevated that, if the abuse of his new condition did not in many cases lower him to something worse than what he had left, he should constantly bless the happy hour that lifted him for ever from the state of nature and from a stupid, limited animal made a creature of intelligence and a man.⁴

Ultimately, these benefits are given to us by education. What the author argues in much of *Émile* is that, were we to educate a child in such a way that they gained these benefits while being shielded from their accompanying abuses, the child might find a happiness denied to the rest of us. Much of Rousseau's rhetoric suggests that this happiness is a product of Emile's self-reliance and independent mind, but such a reading is not borne out by the text's conclusion, or the subsequent *Social Contract*. Rather, virtuous education is a preparation for membership in something greater than oneself. 'Give him entirely to the state, or leave him entirely to himself', Rousseau writes elsewhere.⁵ The latter is impossible, since we cannot return to the state of nature, so we must commit ourselves to a better kind of civilisation.

The society of the *Social Contract* is one founded on total commitment, '...the total alienation by each associate of himself and all his rights to the whole community.'⁶ The individual gains everything from society that they lose from themselves, Rousseau claims, but the place of the individual and the self within this are ambiguous. Judith Shklar argues that Rousseau considers the rights of the individual to be sacrosanct, in part citing the inability of the General Will to override the individual conscience.⁷ Rousseau argues, however, that the individual entering into the social pact agrees that the law (as a manifestation of the General Will) has the power to compel them to action. Obedience to a law that one has prescribed oneself, the author claims, is moral freedom; to act according to one's whims (implicitly without regard to the needs of others) is mere slavery to the passions. The author does not herald any element of paradox here, but in Rousseau's republic, the individual is free because they agree to be bound.

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. by Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 20.

⁵ 'On Public Happiness' in *Political Writings of Rousseau*, Vol. II, p. 325

⁶ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 15.

⁷ Judith N. Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 16.

The republic is, by this token, a delicate balancing act. Rousseau does not confront the consequences of a General Will that is not unanimous – in practice it always is, not because citizens necessarily think alike, but because all citizens have agreed to be bound by the consensus. Active dissent from the General Will would constitute a violation of the social pact. Violations of the social pact render it void, Rousseau claims, returning individuals to their natural freedom and thus dissolving the republic. For the individual to insist on recognition of their individual opinion, after the republic had apparently reached a consensus on the issue, would cause the state to fall apart. The author is explicit that the state's power to compel obedience derives from the individual's initial consent. As such, this compulsion is more moral than physical; individuals are obliged to observe laws they voted against out of respect for the wisdom of the majority. A state that simply enforced the will of the majority, Rousseau suggests, would be one sliding towards tyranny. The individual's obedience is part of a Fénelonian ideal: unless all citizens give themselves to 'the love of that order', the republic is nothing.

Fortunately, the decisions of the General Will are always good. Rousseau regards it impossible that they would not be, for the conclusions arrived at by a body of people seeking the good of all (a precondition for their will to be 'general') are necessarily good. There is no guarantee that citizens will be able to see the right course of action, however. The republic,

...must be shown the good path which it is seeking, and secured against seduction by the desires of individuals; it must be given a sense of situation and season, so as to weigh immediate and tangible advantages against distant and hidden evils. Individuals see the good and reject it; the public desires the good but does not see it. Both equally need guidance. [...] Hence the necessity of a lawgiver.⁸

The lawgiver (or 'great legislator') is a perfectly wise outsider, 'a superior intelligence, who could understand the passions of men without feeling any of them'.⁹ The lawgiver is, equally, outside the constitution of the republic and has no authority over it. A guide and inspiration to the General Will, the lawgiver is a familiar figure in Rousseau's work. Like Émile's tutor, like Wolmar in *La Nouvelle*

⁸ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 43.

⁹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 43.

Héloïse, the lawgiver supplies the place of God in Rousseau's version of Fénelon's quietist vision.

Such a statement needs to be unpacked somewhat further. The most controversial aspect of Fénelon's theology was his belief that the purest love was, ultimately, the annihilation of the self in devotion to the object of that love – in theory the denial of all corporeal concerns in the pursuit of total spiritual commitment to God. Such annihilation was problematic for Fénelon's church superiors because it dismissed the importance of both conventional religious observance and the doctrine of good works; perhaps treading dangerously close to Calvin's idea of salvation by faith alone. Fénelon's views became public thanks to his publication of *Maximes des Saintes* (1697), itself part of his theological dispute with Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1697-99), leading eventually to Fénelon's censure by the Vatican in 1699. The culmination of so many of Rousseau's works is an (apparently) secular understanding of the same idea – the individual, always incomplete as an individual, is made whole by giving themselves entirely to the greater project. *Émile* is seemingly completed in becoming the head of a family, though we might also infer that a still greater endeavour awaits *Émile* as a citizen in Rousseau's republic (and the greater project that is the General Will). In the same vein, Wolmar commissions Saint-Preux as his children's tutor in order that the younger man be healed. In each case, salvation is offered by a guide endowed with clear-sightedness and perfect wisdom – a father-figure whose interest in our wellbeing is not compromised by actual family relations. The evidence of *The Confessions* suggests that the author searched for such a figure in his own life, as his devotion to a succession of authority figures in the memoir attests. In Rousseau's fictional or speculative works, the Mentor figure offers membership and belonging in exchange for the individual giving themselves entirely to what they have joined. In contrast to the quasi-utopian vision of the *Social Contract*, Julie's final testimony in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* shows that this exchange is not without struggle. The author's own, fruitless, search for a guide in *The Confessions* reveals an even greater trial. Time and time again, Rousseau throws himself at the feet of men (and to a lesser extent, women) that he admires: Madame de Warens and Claude Anet, St. Lambert, George Keith; only to eventually find them lacking the ideal wisdom and understanding of sentiment the author felt his mentor should have. It seems likely

that Rousseau would have found any mortal guide wanting, and the published correspondence between himself and Hume provides the picture of a man who, once his initial blind trust was compromised, rejected its object utterly – there is no place in Rousseau’s dream for a fallible, human mentor.¹⁰ For this reason, Rousseau’s vision is only superficially secular. Though the individual is absorbed into a civic or familial cause, a godlike figure is needed to guide both the individual and the cause itself. *The Social Contract’s* lawgiver greatly resembles Mentor in Salente but such a figure may have been doubly resonant for Rousseau, reflecting a Calvinist idea of God. Unwavering faith is not rewarded with salvation, but is instead a sign that one is already saved, and that one is following a virtuous path laid down in the divine plan.

Rousseau’s vision is a fantasy of submission. The individual gives up their autonomy (Rousseau would resist calling it ‘freedom’) on well-defined terms and safe in the knowledge that the boundaries of their submission, their duties and expectations, have been set by one with a perfect understanding of their needs. The perfect mentor has no authority over the individual but we might infer that the mentor’s guidance is so wise that to resist it would be perverse. The mentor knows the individual’s needs better than they do themselves and, since the mentor has no needs of their own, the individual can place absolute trust in the mentor’s guidance.

Reading *Émile* in this context, the machinations of the tutor suggest how the figure of a divinely wise mentor might be constructed by mortal endeavour. This too is a fantasy, however. Although Rousseau presents the tutor as human, he is no less capable than Fénelon’s Mentor; his foresight is infallible. We have already seen Godwin’s concerns regarding this but, to take these concerns further, we might also ask what *Émile’s* education prepares him for. The tutor’s final lessons appear calculated to show the pupil the companionship his life has so far lacked. On his travels, Emile learns that all men are brothers, but is reminded that his life is incomplete without Sophie. Although Rousseau’s rhetoric presents this in a positive light, it is here that the tutor undermines whatever sense of independence that Emile had developed. To become a man, Emile must become conscious that he is no longer truly an individual (not that he ever was, of course, thanks to the

¹⁰ See, David Hume, *A Concise and Genuine Account of the Dispute Between Mr Hume and Mr Rousseau* (London: T. Becket and P.A. de Hondt, 1766).

tutor's manipulation). In joining with Sophie, Emile gives up his identity as an individual in exchange for one as the head of a family. This, in turn, is the beginning of his identity as a citizen. The tutor is a guide towards a Roussevian idea of apotheosis.

If Emile's education is indeed a preparation for his assimilation into the republic, the guidance of the lawgiver and submission to the General Will, then the details of its method appear in a new light. Emile's childhood as his tutor's puppet is unproblematic for Rousseau because he regards true (adult) independence impossible, and his ideal of citizenship places the individual will under the direction of the general. Where adult life differs is in the individual's ability to give their consent to their subordination by others, a capacity that Rousseau believes children have yet to develop. Such consent hinges on a significant (if not absolute) degree of trust, as the individual agrees to be bound by the consensus regarding laws written by a third party. While the individual can withdraw their consent, doing so is a withdrawal from the republic as a whole; for the republic to function, consent must be all-or-nothing. Neither does Rousseau regard the purpose of the laws to be self-evident: the role of the lawgiver is not simply to have the clear-sightedness to write the laws the republic needs, but also to explain their necessity to the people (who lack the perspective to appreciate them). For a newly formed republic to understand the principles of statecraft is, however, impossible, Rousseau says. Such a spirit is a product of life in the republic and cannot be expected of those present at its formation.

...the lawgiver can for these reasons employ neither force nor argument, he must have recourse to an authority of another order, one which can compel without violence and persuade without convincing.¹¹

The lawgiver's recourse is to *divine* authority. The backbone of the individual's commitment to the republic is faith. What Rousseau (perhaps wisely in eighteenth-century France) leaves unsaid is that it is unimportant whether or not the people accept this divine sanction, only that they take the lawgiver's efforts at face value. Laws are, ultimately, ratified by the General Will, but the people must trust that the lawgiver's unique perspective and pure intentions provide him with an insight beyond what they themselves are capable of. Fundamentally,

¹¹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 47.

Rousseau does not require the people to understand the laws their mentor puts before them, only to trust that the mentor has their best interests at heart. We might infer that Rousseau considers consent to be the defining attribute of adult reason, but in practice it seems that Rousseau's idea of consent is only partially a matter of reason – its origin lies in trust, and the author is ambivalent about how rational this trust needs to be.

As observed in the previous chapter, Rousseau blurs any distinction between child and adult. Both need to be led (but not commanded) because their capacity for reason is not perfect.

The people's trust in the lawgiver's guidance is only crucial in the formation of the republic. Once the republic has developed its own institutions, subsequent generations will understand the value of their laws and have the wisdom needed to maintain them. Rousseau gives little sense of how new laws might be written in response to change, or how the republic might renew itself in the future. Perhaps there is no need. Though the author does not claim his republic to be perfect, it works. To imagine no future beyond the republic, however, is to render the apparent 'project' of Rousseau's oeuvre teleological. Our growth beyond the state of nature, and Emile's growth under the tutor's supervision, are stepping stones on the way to a permanent union ordered by the wisdom of the divine.

Rousseau's utopian order is anathema to the basic principles of Godwin's philosophy. Central to the argument of *Political Justice* and implied throughout Godwin's work is the duty of the individual to act according to their private judgment. The author recognises the value of advice proffered by others, but the onus is on the other to demonstrate the accuracy of their insight and to influence the individual's decision making. Godwin explicitly rejects the power of compulsion (to act in accordance with threats is still a deliberate act of judgment) and considers the use of reason to be essential in discerning truth. The author gives little weight to the idea that an adult should be guided, indeed discusses the dividing line between advising a person and interfering in their affairs:

Every man has a certain sphere of discretion which he has a right to expect shall not be infringed by his neighbours. This right flows from the very

nature of man. First, all men are fallible: no man can be justified in setting up his judgement as a standard for others.¹²

Godwin argues that unfettered, objective and clear-sighted private judgment always leads to right action. The author's claim is obviously contentious but it rests upon the belief that moral truths are also intellectual ones. The best (most moral) course of action can always be arrived at through a dispassionate examination of the facts. Moral error occurs, Godwin says, because of elements unknown to the actor, or known elements whose role is misunderstood.

Men always act upon their apprehensions of preferableness. There are few errors of which they are guilty, which may not be resolved into a narrow and inadequate view of the alternative presented for their choice. Present pleasure may appear more certain and eligible than distant good. But they never choose evil as apprehended to be evil.¹³

Godwin argues that discussion and the sharing of experience between individuals is vital (it enables us to see more than one side to a dilemma), but he is clear that for this communication to be meaningful it must be transparent and on equal terms. This principle creates problems for Godwin's theory of education, as we have seen and will return to. Unlike Rousseau Godwin offers us only hints of a future society, with the reader left to imagine the implications of a future where all individuals act according to their private judgment. Godwin's thoughts on the subject are speculative, rather than programmatic, as the author insisted retrospectively in both the *Reply to Parr* and *Of Population* (1820). What the author is most interested in is how individuals arrive at their particular judgments. One of the arguments central to *Political Justice* is that deliberate actions are the result of opinions held in the mind of the actor. Though the author refined his position on volition considerably in the later editions of his treatise (rejecting his initial binary of instinct and reason, and eventually arguing for degrees of voluntary action based on the objectivity of the reasoning process), the core argument remains the same. Godwin's initial statement may seem trite but it allows the author to step from the discussion of how decisions are taken, to how opinions are formed. Both decisions and opinions are often derived from habit

¹² William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 82.

¹³ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 45. The passage is almost identical in later versions of the text.

and custom, Godwin says, and these are problematic because they rest on unexamined principles.

It is easy to read Godwin's critique of habit as a simple indictment of intellectual laziness, but the issue the author identifies goes far deeper. Godwin establishes that the only reasonable ground on which to base decision making is experience but that proper, rational and moral decisions can only be arrived at through deduction – and to deduce accurately may hinge on knowledge that is beyond the individual's experience. For Godwin, the key to this dilemma is our ability to discuss experiences with other people: 'Indeed, if there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind'.¹⁴ Discussion gives the individual access to experience beyond their own, while imagination and empathy allow us to apply the lessons of others' experience to our own situation (this latter element is clearer in the later editions of *Political Justice*, where Godwin adopts Adam Smith's use of the 'impartial spectator'). The author makes literature a part of this solution, using it as a synonym for '...the diffusion of knowledge through the medium of discussion, whether written or oral'.¹⁵

In discussing education, Godwin is concerned with how the faculty of judgment develops and how it is shaped by early experiences. Education is, Godwin tells us in the 1793 *Political Justice*, 'a scheme for the early impression of right principles upon the hitherto unprejudiced mind'.¹⁶ In *The Enquirer*, the author describes this 'impression' in the broadest terms, considering the education of the environment (everyday experiences that we learn from) to be a significantly greater influence on development than the deliberate education provided by tutors.¹⁷ The observation betrays another aspect of Godwin's ambivalence about systematic or direct education as a practice, speculating in his early work that its lack of impact renders it a secondary consideration next to the pursuit of wider reform. 'It [education] performs its task weakly and in detail'.¹⁸ As the author tells

¹⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 14.

¹⁷ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 89.

¹⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 18.

us in the 1798 *Political Justice*, the preceptor is a product of the society in which he lives – the education he provides will be shaped by it. ‘As long as parents and teachers in general shall fall under the established rule, it is clear that politics and modes of government will educate and infect us all’.¹⁹

Godwin never explicitly revises this position, but it is apparently only a weakly held one. What characterises the author’s later work is Godwin’s interest in individual genius and the role that education plays in creating it. The trend is consistent with the emphasis placed in every edition of *Political Justice* on the exercise of private judgment and, were we to accept the position argued by Mark Philip (that private judgment is the core principle of Godwin’s treatise), we might infer that what emerges from the revisions to that text is the author’s focus on the reform of the individual. This focus provides another superficial similarity with Rousseau, but one that illustrates their intellectual distance: Rousseau educates Emile for the greater projects that he sees stretching out before him; Godwin regards the educated mind as the end itself, leaving the individual free to pursue their own hopes, dreams and interests. Education’s purpose, ultimately, is to create minds able to use their private judgment effectively.

Like Rousseau, Godwin rejects the importance of teaching ‘content’. The acquisition of specific types of knowledge in childhood is of limited benefit and it is frequently, as the author tells us in the first essay of *The Enquirer*, easier to learn these forms of knowledge as an adult if our minds have been adequately prepared.²⁰ In a characteristically tortuous passage, the author continues:

He who should affirm, that the true object of juvenile education was 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, would certainly not obtrude upon us the absurdest of paradoxes.

The purpose therefore of early instruction is not absolute. It is of less importance, generally speaking, that a child should acquire this or that species of knowledge, than that, through the medium of instruction, he should acquire habits of intellectual activity.²¹ [...]

¹⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 26.

²⁰ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 84.

²¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 84–5.

In a word, the first lesson of a judicious education is, Learn to think, to discriminate, to remember and to enquire.²²

As far as Godwin is concerned, these are the qualities that constitute genius, ‘...little more in the first instance than a spirit of prying observation and incessant curiosity’.²³ Such qualities are a product of the environment the mind develops in; a mind that is frequently exercised will become sharper. Early experiences are important, the author tells us, because of how the mind acquires ‘solidity’ as we age (invoking familiar Lockean metaphors regarding the malleability of children’s minds) – but here Godwin explicitly rejects the determinism of childhood experiences. While the author acknowledges childhood as a significant period for intellectual formation, he also stresses that genius can ‘break out’ at any point in life.²⁴ Though Godwin defines a very mundane ‘genius’ (perhaps all the better to stress its universality), his language reveals a more Romantic conception: as a spark, a moment of spirit, that is harder to kindle than it is to extinguish.

Examine the children of peasants. Nothing is more common than to find in them a promise of understanding, a quickness of observation, an ingenuousness of character, and a delicacy of tact, at the age of seven years, the very traces of which are obliterated at the age of fourteen. The cares of the world fall upon them. They are enlisted at the crimping-house of oppression. They are brutified by immoderate and unintermitted labour. Their hearts are hardened, and their spirits broken, by all that they see, all that they feel, and all that they look forward to. [...] It is the great slaughter-house of genius and of mind. It is the unrelenting murder of hope and gaiety, of the love of reflection and the love of life.²⁵

Again, Godwin does not confine this phenomenon to the potential of children, as he makes reference to the ‘degradation of powers’ experienced by those (implicitly adults) consumed by ‘severe indisposition’.²⁶ If the spark of genius is struck or smothered by the individual’s experiences, Godwin allows that genius could potentially be generated by education (which might be viewed as fundamentally a structure of experiences). Acknowledging this, the author

²² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 85.

²³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 88.

²⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 89.

²⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 89.

²⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 89.

expresses his scepticism as to whether it ever has been so generated in the past. The author argues that a tutor controls such a small part of a child's experience that their influence over the development of genius is minor:

The talents of the mind, like the herbs of the ground, seem to distribute themselves at random... they take root in many cases without a planter; and grow up without care or observation. It would be truly worthy of regret, if chance, so to speak, could do that, which all the sagacity of man was unable to effect; if the distribution of the noblest ornament of our nature, could be subjected to no rules, and reduced to no system.²⁷

We might wonder how this regret tallies with Godwin's criticism of the overly programmatic in Essay IV ('the madness of philosophy'),²⁸ or his fears about superintendence in Essay VII, but we should not regard his statement here as inconsistent. What the author offers here is not a program, but a process. 'When a man writes a book of methodical investigation, he does not write because he understands the subject, but he understands the subject because he has written.'²⁹ So too is it with education. Education must proceed by experiment and observation, Godwin says. The tutor must 'watch the progress of the dawning mind, and discover what it is that gives it its first determination'.³⁰ What Godwin endorses here is not a plan for the education of children, in the sense that he advocates a curriculum, milestones, or anything but the broadest definition of the finished adult that the system should produce; rather, Godwin offers advice on how tutor might help a child to become the adult the child wants to be. In practice, the author's process might resemble the 'negative' education that Rousseau's method promises, protecting the young plastic mind from vicious influences, allowing it to grow up in freedom. Godwin is fond of the 'seed' metaphor and likens the tutor's role to that of the farmer – to scatter ideas and watch over those shoots that emerge, but not to worry unduly over those that do not.³¹ As we might have come to expect from Godwin, reading is of paramount importance to the project. Reading allows a child to seek out new ideas without the tutor to instruct

²⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 94–5.

²⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 92.

²⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 93.

³⁰ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 95.

³¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 95.

them and (as we have seen in the previous chapter) encourages the critical thought that renders vicious ideas harmless (the child does not need to be protected from them). We are left to infer that the role of Godwin's ideal tutor is to recognise when the learner would benefit from texts they would otherwise be ignorant of, though the author makes the point that the reverse is often true:

There is a principle in the human mind by which a man seems to know his own time, and it will sometimes be much better that he should engage in the perusal of books at the period of his own choice, than at the time that you may recollect to put them in his hands.³²

The idea that children are, essentially, self-educating appears a utopian fantasy. Godwin seems to anticipate this criticism by suggesting the following dilemma: how is a child, allowed to learn according to their own whims, encouraged to study with rigour, organisation and in the face of adversity? Though the following juxtaposition opposes private tuition and the sociability of schooling, the author's considerations are relevant to the question:

A private pupil is too much of a man. He dwells on those things which can be made subjects of reasoning or sources of amusement; and escapes from the task of endless repetition. But public education is less attentive and complaisant to this species of impatience. Society cheers the rugged path, and beguiles the tediousness of the way. It renders the mechanical part of literature supportable.³³

The solitary child, who pursues only their interests, is unlikely to pursue their endeavours with the doggedness of the child whipped into shape by a schoolmaster and sustained by the camaraderie of their peers. Similarly, the formally trained individual is a better scholar and conversationalist than the autodidact for having been taught through the medium of other people's ideas. 'The wildness of [the conventional scholar's] nature, and the stubbornness of their minds, have by long practice been broken into a capacity of candid attention.'³⁴ The author is highly critical of self-education in the sense used here – while contemplation and self-examination lead to a valuable 'audaciousness of

³² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 142–3.

³³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 107.

³⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 233.

thinking', they are no substitute for proper learning.³⁵ To be clear, Godwin does not draw an explicit link between the private pupil and the autodidact but the concerns the author voices appear to illustrate one as a possible consequence of the other. 'The term self-educated', the author tell us, 'was defined... to mean those who had not engaged in any methodical and persevering course of reading'.³⁶ This strikes to the heart of Godwin's dilemma: how does a child whose education is not directed, develop the industry to press on with learning that becomes difficult, or the humility to engage with ideas contrary to their expectations (as a methodical and open-minded scholar must)?

We can infer that Godwin foresees a more active role for the tutor than simply a protector, observer and facilitator. Certain habits of mind must be inculcated in order that a free and independent education transcend the insularity of autodidacticism. In a wider sense, certain habits of mind must be inculcated in order to generate genius (or at least, to prepare the ground that it might break out when circumstances are right). Intellectual training presents a specifically Godwinian problem. 'Habit' is a loaded term in the author's philosophy, as we have already seen, often used as a synonym for instinct, prejudice and a lack of critical thought. There is a subtle distinction to be made between Godwin's use of 'habit' in *Political Justice* and in *The Enquirer*, however, though in both works it describes primarily the same concept – the individual's common practices, based on their body of experience. Habit gains positive connotation in *The Enquirer* when it describes an active process rather than a pattern of beliefs: the 'habits of intellectual activity' are a thing to be acquired, habits that constitute 'resting places' in the mind are prejudices to be resisted.³⁷ With this in mind we should look upon Godwin's role for the educator as someone who engages the child in practicing intellectual skills (for their meta-cognitive value) rather than someone attempting to build a framework of knowledge. This much should be apparent from Godwin's argument in *The Enquirer's* first essay, but it deserves to be reiterated when we arrive at what the author advises should be taught.

³⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 232.

³⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 238.

³⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 85; Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, p. 33.

For all that Godwin disclaims the importance of specific knowledge for children, it is clear that he maintains a high regard for many of the standards of traditional learning. While the author considers all children's reading to be good, it is Shakespeare, Milton, and Horace that he recommends for them to read. Godwin attempts to have it both ways, dismissing the significance of specific content but endorsing the study of great works for the intellectual stimulation that they offer. It is in this vein that the author praises the study of the Classical languages. The Classical authors are the foundation of our intellectual heritage, Godwin tells us, and offer us superior models of moral and political virtue to learn from. We might study these texts in translation, of course. The author dismisses this, bringing us to what is perhaps the more consistent part of Godwin's argument: that the study of language itself is valuable for the command of language that it teaches, and that the study of Latin in particular engenders 'a habit of thinking with precision and order'.³⁸

In this respect the study of Latin and of geometry might perhaps be recommended for a similar reason. Geometry it should seem would always form a part of a liberal course of studies. [...] It cultivates the powers of the mind, and generates the most excellent habits. It eminently conduces to the making man a rational being, and accustoms him to a closeness of deduction, that is not easily made the dupe of ambiguity, and carries on an eternal war against prejudice and imposition. A similar benefit seems to result from the study of language and its inflections. All here is in order. Every thing is subjected to the most inflexible laws. The mind therefore which is accustomed to it, acquires habits of order, and of regarding things in a state of clearness, discrimination and arrangement.³⁹

Childhood seems particularly well-suited to this pursuit, Godwin says, 'the judgment is then small; but the memory is retentive'.⁴⁰ On a practical level, childhood may be the only point in life when the individual has time to devote to this kind of learning,⁴¹ quite apart from the multiplying benefits of training the mind in such a way at the earliest age possible. A cynical reading of Godwin's essay might regard the author's endorsement of the classics (both ancient and modern)

³⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 102.

³⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 103.

⁴⁰ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 104.

⁴¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 104.

as a form of special pleading, but its argument is consistent with (and expands upon) the author's defence of literature as far back as the *Account of the Seminary*. The man of genius is, first and foremost, a 'master of language'⁴² – here, because he cannot be enslaved by others' words or fail to communicate with his own; elsewhere because a command of language(s) makes him a disciplined, critical reader able to extract benefit from any kind of writing. This is, perhaps, the unwritten conclusion of *The Enquirer*: that the purpose of education is to train an ideal reader, one who is free to pursue whatever course in life they choose thanks to a keenly developed critical faculty.

* * *

Godwin's glowing words on Rousseau in the *Account of the Seminary* fail to disguise the significant philosophical distance between the two authors. Though *The Enquirer* reveals a degree of antipathy towards Rousseau's method, Godwin's rhetoric in the *Account* cannot reconcile the anti-intellectualism of *Emile* with Godwin's obvious passion for literary education. As we have seen, however, their opposition goes far deeper. The aim of *Emile*'s education is to build his self-respect, in order that he might be able to wisely give his trust to those who are worthy of it, and not merely to those who pander to the deficiencies in his own soul. Godwin's man of genius has been educated to think critically and independently, to value the ideas of others but to use them only as the materials of thinking, in deciding upon things for himself. These students have been educated to interact with others in radically different ways. Rousseau makes much of how *Emile* grows up apart from much of humanity, but this is a strategy to prepare him for the unavoidable and total interdependence that adult life will require of him. By contrast, Godwin is sure that his student should have peers but we can see that the author is ultimately ambivalent about how close such relationships need to be (either in childhood or adult life). The author's insistence on 'spheres of discretion' (and his criticism of cohabitation and large-scale cooperative endeavour) reveals a thinker who regards personal relationships as useful, important and stimulating, but not as an inevitable consequence of life in society.⁴³ As attractive as he imagines it, Rousseau believes individuality to be a

⁴² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 101.

⁴³ Consider Essay X in *The Enquirer*, where the author claims, 'Excessive familiarity is the bane of social happiness' (p. 86), or his concern in *Political Justice* that co-operation necessitated the

state that we have left behind; Godwin holds that an individual being can never be alienated from their individual will. Godwin regards relationships as positive where both parties respect this, and negative where one or both forget that the relationship is secondary to their duty to act according to the dictates of their private judgment. For Rousseau the individual will is, at best, benign. Man in the savage state is harmless because he wants nothing he cannot access himself; man among men quickly develops desires that can only be satisfied to the detriment of others (*amour-propre*), and which must be given a socially acceptable outlet to prevent their disruption of the social order (the subordination of women to their husbands and fathers).

The social order is paramount. For Rousseau, education is an ordering force. Though *Emile* dismisses many social conventions, the author's intention is to pare down social institutions to their essential character and thereby retrench their importance (thus Rousseau dispenses with the trappings of period education and the family, to focus on the relationships within those things and what they have to contribute to a virtuous republic). Many of *Emile's* lessons are constructed with a view to how they will enable the student to 'fit' in society, rather than how they will improve him personally. Rousseau would have his pupil learn a trade, not (like Locke) because will give *Emile* a useful skill or a productive, harmless, hobby; but to prevent him being a drain on society⁴⁴ and to prevent him from developing a gentleman's prejudices against labour.⁴⁵ Rousseau's idea of a respectable trade is tightly bound up with both what he considers genuinely useful to other people (*Emile* should be an artisan and not a policeman⁴⁶) and what he thinks appropriately masculine (he must not be a tailor⁴⁷). We might imagine the author's concern about his student's masculinity to be a matter of *Emile's* personal development, until we remember the importance of gender roles to Rousseau's family and republic. Education here is the force that shapes the individual into a useful societal unit, one that enables the creation of Rousseau's final 'order'. The author would likely resist the description of his republic as

uniformity of action between individuals and so was to the detriment of independent thought (3e VIII.8, p.758).

⁴⁴ Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, p. 195.

⁴⁵ Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, pp. 197, 201.

⁴⁶ Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, p. 197.

⁴⁷ Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, pp. 199–200.

perfect, since it is based on fundamental compromises, but it is nonetheless teleological – the best social organisation that ‘fallen’ humanity can achieve.

Godwin’s education is individually enabling. The student is both secure in their private judgment but open-minded in listening to other ideas. The author’s vision of a free and critical mind, however, would be an intrinsically destabilising force in any society less than a utopia. Godwin would resist the term ‘revolutionary’, but his ideal of genius would balance respect for existing ideas against a critical interrogation of those institutions that purported to beget individual happiness and lead to the eventual upset of those institutions whose benefits were distributed unfairly (as moral and intellectual truths are frequently synonymous in Godwin’s work). Such logic does not push us towards reading Godwin as a proto-Hegelian; these critical revolutions are not improvements towards some finished state. The author’s sceptical principle is such that, while a perfect world might be imagined, we cannot access or understand it fully. Perfectibility is not the attainment of perfection, but the capacity for perpetual improvement. It is here that we recognise the most fundamental dichotomy between Godwin and Rousseau on education: Rousseau imagines education as the exertion of power to fix the individual in a way that they can be ordered, and then be happy; Godwin imagines education to be the means of giving the individual power, that they might make themselves and others happy.

Chapter V

Fleetwood: Empathy and Failure

Like his position on so many other things, Godwin's ideas on education embody both his idealism and scepticism. The novel *Fleetwood* problematises a number of the (already problematic) arguments the author puts forward in *The Enquirer*, while articulating a strongly critical argument towards the educational method advanced in Rousseau's *Emile*. Unlike Godwin's rejection of *Emile* on an ethical level in *The Enquirer*, in *Fleetwood* the author demonstrates what he sees as the consequences of Rousseau's programme – of the emotionally impoverished adult that results from a stage-managed moral education. Tellingly, Godwin frames the novel in a confessional mode, harnessing the subjectivity and unreliability of the first-person narrative in a manner that instantly evokes Rousseau's attempts to tell his own story.

Fleetwood is a novel about education, but more precisely it is a novel about the relationships between a learner and his tutors and how a certain kind of education leaves an individual ill-equipped to become a tutor themselves. Casimir Fleetwood's early education is one of indulgence. As a boy he is allowed to roam freely and explore the natural world. What formal education Casimir is given comes from a private tutor whom he finds ridiculous, and no greater scholarship is expected from him than that which he chooses to put his mind to. 'My father was contented to discern in me a certain inclination to learning, and did not think of putting on me a task greater than I was willing to endure.'¹ Critics have been known to draw comparisons between this and Emile's semi-pastoral education, but this fails to acknowledge how closely Godwin read Rousseau – Fleetwood's narrative of his own early education resembles nothing so much as the 'received' account of Rousseau's system put forward by period commentators.² Godwin

¹ William Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: William Pickering, 1992), p. 21.

² Marshall refers to a 'Rousseauist contrast' between the pastoral scenes and elsewhere (p.261), Handwerk's introduction to the Broadview edition describes how Fleetwood, 'In true Rousseavian fashion' is educated by nature, allowed to roam free by his father (p.25). Lisa-Marie Lynn Butler, in her unpublished thesis *Mis-Education and the Crisis in Male Subjectivity* (Wilfrid Laurier, 2008), also draws a comparison with these early scenes and Rousseau, but rightly focuses on the protagonist's social and emotional isolation – a state that Emile's tutor endeavours to maintain – as negative influences on his psyche (pp. 137-40). Period commentators who associate Rousseau with the indulgence of children include Kames and John Brown (in *Sermons on Various*

here invokes some of the popularly known themes of *Emile* (seeming indulgence and ambivalence towards formal learning) in order to convey the sense that the novel is a commentary on that work, before descending into more precise criticism in later chapters.

As well as private indulgence, the author gives Fleetwood a parallel brush with public education as a teenager at Oxford. The ultimately tragic bullying he witnesses there is reminiscent of the Hobbesian mob-rule that reigned everywhere beyond the teacher's gaze, in the imaginations of schooling's eighteenth-century critics. Oxford is followed by travel to Europe which, like so many Grand Tours of the period, stumbles quickly into vice. Fleetwood flees adulterous assignations with a Marchioness and a Countess in Paris, heading for Switzerland. Though Fleetwood initially seeks the wild solitude he experienced as a child, what he finds is a teacher. Ruffigny is the first of Fleetwood's mentors and provides the novel's first example of overtly Rousseavian tutelage.

Together on a small boat, floating on the edge of Lake Uri, Ruffigny allows Fleetwood to lose himself in reverie amidst the natural beauty of his surroundings and in contemplation of the virtuous example set by Switzerland's historical and legendary heroes. Ruffigny takes the moment to pass on the news that Fleetwood's father has died.

The communication of this melancholy intelligence no doubt affected me very differently from what it would otherwise have done, in consequence of the frame of mind, which this day's excursion, and the various objects I had beheld, produced in me. My sensibility was increased by the preparation and the impression I received was by so much the deeper. I do not pretend to divine Ruffigny's motives for so contriving the scene. Perhaps he knew enough of human nature to believe that it rarely happened to a son in the bloom of life to break his heart for the loss of an aged parent. Perhaps he understood and disapproved of the train of life in which I had lately been engaged, and thought the thus softening my heart the most effectual way of recalling me to my better self.³

Subjects, 1763). Macaulay (*Letters on Education*, 1790) accuses Rousseau of a kind of benign neglect, rather than deliberate indulgence (Letters IV and VII, p. 46 and 67). We should also note Edgeworth's attributing the distinction to Rousseau (in *Practical Education*, p.127) between helping a child and waiting on them (as if parents were servants). Edgeworth's point neatly reverses Macaulay's Letter VII (Vol.I), suggesting that Edgeworth was responding to what she thought was a common misreading of Rousseau.

³ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 73.

The scene recalls Rousseau's *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*. 'One would have said that nature displayed all its magnificence to our eyes in order to present then with the text for our conversation'.⁴ Unlike Rousseau, however, we see here that Fleetwood does not entirely understand his teacher's method, or what lesson Ruffigny attempts to impart here. We might imagine that the scene is intended to impress upon the protagonist the ideas of simplicity and civic virtue – influences that have shaped Ruffigny – as the mentor establishes his credentials as a surrogate father. What the scene succeeds at instead is the invocation of Fleetwood's sensibility. The protagonist mourns and declares his dissipation in Oxford and Paris to have been an 'interval of incoherence'.⁵ Fleetwood rejects his previous conduct, not because he understands (intellectually) why virtuous conduct is better but because he is shamed by the reminder of his late father's example and by the imagined disapproval of his parent.

Ruffigny's lesson inadvertently shakes Fleetwood's self-esteem:

How various circumstances combined to make this a terrible blow to me! I felt naked and unsheltered from the blasts of the world. I was like a vine that had long twined itself round the trunk of a sturdy oak, and from which at length the support and alliance of the oak is taken away. The shoots of my emulation and enterprise lay prostrate on the ground, and the fibres of my heart were torn and bleeding.⁶

With this passage in mind, we might be inclined to read the protagonist's turn towards Ruffigny as a mentor more as satisfying Fleetwood's need for emotional support than as a rational desire for moral education. Ruffigny's replacement of the protagonist's father is expedited by Fleetwood's emotional vulnerability. We should not read anything too sinister into this – there is nothing in the text that suggests that the mentor does not have his pupil's best interests at heart – but Godwin here seeks to depict a shaky foundation to Rousseavian education. By exploiting Fleetwood's emotional state in order to build a rapport between them, Ruffigny fails to provide rational grounds for Casimir to follow his example. That is not to suggest that Godwin presents a dichotomy between (rational) intellect

⁴Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, ed. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 266.

⁵ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 74.

⁶ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 75.

and (irrational) feeling here but simply that the mentor has done nothing to earn the protagonist's trust. His is a confidence won, as Godwin says in *The Enquirer*, through illiberal means.

The inadequacy of this confidence is exposed in London, as Fleetwood falls back into habits of vice. He justifies his dalliance with a mistress to himself, and to Ruffigny, as harmless (because it is not adulterous). 'No delusion was practised by any of the parties. She would not be made worse by any thing into which she was induced by me; and neither I nor any one else understood her but for what she was.'⁷ Ruffigny's objections are taken as Puritan. '...I was like Telemachus in the island of Calypso, so inflamed by the wiles of the God of Love, so enamoured with the graces and witchcraft of my Eucharis, that all remonstrances were in vain.'⁸ Like Fénelon's Mentor, Ruffigny is driven to drastic action to break his pupil's enchantment. Fleetwood's mentor puts forward a rational case: that Casimir's vice will deny him higher pleasures, and ultimate happiness, but it is Ruffigny's ultimatum (in no uncertain terms, emotional blackmail) that sways his charge – if the younger man does not abandon his vicious course, his mentor will die from shame. Fleetwood tearfully recants his ways, professes his gratitude and excoriates his previous behaviour. Ruffigny closes the chapter with what I take to be Godwin's irony: "This prompt and decisive return to reason and virtue inspires me with the most sanguine hope," said he.⁹ Fleetwood has not, of course, embraced reason but has instead allowed himself to be ruled by dramatic sentiment. Ruffigny, having achieved the result he intended, is unable or unwilling to perceive the distinction. For Godwin, however, the distinction is crucial because it lays the groundwork of the novel's overall argument – the process of Fleetwood's education is not sound, though it appears to meet all its interim goals, leaving the supposedly 'finished' adult unable to cope with the emotional and moral challenges that adult life presents.

We first see Fleetwood's lack of emotional literacy in the years following Ruffigny's death. The protagonist is conscious of his own misanthropy, but considers it a consequence of his 'contamination' by vice:

⁷ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 132.

⁸ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 132.

⁹ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 135.

Innocence is philanthropical and confiding, “believeth all things, and hopeth all things.” I looked upon every thing with an eye of jealousy and incredulity. The universe had lost to me that sunshine, which it derives from the reflection of an unspotted mind.¹⁰

Fleetwood comes to regard his misanthropy in a positive light, justifying his dissatisfaction with the court, literary society, and parliament as a reflection of his severe virtue. Later we see that the protagonist lacks the self-awareness to contrast his own experience of vice and redemption with that of Mrs Macneil. Fleetwood narrates another’s approval of Mrs. Macneil’s moral example and readily accepts the idea that the Macneil family are good, happy and wise, without recognising the contrast with his ‘contaminated’, ‘saturnine’ self.¹¹ Severity cannot make him happy, however, and Fleetwood travels in the hope of relieving ‘the *ennui* which devoured me’.¹² What neither society nor travel can give him is a friend – not because the protagonist rejects the company of others, but because Fleetwood imagines friendship to be the devotion of others to *his* emotional needs.

This must be a friend, 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. – I do not condemn the man, upon whom a wound through my vitals acts but as a scratch; I know that his feelings are natural; I admit him for just, honest, and humane – a valuable member of society. But he is not the brother of my heart.¹³

We would consider the sentiment the protagonist expresses to be benign, were it reciprocal, but Fleetwood’s account gives the reader little sense that he imagines commensurate duties on himself (and later scenes in the novel encourage the reader not to regard these as implied). The protagonist’s experience has conditioned him to expect this devotion. Ruffigny, and before him Casimir’s father, was selfless in his attention to the protagonist’s needs (a devotion that is understandable between a father-figure and his son). Fleetwood

¹⁰ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 138.

¹¹ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 137.

¹² Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 147.

¹³ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 148.

has only ever experienced the love of others in Fénelonian terms, the annihilation of their selfhood in support of his happiness.

Fleetwood's second mentor, Macneil, does little to disabuse him of this notion. In Macneil's philosophy, a higher state of companionship (true friendship) is achieved through familiarity, shared experience, and ultimately the need for companionship itself. Macneil conjures Fleetwood an image of himself shipwrecked on a desert island with only 'the most gross, perverse, and stupid of the crew' for company.¹⁴ The close relationship that would be forced upon them, Macneil says, would make the castaways friends for life. Fleetwood claims himself unconvinced by Macneil's argument but accepts his mentor's advice that he should marry and gather a family around him (substituting friends and relatives in need until his own children are born). 'Call them round you; contribute to their means; contribute to their improvement [...] Depend upon it, you will not then feel a vacuity; your mind will no longer prey upon itself.'¹⁵ Macneil presumably intends that Fleetwood become a patron, a mentor himself, but the terms in which he frames this play to the protagonist's solipsism: rather than the object of devotion, the protagonist would become the centre that his loved ones orbit around. Macneil compounds this with the qualities and role he sees for Fleetwood's (as yet hypothetical) wife:

No; if you marry, Fleetwood, choose a girl whom no disappointments have soured, and no misfortunes have bent to the earth; let her be lively, gay as the morning, and smiling as the day. 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.¹⁶

Macneil imagines husband and wife combining to form a greater whole but, as Rousseau would have it, their mutual dependence is not equal.

Man marries because he desires a lovely and soothing companion for his vacant hours; woman marries, because she feels the want of a protector,

¹⁴ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 163.

¹⁵ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 165.

¹⁶ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 167.

a guardian, a guide, and an oracle, some one to look up to with respect, and in whose judgment and direction she may securely confide.¹⁷

This first nod towards a Roussevian idea of marriage further validates Fleetwood's worldview – the role of a companion is essentially subaltern, adding themselves to his life, rather than a genuinely mutual partnership. Godwin takes the opportunity in this scene to have Macneil damn Rousseau with faint praise, making the now familiar acknowledgment of the Swiss author's 'exquisite sensibility', but remarking that he regarded him as 'not in his sober mind'.¹⁸

Godwin contrives to have Fleetwood's courtship of Mary resemble the ideal that Rousseau sets out in *Emile*. The shipwreck strips away Mary's ties to the world beyond her prospective husband (as Sophie's parents vanish from consideration when her suitor appears on the scene) and her dependence upon the protagonist allows him to feel himself growing into that role.

When I waited upon her as an heiress, I approached with a certain submission; I looked at her as an independent being; my thoughts moved slow, and my tongue was apt to falter [...] 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...¹⁹

Godwin has Fleetwood's pontifications on the married state read like paraphrases of Rousseau's; '...the contrast of masculine enterprise in one, and a defenceless tenderness in the other' (compare with Rousseau's 'one ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak').²⁰ The events of the novel's third volume comprehensively undermine these pronouncements; but it is important to draw a distinction here between Godwin's argument regarding the effect of education on gender relations, and the effect of education on wider emotional literacy. Gary Handwerk argues that *Fleetwood* diagnoses *Emile*'s 'reinscription of gender hierarchy':²¹

¹⁷ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 167.

¹⁸ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 159.

¹⁹ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 183.

²⁰ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 191; Rousseau, p. 358.

²¹ Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Roussevian Education', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), 375–98 (p. 378).

As it was for Rousseau in *Emile*, marriage is in *Fleetwood* the goal toward which the system of education is ultimately directed. But rather than envisaging marital bliss, Godwin asks how a particular upbringing, a particular and not atypical set of formative experiences, could produce a character as paternalistic and misogynistic as Fleetwood turns out to be.²²

Fleetwood is, indeed, conscious of his own misogyny, explaining to Macneil that he is 'impressed with no favourable prepossessions toward the female sex'.²³ Handwerk regards this misogyny as the displacement of the protagonist's unconscious resentment towards Ruffigny. Fleetwood's respect for his mentor's example and awareness of the moral debt he owes sublimate any recognition of Ruffigny's deception and emotional manipulation, and the struggle between independence and control is played out in Fleetwood's marriage. I would concur that the protagonist's anger is directed towards (in eighteenth-century terms) more socially acceptable targets – women, at first exemplified by the Countess and Marchioness (whom he feels practised similar arts against him), but later also Mary, as he comes to imagine her attempts to satisfy her own emotional needs as ploys to curtail his independence. I would, however, argue that Fleetwood's misogyny is a subset of Godwin's concerns regarding the fictitious equality of Rousseavian education. Ruffigny's moral lessons are manipulations (as, to a lesser extent, are Macneil's). In a manner that Rousseau might well have endorsed, the lesson on the lake of Uri is (by Ruffigny) presented as revealed truth rather than the deliberate act of spectacle and timing apparent to the reader. Though Ruffigny purports to treat Fleetwood as a reasoning adult (as perhaps *Emile* – or as the autobiographical 'Rousseau', in the *Profession of Faith* – feels himself to be), the lesson's method speaks otherwise. Under Ruffigny's tutelage the protagonist is at no point expected to exercise his reasoning faculty, as all dilemmas are ultimately resolved with an appeal to feeling. Like Rousseau, Fleetwood's mentor appears to assume that the protagonist's reason will develop of its own accord (proceeding from the related assumption that he is incapable of it right now) and that the expedience of using deception to set his charge on a moral course will have no consequences later.²⁴ Ruffigny treats Fleetwood as

²² Handwerk, p. 380.

²³ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 166.

²⁴ Though this may seem incongruous to a modern reader, the protagonist's age at this point in the novel (around 20) is still within the boundaries of what many period writers considered adolescence. Following on from my argument in previous chapters however, we might also read Fleetwood's (adult) education as an acknowledgment that *Emile* – grown into the role of husband,

Rousseau would treat a child – acting as if their relationship were one of equal companionship, while contriving the protagonist’s moral education from a position of superior wisdom.

Godwin had already criticised such logic in *The Enquirer*. *Fleetwood* assumes that the Rousseavian method, ‘in hourly danger of discovery’, is never apocalyptically uncovered but is implicitly suspected in the ‘confused and indistinct manner’ that Godwin foresaw.²⁵ The author regards this illusion of equality as a greater torture than overt tyranny:

The person who has thus been treated, turns restless upon the bed of his dungeon. He feels every thing that can give poignancy to his fate. He burns with indignation against the hourly events of his life. His sense of suffering, which would otherwise be blunted, is by this refinement, like the vitals of Prometheus, for ever preyed upon, and for ever renewed.²⁶

This suffering is constantly at odds with Fleetwood’s own sense of self-worth, but the author takes pains to show that the protagonist’s self-esteem owes more to a narcissism validated by the attention of others than it does to any genuine merit – *amour-propre* in a Rousseavian sense. In childhood, Fleetwood is allowed to use his intellectual gifts to belittle his tutor (‘I never dreamed for a moment that it could be less than sacrilege to measure his understanding with my own’);²⁷ he displays generosity in order to feel the satisfaction of a patron rather than out of a desire to share his largesse (‘when I witnessed the effusions of their honest esteem and affection, my heart whispered me, “This would not have existed but for me!”’).²⁸ In either case, the merit of the protagonist’s action is secondary to its acknowledgment – Casimir wants to be told he is a good and clever boy more than he cares about being one. Oxford and Paris confront him with individuals whose narcissism is more developed than his own. Morrison, the Countess and the Marchioness all desire acclamation but are apparently indifferent to its cause; they seem unconcerned that they are notorious for their cruelty and not celebrated for their kindness. Fleetwood’s horror at their moral example is only

father and citizen – believes himself as dependent on his tutor in adulthood as he ever was as a child.

²⁵ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 126.

²⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 123.

²⁷ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 21.

²⁸ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 25.

vaguely defined, however. More acute is the protagonist's resentment of being expected to *provide* acclamation rather than receive it.

One passion which eminently distinguished the Marchioness, was the perpetual desire of doing something that should excite notice and astonishment. If in the privacy of the *tête-à-tête* she was not seldom in a singular degree provoking, in public and in society she was, if possible, still worse.²⁹

The Marchioness laughs at Fleetwood's censure, however, and inflames his passions with mind games and an apparently mercurial temper. The protagonist flees Paris in part because he can no longer bear to be petitioner rather than patron. Ruffigny allows Fleetwood to reassert himself as the centre of the world and encourages him to believe that his mentor's lessons are merely recollections of his essential character. In both of Ruffigny's attempts to impress upon Fleetwood the rectitude of a more moral lifestyle, the teacher conjures to his pupil an image of the man he should be; Fleetwood chooses to see his episodes of vice as deviations from the man he is.

The protagonist's subconscious knowledge of his subaltern position is contrasted with a belief in his own superiority that the deception of Ruffigny's tutelage allowed him to maintain. Following Handwerk's argument, we might read Fleetwood's disastrous marriage as an 'acting out' of long-buried resentment against those who compromised his independence. Fleetwood's descent into insanity and violence is then a result of his inability to assert his dominance over Mary, whom all his education has taught him is his natural subordinate. What this reading neglects is due attention to the central dilemma in Godwin's writing on education: the need for equality. At no point has Fleetwood enjoyed an equal relationship and so his search for friendship is tainted by a misguided sense of what friendship entails. Having never had peers, Fleetwood knows only how to relate to mentors and students. This problem is fundamentally why Godwin endorses public education in *The Enquirer* – a child needs people that they can engage with on an equal level, not only to develop their social abilities but to experience opinions that do not carry with them the implicit authority of a parent or tutor's wisdom. In contrast, Fleetwood comes to believe that inequality encourages virtue. We have already seen how the protagonist congratulates

²⁹ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 55.

himself for growing into the role of Mary's protector and noted the implication in Macneil's advice that patronage might serve as a (temporary) substitute for familial love. It is clear from *The Enquirer*, however, that Godwin sees relationships based solely on dominance and submission as teaching entirely the wrong lessons. The master is lessened by their authority and the subject learns only how to disguise their rebellion. The disintegration of Fleetwood's marriage comes because he cannot imagine a relationship where he is neither master nor subject. He has no notion of how to be an equal partner, nor any idea that others have feelings not directly related to him. For this reason, Fleetwood imagines Mary's innocent relationships with other men to be active betrayals, and remains oblivious to Gifford's ulterior motive in slandering her – they cannot want things not centred on his interests, so Mary's desire for social connections beyond the family and Gifford's desire for wealth (regardless of the morality of how he acquires it) go unnoticed. Fleetwood's tantrums at the beginning of volume three illustrate his inability to perceive a third course between dominance and submission. When Mary interrupts their reading together that she might collect herbs with the son of William (the farmer who was beneficiary of the teenage Fleetwood's patronage), the protagonist resists the urge to chase after her and beg for her attention, while simultaneously cursing her for finding pleasure in interests that are not his.

“... In all my life I have been unused to brook control. The sensitiveness of my temper will never allow me to bear to be thwarted, crossed, the chain of my sensations snapped and crumbled to pieces at every moment, with impunity. There is no reciprocity in this commerce. I could be content to yield much to her. - Aye, again I say, God bless her in her caprices! - But I 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.”³⁰

Not omnipotent, as Rousseau says, he believes himself impotent. Fleetwood displays no understanding of compromise, the early months of his marriage alternating between imperious demand and ill-natured acquiescence. Gifford, on the other hand, offers him a relationship he is familiar with: apparent devotion, and emotional manipulation masquerading as wise counsel. Gifford is Fleetwood's third mentor, and the poverty of the protagonist's emotional

³⁰ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, pp. 201–2.

development prevents him from seeing the malice behind his cousin's guidance. The protagonist's spiral into madness is a retreat from the challenge of real (equal) companionship, reaching its nadir in violence against the symbols of his failed union. Fleetwood's mock wedding-feast destroys not only Mary in effigy, but also the child-bed, the feast, and the barrel-organ that he uses to accompany the bizarre ceremony. The protagonist's psychotic episode, on the surface an act of displaced vengeance, is subconsciously an outpouring of frustration against a relationship that his education to this point has left him unable to understand.

* * *

Fleetwood's education, an exemplar of Rousseavian principles, has disastrous consequences. Despite the author's use of *Othello* to illustrate those consequences, however, the novel is not a tragedy. With Gifford's plot revealed; Mary and Fleetwood are slowly, painfully, reconciled. Godwin does not present this as a tidy resolution but rather as a drawn out process that causes both of its principals misery. Kenrick and the Scarboroughs gradually clear away the misunderstandings and deceptions that led to the couple's separation, but Mary remains deeply wounded by her treatment. Fleetwood, characteristically, cannot imagine being forgiven and plans to live out the rest of his years as a penitent recluse.

It seemed as if, now that what the vulgar mind would call the obstacles to our re-union were removed, we were more certainly divided than ever. While charges, and accusations, and historical details, were the mountains that separated us, the case was not altogether hopeless. These might be cleared away and refuted. Now we were separated by sentiments, that must for ever twine themselves with the vitals of every honourable individual, and that can only be exterminated by the blow which lays the head that has conceived them in the dust.³¹

Whether by chance or the design of their confidants, the couple meet again some four weeks after Fleetwood's rescue. Pale, emaciated and behind a veil, Mary is not recognised by her erstwhile husband until both almost faint and she offers him her hand. Fleetwood's earlier attempt to confront Mary³² recalled Hermione's

³¹ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 289.

³² Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 259.

trial in *The Winter's Tale* (III.2.120); the unveiling here is a similar return to life for both of them:

It is impossible for any one to imagine what I felt at that moment. Whenever I recollect it, I am astonished that I did not expire on the spot. Remorse, while the party against whom we have offended still retains its resentment, and regards us with disdain, scarcely rases the outermost cuticle of the heart. It is from the hour in which we are forgiven, that the true remorse commences.³³

Mary offers Fleetwood a chance at redemption but the implication here is not one of forgiveness offered unconditionally. There is no suggestion that their reconciliation provides a fresh start – indeed, quite the opposite:

Another feeling succeeded. Mary never looked half so beautiful, half so radiant, as now. Innocence is nothing, if it is merely innocence. It is guileless nature, when impleaded at a stern and inhuman bar, when dragged out to contumely and punishment, when lifting up its head in conscious honour, when Heaven itself seems to interpose to confound the malice of men, and declares, "This is the virtue that I approve!"...³⁴

Fleetwood's narcissism, mistrust and irrationality cannot, and should not, be forgotten. Forgiveness signals the beginning of the real work of rebuilding their relationship and the reminder of the protagonist's indisputable failure ('the sensation that is sharper than all the pains of hell')³⁵ provides, we must hope, the incentive for him to change his ways. Throughout the novel, Fleetwood portrays himself as incapable of change; he has 'formed inveterate habits, and outlived the age of experiments'.³⁶ Writhing with suspicion and jealousy (in volume three), he castigates himself for attempting to change:

Why did I marry? I, that had already passed the middle stage of life? I, that knew the sex so well, that had gained my knowledge by such bitter experience? – What shall I do? How shall I signalise the terribleness of my justice? And in what dungeon shall I afterward hide myself?³⁷

He rages against the late Macneil for having encouraged him to abandon his solitude: 'He had recommended to me a wife, the society of my kindred, and that I should cherish the fond anticipation of offspring. Each of these pretended

³³ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 290.

³⁴ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, pp. 290–1.

³⁵ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 290.

³⁶ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 203.

³⁷ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 256.

sources of happiness had proved a scorpion...'.³⁸ As noted above, Fleetwood imagines his (and Mary's) character to be fixed even with Gifford's deception unmasked. Mary's unveiling in the final pages of the novel can be read, in this context, as a revelation – Fleetwood, who has always fled from confrontation, is brought to recognise that adversity can strengthen as well as destroy. Mary is physically weaker but mentally and emotionally stronger for her ordeal, as the protagonist acknowledges (quoting Pope) she has 'grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength'.³⁹ 'I never till now was sensible of half the merits of my wife'.⁴⁰ Godwin, however, offers the reader no final word on the couple's reunion. The novel gives us no triumphant re-marriage, nor any account of their child, segueing quickly into the fate of Gifford, and Kenrick's happy marriage to Louisa. The author offers us a glimmer of hope in the reformed character of Mr. Scarborough, once a draconian father but now (as the novel's final sentence informs us) 'the most indulgent of grandsires'.⁴¹ Scarborough has suffered tragedy and learned from it. Godwin offers us no conclusive reconciliation between the Fleetwoods in order to remind us that such forgiveness is always a work-in-progress, but holds out the conversion of Scarborough as evidence that change is always possible.

We should be inclined to read *Fleetwood's* ending as one of (possible) redemption because this scene has already played out once before in the novel. The young Mrs. Macneil's elopement can be framed in similar terms: she disappears to Europe with a morally bankrupt flatterer who preys on her naivety and imprisons her so that he might lay claim to her fortune. She too breaks the heart of the relative she abandons, and she too initially regards herself as unfit for society as a result (she vows to 'never again quit the paternal roof').⁴² Forgiveness and understanding allow her to move beyond her mistake. Godwin does not tie Mrs. Macneil's story tidily either – Mary's mother is a social pariah regardless of her true moral worth – but the author has one of her supporters remind us that a redeemed soul is of greater value than an innocent one (Godwin cites Luke 15.7 in a footnote: 'that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner

³⁸ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 261.

³⁹ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 287.

⁴⁰ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 291.

⁴¹ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 291.

⁴² Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 154.

that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance').⁴³

The text speaks powerfully of forgiveness but, read as a novel of education, it also seems to say profound things about the likelihood, value, and perhaps even necessity of failure. The novel's examples of positive growth are all developed in adversity, from the young Ruffigny's escape from the factory, to Mary's fortitude in the final volume. These characters are frequently more sinned against than sinning, however. Fleetwood's trials are more conspicuously of his own making. Though we might be inclined to allow the protagonist some small note of sympathy, noting the deficiencies of his education, his flaws are born out of indulgence and privilege. Like Emile, Fleetwood has been shielded from real failure – Emile's tutor has manufactured controlled experiences that expose his charge's shortcomings, while Fleetwood is always rescued by the intervention of others – in neither case is the protagonist expected to deal with the meaningful consequences of their mistakes. If, as Godwin suggests, both protagonists unconsciously suspect the method behind their education, we might imagine for Fleetwood an equally unconscious complacency regarding the impact of the choices he makes. Fleetwood develops an unwarranted confidence in the accuracy and rectitude of his own judgment, thanks to an education where his motivations were never interrogated and deviations from the moral course were corrected in a manner that allowed him to believe that such interventions were his own ethical decision-making at work. The protagonist's ability to make moral decisions, and to understand their impact on others, has never been tested because he has never been forced to live with the consequences of the choices he makes. Macneil makes the point that Fleetwood is too rich to 'engage with sincere eagerness in any undertaking or employment'⁴⁴ – he is too well insulated from economic and political reality to develop the motivation to pursue any field of endeavour as more than a dilettante – and we might extend this to his engagement with others. Until Mary, Fleetwood's behaviour has never cost him a friend because he is, again, insulated from its consequences (he has always been indulged, or prevented from doing further harm). He has been taught to believe that true friendship is unconditional and has come to believe that

⁴³ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 155.

⁴⁴ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 165.

friendships hinging on reciprocal duties lack emotional commitment. He categorises all his friendships that lack this total commitment to be essentially casual. Fleetwood is, in a sense, a dilettante of human relationships.

In the context of Godwin's other writing on education, the novel appears to ask how we could expect (to borrow Wollstonecraft's term) 'fellow feeling' to develop in an individual with no experience of reciprocal companionship. Setting aside both Fleetwood and Emile's lack of peers throughout childhood, neither character has any genuine experience of others as feeling, social beings. All those that Emile engages with are, in Godwin's view, the tutor's puppets – their reactions are scripted responses to actions that Emile himself has been manipulated into. Fleetwood, on the other hand, has learned to hold himself apart from anything more than superficial social contact. In either case, for much of their lives their only meaningful relationship is with their mentors; a profoundly unbalanced fellowship where their own feelings are predicted and managed by the superior wisdom of the senior partner. Fleetwood (and implicitly, Emile) is emotionally stunted because he has never been allowed to fail as a friend, has never had to live with the social consequences of a bad choice, or ever had to make amends for mistakes that he has made. Where apologies occur in *Emile*, Godwin's reading implies that the boy's repentance is only ever as real as he suspects the situation to be – an artificial crime will receive only an artificial apology. Between Fleetwood and Ruffigny, Godwin makes no suggestion that amends are made at all; for the mentor to extract penance for his charge's mistakes would perhaps be a reminder that Fleetwood's moral choices are not his own.

The artificiality of Emile's experience and the indulgence of Fleetwood's stand in stark contrast to the tragic death of the unnamed Scarborough boy. Never allowed to succeed, where Fleetwood is never allowed to fail, young Scarborough is broken by *too much* interrogation and correction, and functions as Godwin's dismissal of what the author clearly perceives as the opposite extreme to Rousseau's illusory liberality. The younger Scarborough's misery is to be constantly measured against an impossible standard, and despair causes him to waste away before reaching adulthood. The tragedy here recalls Godwin's observation in *The Enquirer* that to press a boy into 'premature manhood' (to expect greater seriousness and dedication than a child's mind is ready for) is to

rob them 'of the chief blessing of youth'.⁴⁵ By contrast, Fleetwood is forever a child.

Fleetwood's conclusion suggests that both success and failure are needed to form a rounded adult. If, as Godwin insists from *Political Justice* onwards, experience is the basis of all knowledge, there must exist truths which can only be learned through trial and error. What we might take from the novel's final chapter is that the experience of failure itself is essential to developing an understanding of forgiveness and forbearance. Fleetwood has had no opportunity to develop the empathy and sympathy necessary to interact with others on anything more than a superficial level. Though he has experienced emotional torment, he has no experience of seeing it in others, nor any sense that he might be capable of inflicting it himself. The ease with which the protagonist is manipulated by Gifford is a sign that his lack of empathy is fatal to his ability to make ethical decisions for himself – he still requires a guide or mentor to point out the 'right' path.

The danger of Rousseavian education is that it provides only pseudo-experience. Godwin implies that Emile's lessons are incomplete or inadequate – his experience is guided towards a specific outcome and his ability to influence this outcome is limited (in that his choices have already been predicted and allowed for). At no point in Emile's education is he genuinely able to exercise his own judgment; his ability to choose, an illusion. *The Enquirer* decries this as both unethical and impractical; *Fleetwood* shows that even its success denies the pupil the necessary tools of life. Such inadequacy is not strictly a failure on Rousseau's terms: a pupil left dependent on the moral guidance of a wiser mentor is, for the author, an unavoidable consequence of a life lived among other people. Godwin however cannot endorse an education that results in a mind ill-equipped to determine moral questions on its own. The experiences that Rousseau's education provides are, ultimately, not real. As scripted simulations of ethical deduction, they are only as sound as the moral reasoning of their author. We might question the long-term circularity of this endeavour. If each generation impresses its version of morality on the next then it is possible that certain avenues of moral improvement might be closed to future generations who have

⁴⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 128.

been educated to follow an existing pattern, rather than to think critically on an ethical level. Godwin does not address this explicitly and it may be that the author allows the divine wisdom of Rousseau's mentor figures for the purposes of argument. The point remains that, regardless of the truth inculcated in the simulation, it provides only an ideal of how such a dilemma should play out – a point of data for use in the ethical deduction attached to any subsequent, related situation in real life. The individual educated in this manner has little or no experience of using their own judgment, however, and seems likely to flounder (as Fleetwood does) when they are called upon to use it. This is obviously true of all novices in the field. The particular weakness of Rousseavian pseudo-experience is that the individual believes their early lessons to be more valid than is really the case. The individual seems likely to struggle more, faced with people whose actions do not conform to the familiar scripts of their education. What Godwin seems to imply in *Fleetwood* is that this education encourages its recipient to believe, when faced with this disconnection between how others *should* act and how others *do*, that it is the rest of the world that is at fault. The world that Emile experiences as a child is, as far as he can tell, entirely centred on him. His constant companion is the mentor who has devoted his life to teaching him, all other contacts are coloured by the lessons they appear to impart. In Godwin's view a Rousseavian education feeds a child's narcissism where it should combat it. The resulting adult is totally unprepared for others with needs unrelated to their own. Fleetwood reacts so poorly to Mary's problems because they present a fundamental challenge to his understanding of the world.

This reading provides an interesting parallel with Godwin's argument in 'Of History and Romance'. If fiction presents the opportunity to provide an instructive ideal for the reader, a better teacher than history because it enables the author to construct a narrative that is emotionally and morally 'true' without being bound to the facts in evidence, why is a Rousseavian education problematic?

I would argue that Godwin regards knowledge derived from reading, and knowledge derived from Rousseavian moral lessons, as qualitatively different forms of pseudo-experience. Fundamentally, Emile's moral lessons are 'lived' and purport to be real. Godwin is uncomfortable with deception in principle but furthermore questions the value of the knowledge such lessons provide. While we might allow the wisdom of the teacher, the accuracy with which the lesson is

absorbed is not certain (the student is capable of reinterpreting or misinterpreting the intended moral). The apparent moral of the lesson carries with it a specious authority – the faux veracity of a lived-but-unreal experience. Fiction is transparently unreal, giving the reader a distance that allows them to interrogate its lessons critically. Fleetwood, the character, is imbued with the certainty of moral lessons he has experienced but misinterpreted. *Fleetwood*, the novel, provides the materials of thinking – a series of arguments against Roussevian education that we are not forced to accept.

A reading of *Fleetwood's* conclusion that focuses on failure and the on-going work of redemption resonates strongly with Godwin's scepticism elsewhere. The novel reminds us that certainty – in this case knowing ourselves and the minds of others – is frequently a mirage. The protagonist's reliance on moral guidance makes him ultimately a victim because his underdeveloped reason forces him to accept such guidance uncritically. It is here that the novel's subtitle ('the New Man of Feeling') comes into play. Fleetwood's troubles are not only the result of his inadequate reason but also his abundant and unregulated sentiment. This is, again, not a straightforward opposition of reason and feeling but we might read it as Godwin's counterblast to Rousseau's conviction regarding the truth of 'inner sentiment' in *Emile*. From the Savoyard Vicar:

I know only that truth is in things and not in the mind which judges them, and that the less of myself I put in judgments I make, the more sure I am of approaching the truth. Thus my rule of yielding to sentiment more than to reason is confirmed by reason itself.⁴⁶

Fleetwood's sentiment, like that of Mackenzie's Harley, is powerful but undisciplined. Like Harley also, Fleetwood feels in place of understanding. Though we might imagine Godwin's distaste at Mackenzie's example (the latter author's commentary undermines his character's condemnation of the slave trade by dismissing his understanding of it), he must have found the epistemological principle sound: exquisite sentiment is no substitute for critical thought. Godwin does not, however, imagine a dispassionate examination of the facts. Fleetwood is neither mad (unable to think coherently about his problems), nor stupid (unable to deduce logical solutions). What Fleetwood lacks is empathy: he is unable to take reasonable ethical decisions because he cannot place

⁴⁶ Rousseau, p. 272.

himself in another's position and imagine the consequences of his actions for others.

We see here that Godwin regards empathy as a process mediated by reason as much as feeling, and may be reaching for a distinction between empathy and sympathy. In the revisions to *Political Justice*, Godwin adopts a term from Adam Smith to explain the process of ethical deduction:

When once we have entered into so auspicious a path as disinterestedness, reflection confirms our choice, in a sense in which it never can confirm any of the factitious passions we have named. We find by observation that we are surrounded by beings of the same nature with ourselves. [...] We are able in imagination to go out of ourselves, and become *impartial spectators* of the system of which we are part. We can then make an estimate of our intrinsic and absolute value... (Emphasis Mine.)⁴⁷

The impartial spectator is a more important concept for Godwin's idea of ethical reasoning than its prominence in his work would indicate. In Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* ethical decisions are arrived at, first through the excitement of the passions (caring about the matter), second through the imaginative leap of deciding what an unconnected observer would make of the situation. Godwin explains a similar process in the *Reply to Parr*: 'without feeling, we cannot act at all ... But, when we proceed to ascertain whether our actions are entitled to the name of virtue, this can only be done by examining into their effects'.⁴⁸ Casimir Fleetwood cannot put himself in the place of another because he has no experience of imagining what others might think. He may be able to share the passionate feeling of people around him (he is moved by Mary's sadness after the shipwreck) but he cannot imagine the matter from any perspective that is not his own. It is here that Godwin steps beyond Smith, who makes no distinction between empathy (the attempt to understand the feelings of another) and sympathy (indulging in feelings that correspond with those expressed by others). Godwin's own use of 'sympathy' is not without problems, as the author uses a

⁴⁷ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 197.

⁴⁸ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 181.

sense of the word akin to Smith's in *The Enquirer* (Essay VII),⁴⁹ but *Fleetwood* displays a separation between these forms of emotional engagement even if it does not make the distinction overtly. Suzie Asha Park has argued that the earlier *Caleb Williams* reflects tensions in Smith's system of sympathy, that once the spectator's sympathy is engaged, the demand for (believable, relatable) narrative encourages a rush towards unreasoned (sentimental) judgment.⁵⁰ If this is the case, then it suggests an emergent critique of Smith's theory in Godwin's work that the author did not pursue – if indeed he was conscious of it.

We might contrast Fleetwood's reaction to Ruffigny's ultimatum in London, with his (lack of) understanding of Mary's continued mourning: the protagonist is able to share in his mentor's horror (comparing Fleetwood's behaviour with his father's) because it is still, essentially, about him; in comparison, Mary is pitied but her sadness is not understood because to do so would necessitate an imaginative process that Fleetwood is ill-equipped to attempt. Like Harley, and like Rousseau, Fleetwood can indulge and share in extravagant displays of sentiment but Godwin here distinguishes such displays from moral action – he is sure that sentiment is needed for moral action, but is not synonymous with it. The author's implication is that great power of sentiment is in no way symptomatic of great moral standing. Sensibility is a neutral element in the ethical equation, stimulating action but in no way responsible for its ethical character. This conclusion challenges the moral logic of the sentimental novel, dismissing its assumption of a link between sympathy and virtue (exemplified in Rousseau's *Julie*), and going so far as to portray the negative consequences of powerful feeling unallied to reason or imagination. Godwin's challenge to a widely-used convention of eighteenth-century literature is, to some extent, responsible for the novel's rejection by contemporary critics who, as Handwerk puts it, '...rejected, or refused even to see, the logic of Godwin's ethical analysis - that the sensibility of a figure like Fleetwood might manifest itself in personally and socially destructive ways...'.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 106.

⁵⁰ Suzie Asha Park, 'Caleb Williams and the Smithian Spectator: Reading the "Reasonable Demand"', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 41 (2014), 195–224.

⁵¹ Handwerk, p. 376.

The novel's subtitle is particularly incendiary in this context. Hostile critics chose to read it as a slight on Mackenzie's much loved novel by its comparison (in the *Critical Review*, the *European* and, unsurprisingly, the *Anti-Jacobin Review*).⁵² Godwin's preface to the first edition compounded matters by stressing the mundanity of Fleetwood's passions, 'such adventures, as for the most part have occurred to at least one half of the Englishmen now existing, who are of the same rank of life as my hero.'⁵³ 'The New Man of Feeling' is less an attack on sensibility or the English gentleman, than it is an expression of the author's concerns about the influence of Roussevian education. We might imagine Godwin feared that the assumptions encoded into Rousseau's system would give rise to a generation of solipsistic, incurious and irrational adults. Casimir Fleetwood is all of these things. He has lived his life within boundaries that he is only dimly aware of. His counterpart Emile has been 'protected' from experiences that might lead him away from the path his tutor has set out. Together they have led artificial lives of pseudo-experience, but neither is conscious of it. They are emotionally and intellectually impoverished and lack the resources to imagine any other life. For Rousseau, this is acceptable because Emile is at least happy. Godwin is clear that Casimir Fleetwood is not. Godwin rejects the idea that denying children the opportunity to think can ever make them good or happy. *Fleetwood* is the author's final word on theory to the 'disciples of Rousseau'. It is after *Fleetwood* that Godwin turns concertedly to children's books, and by extension the practice of education.

⁵² *Critical Review*, S3 4 (1805), p.383-91; *European Magazine and London Review* 49 (April 1806), p. 259-61; and the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 21 (August 1805), p. 337-58. The *Anti-Jacobin's* review is particularly vehement, descending into an extended *ad hominem* on the late Wollstonecraft. Godwin's Gifford shares his name with the magazine's editor.

⁵³ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 5: Fleetwood*, p. 13.

Chapter VI

Imagination and the Independent Thinker: Godwin's Writing for Children and Young People

A discussion of Godwin's educational thought would be incomplete if it did not consider the author's children's books. Although we should not ignore the commercial pressures behind much of Godwin's writing for children (the need to provide a catalogue for the family's 'Juvenile Library' imprint and their always precarious bookshop, and the economic reality that children's books were often a more profitable venture than philosophy, history or the novel), I will argue here that these works complement the author's discussion of literary education in earlier (more theoretical) texts. If *The Enquirer* provides Godwin's theory of critical reading, then the works discussed here provide the practice.

This chapter will focus on three texts: *Bible Stories* (1802), *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1805), and *Letter of Advice to a Young American* (1818). Of the dozen children's books that Godwin published before the bankruptcy of the Juvenile Library in 1825, *Bible Stories* and *Fables* best illustrate the method by which the author sought to nurture the development of children as critical readers. By contrast, *Letter of Advice* is a practical work on reading, remarkable because it represents Godwin's contribution to that most traditional of educational genres: the curriculum piece. Even more remarkable is that the text, though operating within a genre and format that invites didacticism, still reflects the author's concerns about the piece's essential function. *Letter of Advice* is a very Godwinian reading list, and provides us with a degree on insight into the author as a 'hands on' educator.

There has been some critical focus on Godwin's writing for children centred on its political content, or lack thereof. M.O. Grenby juxtaposes the image of children's publishing as a battleground of the 1790s 'war of ideas' (described in Sarah Trimmer's *Guardian of Education*, 1802-1806) with the relatively de-politicised reality of children's books at the time. Though noting a handful of 'loyalist' and anti-Jacobin texts aimed at children in the period – Robert Dodsley's

The Chronicle of the Kings of England (1799) and Mary Pilkington's *New Tales of the Castle* (1800) are both cited – Grenby argues that both conservatives and radicals consciously avoided overt political content in writing intended for young minds. In support of this thesis Grenby points out that Trimmer was quick to lambast politicised children's writing even when it was in accord with her own views; Grenby further argues that because the Godwin family's bookshop was investigated by government spies but never charged with anything, his work must have been seen as innocuous.¹ Robert Anderson disputes Grenby's assertion, arguing that 'although they do not necessarily extend to current events, [Godwin's children's books] speak to current issues of liberty, tyranny, autonomy, nationality, obedience, communality, hierarchy, equality, the distribution of property, and ethnocentrism – that is to say, Godwin's central political and social preoccupations throughout his writings.'² Discussing a handful of stories from *Fables Ancient and Modern*, Anderson argues that the politics of Godwin's children's books are deliberately unstable, offering both anti-authoritarian and conservative messages in order to stretch the reader. I would concur with Anderson that these books are political in deeper, more philosophical, ways than Grenby acknowledges (though Grenby consciously defines politics 'in its narrow sense' in his essay, perhaps to better illustrate the contrast with obviously conservative children's books³) but Anderson seems to assume that Godwin seeks to educate his readers about particular political issues ('liberty', for example) rather than to awaken their minds in a general sense. The preface of *Bible Stories* gives us reason to doubt Anderson's notion.

Bible Stories. Memorable Acts of the Ancient Patriarchs, Judges, and Kings: Extracted From Their Original Historians. For the Use of Children was probably commissioned by either Benjamin Tabart or (later, Sir) Richard Phillips as part of their respective 'children's library' concerns, and pre-dates Godwin's own venture in children's publishing by several years.⁴ Given his wife's previous work for Tabart, and that *Bible Stories* was published under a pseudonym, it may be that

¹ Grenby, Matthew; 'Politicizing the Nursery: British Children's Literature and the French Revolution' in *The Lion and the Unicorn* 27 (2003), p. 1-26

² Robert Anderson, 'Godwin Disguised: Politics in the Juvenile Library' in *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 125-147, (p.130).

³ Grenby, p.3

⁴ The first edition is advertised as having been printed for Phillips and sold by Tabart. Phillips appears to have held the copyright, publishing two subsequent editions in 1803 and 1806.

the commission was arranged as a piece of 'work for hire' in the lean period between the author's unsuccessful foray into theatre (*Antonio*, 1800) and his *Life of Chaucer* (1803).⁵ The text itself is made up of selections from the King James Bible, the preface explaining the desirability of preserving the language of the original (that is to say, of the King James translation) in terms of its 'peculiar charm'.⁶ This study will concern itself solely with the argument expressed in the preface. The preface sits at a juncture between several of the educational methods already discussed and can be read as Godwin's synthesis of these ideas to support his own pedagogic agenda.

In the preface, Godwin (under the assumed name of 'William Scolfield') explains his dissatisfaction with contemporary children's books. They are too abstract, too boring, too prone to moralising when they should provide incident and excitement. Where older books indulged in fantasy and wonder,

modern books ... abound in real scenes, but impossible personages. They would not for the world astonish the child's mind with a giant, a dragon or a fairy, but their young people are all so good, and their old people so sober, so demure, and so rational, that no genuine interest can be felt for their adventures.⁷

The author's comment on the 'homily-language' of her early work suggests that not even Wollstonecraft was exempt from his criticism here.⁸ Godwin/Scolfield suggests that, in their determination to provide both morally sound and 'useful' knowledge, contemporary children's authors have neglected to stimulate the imagination of readers. The preface reads at times like a manifesto:

Imagination is the ground-plot upon which the edifice of a sound morality must be erected. Without imagination we may have a certain cold and arid circle of principles, but we cannot have sentiments: we may learn by rote a catalogue of rules, and repeat our lesson with the exactness of a parrot,

⁵ Mary Jane Godwin's work for Tabart is discussed in Marjorie Moon, *Benjamin Tabart's Juvenile Library* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1990), p. 43.

⁶ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 315.

⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 313.

⁸ William Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 1: Memoirs*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: William Pickering, 1992), p. 105.

or play over our tricks with the docility of a monkey; but we can neither ourselves love, nor be fitted to excite the love of others.⁹

The argument here synthesises two apparently separate positions: the author's valorisation of literary education (as expressed in the *Account* and *The Enquirer*), and his account of passion in the revised *Political Justice* and the *Reply to Parr* ('Virtue, sincerity, justice and all those principles which are begotten and cherished in us by a due exercise of reason will never be very strenuously espoused till they are ardently loved').¹⁰ In the preface to *Bible Stories* Godwin argues that reading is of the utmost importance to children's development, but that the development of the child's intellectual capacity is secondary to the development of the imagination. The author opposes imagination (and by extension, the heart) to logic, or 'mathematical deduction'. The latter are important, but 'do not contain in them the living principle of our nature'.¹¹ This seems to present a conflict with the apparent importance of critical reading in *The Enquirer*, wherein the intellectual work of uncovering a text's tendency was the best means to educate away from the shadow of teacherly or textual authority.

We might dismiss the need to render these arguments consistent. Godwin, writing under a pseudonym, for a new publisher and audience, might not need to be held to the standards of philosophical rigour we expect from his 'major' works. It appears, however, that the author later considered the preface a significant enough work to stand at the head of all his writing for children; Godwin wrote in 1828 that the preface should be included in any collection of his 'Miscellaneous Works' alongside the books he had published as 'Edward Baldwin, Esq' – a collection which would include *Fables Ancient and Modern*, as well as his many children's histories.¹² Given the apparent alignment between the concerns of *The Enquirer* and both *Fleetwood* and *Fables*, we cannot take the apparently contradictory preface of *Bible Stories* as a rejection of the author's earlier position. Clearly Godwin considers critical reading to be of supreme importance, and the

⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 313–4.

¹⁰ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 39.

¹¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 314.

¹² Abinger MSS Dep, c.604/2, cited in Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 312.

development of the imagination to take precedence over the development of intellect. The route through this apparent conflict is to see that Godwin understands the act of critical reading to be an imaginative process rather than (or as well as) an intellectual one. This may not even be a significant revision; re-reading Godwin on the empathy of literature ('when I read Milton, I become Milton. I find myself a sort of intellectual camelion, assuming the colour of the substances on which I rest.') in this light suggests that the author's distinction between the ethical and intellectual tendencies of literary works (in *The Enquirer*) may be misleading.¹³ *Bible Stories* is, in some respects, a clarification – a reminder that the primary value of reading lies in its imaginative potential rather than its intellectual rigour – but one that muddies the waters by reiterating a dichotomy between the heart and the mind that a close reading of the author's ideas does not actually support.

The preface to *Bible Stories* does, however, present the author's clearest statement on the power and necessity of imagination, 'the ground-plot upon which the edifice of a sound morality must be erected.'¹⁴ This was not a new development in Godwin's thought; we might recall the author's declaration in the first edition of *Political Justice* that:

There is indeed no species of composition, in which the seeds of a morality too perfect for our present improvements in science, may more reasonably be expected to discover themselves, than in works of imagination. When the mind shakes off the fetters of prescription and prejudice, when it boldly takes a flight into the world unknown, and employs itself in search of those grand and interesting principles which shall tend to impart to every reader the glow of enthusiasm, it is at such moments that the enquiring and philosophical reader may expect to be presented with the materials and rude sketches of intellectual improvements.¹⁵

What we see in the near decade between these texts is the gradual shift from visionary statements about the potential of imagination, to a more definite sense

¹³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 96.

¹⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 313.

¹⁵ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 101.

of the role imagination plays in the exercise of individual moral reason. Literature is, for Godwin, the best active method for developing and improving the imagination – and therefore the best method of moral and rational improvement.

Bible Stories asserts that we cannot have sentiments without imagination, and that without sentiment we have only ‘arid’ principles to guide us morally. Ethical thought and action are then a matter of both feelings and reason, or perhaps more accurately, a matter of feelings *then* reason (considering Godwin’s account of motivation); imagination plays an exciting, then regulating, role in both parts of the equation. To make an ethical decision, we must first care about the subject. ‘Caring’ is a matter of both sympathy and empathy, it behoves us to recognise or enter into another’s feelings before we can react to their distress. As observed in chapter five, *Fleetwood* reveals a distinction between empathy and sympathy that is particularly relevant here: the former is an imaginative process, the latter is not. Using the imagination, the individual goes on to reason what an appropriate response to the subject might be (placing themselves in the position of an impartial spectator in order to arrive at the best moral conclusion available). *Fleetwood’s* example allows us to imagine the opposite case: an individual with an underdeveloped imagination may sympathise with the subject, but their inability to put themselves in the place of another person (or a hypothetical observer) means that the ethical weight their response carries is mostly accidental. Without the power to contemplate the cost or benefit of their actions to anyone but themselves, the individual’s actions are (at best) a clumsy attempt to make the ‘need for sympathy’ go away. Such a route favours appeasement over resolution and, since Godwin considers purity of intention to be correct starting point for all moral action, is unlikely to follow an acceptable moral course. This is, of course, essential for a child’s moral development and the long journey out of childhood solipsism that Godwin observed as early as the *Account of the Seminary*.

The preface, however, insists:

Imagination is the characteristic of man. The dexterities of logic or of mathematical deduction belong rather to a well-regulated machine; they do not contain in them the living principle of nature. It is the heart which most deserves to be cultivated: not the rules which may serve us in the

nature of a compass to steer through the difficulties of life; but the pulses which beat with sympathy, and qualify us for the habits of charity, reverence and attachment.¹⁶

The author seems to endorse sensibility as a moral guide, and that literature should nurse it, a notion that Godwin appeared to criticise a year earlier in the *Reply to Parr*:

We all of us have, twisted with our very natures, the principles of parental and filial affection, of love, attachment and friendship. I do therefore not think it the primordial duty of the moralist to draw forth all the powers of his wit in the recommendation of these.¹⁷

A valorisation of sensibility would also clash with the implications of *Fleetwood*, three years later. As such, we have little reason to think that the 'William Scolfield' alter-ego reveals Godwin as a closet sentimentalist, nor should we imagine that Godwin here adopts a sentimental 'pose' for his audience (given the author's later endorsement of the preface in his *Letter of Advice*). Reading the *Bible Stories* passage through this lens gives certain elements new meaning. Working from the position that imagination is the 'living principle of nature' that Godwin refers to, and that the author sees the imagination as a faculty to be actively developed, 'cultivated' becomes the operative part of the statement. The heart is to be fed, nurtured and disciplined rather than allowed to grow out of control. The author's disdain for rules 'in the nature of a compass' should be read, not as an endorsement of an unreasoned 'moral sense', but as a rejection of deontological ethics consistent with the 'case-by-case' approach to moral questions consistent throughout Godwin's work. The author's use of 'sympathy' remains problematic, as noted in chapter five, and we are forced to assume that the emergent distinction in *Fleetwood* is something that Godwin was not conscious of in 1802 – if indeed he became conscious of it at all. The 'habits of charity, reverence and attachment' are familiar concerns in the author's work: benevolence, respect and friendship; perhaps here under synonyms so as not to conspicuously align the text with the 'New Philosophy' that was the bugbear of conservatives ('universal

¹⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 314.

¹⁷ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 2: Political Writings II*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 182.

benevolence' is the principal target of Parr's *Spital Sermon*). The preface's statement that we need sentiment (and by extension, imagination) to access these feelings is uncontroversial, but in the context of Godwin's work they acquire additional meaning. All these things are felt, but they are sentiments regulated by reason and imagination (empathy). For charity to be meaningful, it must alleviate suffering (requiring us to understand the suffering of others); 'reverence' is how the author chooses to express the respect we owe to our boundaries with other people (we must acknowledge that they are people like ourselves and entitled to their own sphere of independence);¹⁸ 'attachment' is (as in *Fleetwood*) understood as the recognition of reciprocal emotional duties. In each case, the heart must be cultivated rather than allowed to grow wild.

The imagination is itself a teacher, as Godwin explains much earlier in the *Account of the Seminary*.

The aera of foresight is the aera of imagination, and imagination is the grand instrument of virtue. The mind is the seat of pleasure and pain. It is not by what we see, but by what we infer and suppose, that we are taught, that any being is the object of commiseration. It is by the constant return of the mind to the unfortunate object, that we are strongly impressed with sympathy. Hence it is that the too frequent recurrence of objects of distress, at the same time that it blunts the imagination, renders the heart callous and obdurate.¹⁹

Although the author again refers to sympathy (the 'object of commiseration'), we see here the operation of empathy also. The imagination teaches empathy, the inference that other beings suffer as we do.

Bible Stories can be seen to advance the author's reading 'project' in other ways, also. The Bible might be seen as an unusual case, one where the text's cultural superstructure might appear to hamper its free interpretation by readers. Despite the author's belief that the mind's operations could not truly be regulated by external compulsion, Godwin also acknowledged that children's minds were heavily impressionable. Reading the Bible, where certain interpretations of its

¹⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, pp. 118–9.

¹⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 19.

tendency still carried with them the force of law in 1802, it would be asking a great deal of a young mind to expect a reading uninfluenced by outside pressures.²⁰ Godwin's book, by removing stories from their original context and presenting them as purely historical or legendary narratives, attempts to strip the Bible of its perceived authority and allow the reader to appreciate the tales for their individual merits. Such a mission was controversial, and the book attracted the ire of Sarah Trimmer in the *Guardian of Education*: 'SCRIPTURE itself ceases to be HOLY, when it is mutilated and applied to an UNHOLY PURPOSE, as it is in this compilation...'.²¹ Godwin/Scolfield justified himself using much the same argument as Locke had a century or more earlier:

The mysteries of religion, it may be, are not proper topics upon which to exercise the imperfect and infant understandings of children. There are many things dry and repulsive to the apprehensions of children to be found in the Bible; and the rituals of the Mosaic system, as well as many other things which might be mentioned, are matters which it is not the part of a Christian parent early to put before his son: he would not wish to disgust him with the abstruseness of scripture, before his mind was ripe enough to feel its merits.²²

Indeed, Godwin's method in *Bible Stories* is very similar to that suggested by his predecessor:

I think, the promiscuous reading of it, though by Chapters as they lie in Order, is so far from being of any Advantage to Children, either for the perfecting their *Reading*, or the principling their Religion, that perhaps a worse could not be found. For what Pleasure or Encouragement can it be to a Child to exercise himself in reading those Parts of a Book where he understands nothing? [...] I grant, that the Principles of Religion are to be drawn from thence, and in the Words of the Scripture; yet none should be propos'd to a Child, but such as are suited to a Child's Capacity and Notions.²³

²⁰ It remained, for example, an offence to espouse non-Trinitarian interpretations of the Bible until 1813.

²¹ Sarah Trimmer's review of the reissued *Scripture Histories* (the critic was vocal in her denunciation of both editions of the text), *Guardian of Education* 3, 372, in Kenneth W. Graham, *William Godwin Reviewed: A Reception History, 1783-1834* (New York: AMS Press, 2001), p. 212.

²² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 314.

²³ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. by John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 213.

Godwin's text differs in purpose, however. Rather than gently introduce the tenets of Christianity, the author encourages the consideration of the stories as stories, '...read merely as historical, as tales of ancient times, and a selection made for the pleasure of children'.²⁴ Godwin assures the reader that enjoying the stories in this manner cannot fail to inculcate respect for the Bible itself, and 'this foundation, if built upon by a skilful architect, is perhaps the happiest commencement which can be devised for a sincere and manly sentiment of religion'.²⁵ We see hints of the author's ambiguous religious beliefs here, in his description of Christianity as 'a system in which we are so many ways interested'.²⁶ Religious education is (with the advantage of context) clearly not Godwin's aim. Godwin values the narrative of various Biblical episodes but, in-keeping with his argument in *The Enquirer*, *Bible Stories* is most concerned with the language of the King James text. The author clearly regards the King James Version with some affection and praises the spirit of its translation. Furthermore, Godwin comments on its linguistic significance ('...made precisely at that period when our language assumed a fixed and determinate form...') and the disservice one might do to the text by paraphrasing it (it '...will not bear to be clothed in a new and second dress').²⁷ The King James Version, like Horace in *The Enquirer*, is a text worthy of study - for reasons only tangentially related to its status as a religious work. The reasoning behind Godwin's one major editorial intervention (replacing the King James' 'the LORD' with the Hebrew title 'Jehovah') comes more clearly into focus as a result. The author explains the matter in the preface as a 'more literal' translation that provides parents with the option of ignoring the 'higher mysteries of religion' entirely (treating Jehovah as they would Athena in the *Iliad*). In practice, of course, the change serves to further de-mythologise the text. 'Jehovah', stripped of his definite article and honorific becomes simply another character; the story, another legend. The language and tendency of the King James Bible are fit to be studied, divested of the trappings of textual authority – rendered ethically and intellectually harmless for a Godwinian critical

²⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 315.

²⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 315.

²⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 315.

²⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 315.

reading. The author here re-purposes the method of Genlis' Baroness: by reading a questionable text in excerpt we draw its fangs (we are able to interrogate its arguments in detail without being seduced by its overall narrative) but, contra-Genlis, Godwin renders the text open to interpretation rather than dictating how the text may be interpreted safely.

In this vein, *Fables Ancient and Modern* might be regarded as Godwin's attempt to write a model 'open' text for children to interpret. Godwin's work (this time under the pseudonym 'Edward Baldwin, Esq') takes its inspiration from Aesop – primarily Samuel Croxall's 1722 version – but unlike *Bible Stories* is composed entirely of Godwin's prose. *Fables* was the first work published as part of the Juvenile Library: the book tells seventy one individual stories, a substantial but not comprehensive selection from the many hundreds attributed to Aesop and the 196 that appear in Croxall. Godwin's particular selections suggest that the author complemented his use of Croxall's text with the work of other fabulists – most likely La Fontaine, whose collection Godwin appears to have owned, though Godwin's own childhood book of Fables was that of John Gay (published 1727-38).²⁸ Donelle Ruwe has asserted that Godwin modelled *Fables* after Trimmer's *Ladder to Learning* (1789), but there is no reference to the latter text in Godwin's diary.²⁹ The most obvious break with Croxall however, and the point that most clearly aligns Godwin's text with his own educational thought, is that the author makes little attempt to telegraph the 'correct' reading of any individual fable. Where, in Croxall, each tale is accompanied by an 'application' to explain its meaning (an authorial commentary often several times longer than the fictional text); in Godwin, the authorial voice is part of the story itself (Godwin explains in the preface his desire to write the stories as if he were telling them to children in person) and the reader is often left to interpret the meaning of the story themselves.

Fables is not without explicit moralising, and Godwin does occasionally lead the reader towards particular conclusions. More often, however, the author leaves

²⁸ Gay appears on Godwin's list of childhood reading in a manuscript note. William Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume II: 1798-1805*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 377.

²⁹ Godwin certainly notes reading other texts by Trimmer, but only one (*Knowledge of Nature*, 1780) prior to *Fables Ancient and Modern*. Donelle Ruwe, 'Guarding the British Bible from Rousseau: Sarah Trimmer, William Godwin, and the Pedagogical Periodical', *Children's Literature*, 29 (2001), 1–17.

the moral of the story unstated and on more than one occasion claims the fable's argument or conclusion to be obscure. From 'The Miser and his Treasure':

Now what do you think happened after this poor miser? He never got his money again. For some days he was so sorry, that he could hardly go to work. But by degrees he forgot his loss: and then, I cannot tell how it happened, when he was no richer than his neighbours, he ate better, and whistled better, than when he had fifty guineas that he had resolved never to change.³⁰

In the context of the other stories, the former miser's happiness is not too mysterious. A critical reader will have little difficulty in divining the author's ethical stance across the entirety of the text: Godwin, for the most part, advocates empathy with others³¹, kindness to animals³², the hollowness of avarice³³ and the absurdity of vanity³⁴. The text never endorses violence³⁵ or deception³⁶ and equates ignorance with foolishness.³⁷ Though mostly secular in tone, such points seem uncontroversial alongside the explicitly Christian morality common to children's books of the period.³⁸ Croxall, for example, always uses a fable's application to discuss any instance of Classical religiosity in the story in Christian terms. Godwin, by contrast, explains Classical religion historically and we might

³⁰ William Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, ed. by Suzanne L. Barnett and Katherine Bennett Gustafson (Romantic Circles, University of Maryland, 2014), para. 98.

³¹ In many stories, but principally, 'The Dog in the Manger' (para.7), 'The Miller, his Son, and his Ass' (52-67), 'The Poor Farmer and the Justice' (163-171) and 'The Lynx and the Mole' (Vol.II., para. 249-255).

³² 'The Boys and the Frogs' (para.138-144), 'The Mice in Council' (145-154), 'The Dog and the Shadow' (186-190), 'The Good-Natured Man and the Adder' (286-293), though the last case is particularly interesting for reasons that will become clear below.

³³ 'The Travellers and the Money-Bag' (para.43-51), 'The Miser and his Treasure' (81-98), 'The Goose with Golden Eggs' (128-137), 'The Murderer and the Moon' (Vol.II, para.150-156), 'The Contractor and the Cobbler' (Vol.II, 313-328).

³⁴ 'The Stag Drinking' (para.36-42), 'The Daw and Borrowed Feathers' (179-185), 'The Fox and the Mask' (Vol.II, para.22-25).

³⁵ In Godwin's re-telling, many fables acquire less lethal endings ('The Stag Drinking', 'The Frog and the Ox', para.259-276) and the author expresses his dismay at the amount of death fables contain (in 'The Lynx and the Mole').

³⁶ In 'The Poor Farmer and the Justice', the farmer castigates himself for his successful deception (although it is clear the deception was necessary) and gives away the compensation he has received.

³⁷ 'Washing the Blackamoore White' (Vol.II, para.84-91) and 'Ignoramus and the Student' (Vol.II, 207-219).

³⁸ The later eighteenth century saw a rise in secular children's books and was gradually moving away from the narrowly doctrinal literature of the previous century, but the children's publishing mainstream appears little less 'Christian' to the modern reader. The majority of the market ranged between texts recommending non-denominational piety to vocally evangelical works from publishers such as the Religious Tract Society, with strictly Anglican critics such as Sarah Trimmer attempting to police its boundaries. See Patricia Demers, *Heaven Upon Earth: The Form of Moral and Religious Children's Literature, to 1850* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

compare the two authors' treatment of the 'Waggoner and Hercules' fable in these terms: Croxall (using the title 'Hercules and the Carter') launches directly into a condemnation of those who resort to prayer before they attempt industry and that even 'honest good Heathens' understood this.³⁹ Godwin begins his own version with 'Before [Jesus'] time men believed that there were many Gods...'.⁴⁰ As Grenby notes, Godwin makes little effort to propagandise to his audience and there is very little in *Fables* that might be considered 'political' content. Robert Anderson has gone so far as to argue that elements of the text can be read as conservative – there is a strong line in the text to the effect of 'to thine own self be true' (seen in 'The Daw and Borrowed Feathers' and 'The Ass and the Lap-Dog') that Anderson interprets as hostile to social mobility.⁴¹ Even if we were to accept this reading (and I do not), comparison with other collections in the period would still reveal *Fables* to be considerably less critical of social aspiration than many contemporary texts. Where, in Croxall, 'The Frog and the Ox' ('The Proud Frog', in the earlier work) is followed by a lecture on how people of moderate means should not indulge in ostentation; in Godwin the same tale is repurposed into a lesson on tempering ambition with wisdom. I would argue however that, from a scholarly perspective, attempting to narrow down the book's political or ethical position is to miss the point of Godwin's exercise. Godwin here is uninterested in dictating specific ethical terms to the reader because the purpose of the work is for the reader to interpret those terms for themselves. This is not to say that the author never editorialises, but it is interesting to note how often the authorial voice sets itself at odds with the narrative, questioning the believability of the story and encouraging the reader to gauge its supposed moral against their own experience. The fable of the farmer and the viper (in Godwin, 'The Good-Natured Man and the Adder') is supposedly the origin of the phrase 'to nurse a snake in one's bosom' and is commonly given the moral that some individuals are never worthy of beneficence, or that it is in the nature of some to always do harm. Croxall criticises the farmer in this example for showing benevolence to an improper object. By contrast, Godwin has a neighbour (who has previously

³⁹ Samuel Croxall, *Fables of Aesop and Others* (London: Millar, Law and Cater, 1792), p. 100.

⁴⁰ William Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 2*, ed. by Suzanne L. Barnett and Katherine Bennett Gustafson (Romantic Circles, University of Maryland, 2014), para.64.

⁴¹ Rob Anderson, 'Godwin Disguised: Politics in the Juvenile Library', in *Godwinian Moments from the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, ed. by Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 125–46 (pp. 132–3).

benefitted from the farmer's generosity) step in to save his protagonist. The author's conclusion is thus:

The good-natured man learned a wise lesson from this adventure: he saw how much mischief he had nearly brought upon himself by a kindness that paid no attention to the different qualities of living creatures; but then he saw that the life of his child had been saved by a person, to whom he had once acted generously, without acting imprudently.

The only thing that puzzles me in this story is the behaviour of the adder. It is contrary to the nature of all animals; for I have found it almost an universal rule, that no creature will harm you, if you have not first done that creature harm.⁴²

Though the story provides a lesson, precisely what that lesson *is* remains open to interpretation. We might conclude that benevolence should always be tempered with prudence, but it is the Good-Natured Man's apparently universal benevolence that saves him. Godwin specifies that the neighbour '...did not care for the danger to himself' – if we do not act selflessly, how can we expect selflessness in return?⁴³ The author goes on to question the fable's fundamental conceit (that some creatures are intrinsically dangerous), and turns its apparent argument on its head. If we have never seen a snake harm a human without provocation, what grounds do we have to assume that snakes are dangerous? If we have no reason to believe snakes dangerous, why might they not be fitting objects of benevolence? A contextual knowledge of Godwin's philosophy might suggest to us a particular reading, but a child reader (reading a text by 'Edward Baldwin') is encouraged to think carefully about the ethical conclusions to be drawn from the text. A parent or teacher might provide some guidance on this score, but in Godwin's view this carries little weight next to the tendency uncovered by the child reader themselves. While many of Godwin's fables are considerably less complex than 'The Good-Natured Man and the Adder', each requires some degree of interpretation. Furthermore, this need for interpretation is not contained within the boundaries of the individual tale, but extends across the text as a whole. Godwin is not afraid to have claims made in one story appear to contradict the sentiments expressed in another, nor should we be surprised that it requires a little thought to reconcile the apparent moral of one fable with

⁴² Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 292–3.

⁴³ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 291.

the apparent moral of another. An example of the first instance is seen in the differing accounts of the ethical use of 'God-sends' in 'The Travellers and the Money-Bag' and 'The Disputed Oyster' (are they to be shared, or do they belong solely to the finder?).⁴⁴ The second instance presents itself in a close reading of the fables 'The Horse and the Stag' and 'The Lion and the Man'.⁴⁵

'The Horse and the Stag' is seemingly a story about the emptiness of revenge and the foolishness of Faustian bargains. The horse, having been wounded by his rival's antlers, allows a man to ride him in order to hunt and kill the stag. His vengeance achieved, however, the horse finds himself the man's slave now that the man has seen the benefits of riding. 'The Lion and the Man' sees the titular characters discussing which of them is 'the nobler animal': the lion, because of his personal strength and self-sufficiency; or the man, thanks to his ingenuity and creativity.⁴⁶ What renders the comparison between these two fables interesting is that in the first story, the horse and the man's future partnership is portrayed as the man exerting his power over the animal for personal gain; in the latter tale, the lion uses the image of a horse and rider to illustrate humanity's dependence on tools and aid to achieve what the lion can do naturally, 'the consequence of all this is' says the lion, 'I am a free creature, and you a slave'.⁴⁷ On one level, we might question whether our reliance on others and things is genuinely a weakness, given our achievements as a result, and the evidence of the earlier story leads the reader towards this point. On a further level, and noting the argument of a third tale ('The Wolf and the Mastiff', wherein the privations of freedom are thought superior to comfortable slavery), we might ask on what terms this 'slavery' is offered. Man's dependence on his horse for speed is, as 'The Horse and the Stag' reveals, an excellent deal for the man and less so for the horse. The structure of Godwin's collection is not accidental; indeed, there are numerous references in later stories to the characters and events of earlier ones,

⁴⁴ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 43–51. Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 115–127.

⁴⁵ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 277–285. Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 2*, para. 15–21.

⁴⁶ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 2*, para. 16.

⁴⁷ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 2*, para. 17. The details of the lion and the man's dispute are original to Godwin's version. In other versions of the tale, the discussion centres on a statue of a man vanquishing a lion, with the moral expressing the sentiment that a depiction of a thing is not the be-all and end-all of truth about a thing. Croxall has the lion conclude that 'If this... is all you have to say for it, let us be the carvers, and we will make the lion striding over the man' (Croxall, p. 96). Unsurprisingly, Godwin preserves this scepticism, but his embellishments add another aspect to the story.

suggesting the text is intended to be read in a linear fashion. Moreover, the text gradually acquires a more serious tone in the second volume. Death, a topic that was consciously avoided in the first volume (many fables are altered to provide a less lethal comeuppance for the foolish), is discussed at length here. 'The Lion and the Man', placed at the head of the second volume, is an intentionally complex tale that invites the contemplation of other tales alongside it in order that a properly satisfying conclusion be drawn. This fable (though there are others like it) demonstrates the author's attempt to engage the active mind of the child reader, rather than to preach a specific way of thinking.

We see Godwinian pedagogy in a microcosm in the fable 'The Labourer and his Sons', in the second volume. On his death-bed, a farmer worries over what will become of his sons after he is gone: 'He could teach them to work, as I have already told you, but he could not teach them to think'.⁴⁸

My children, said the old man, may I depend upon your doing what I am now going to tell you?

That you may! answered one. That you may! answered another.

You will find a treasure in the field we have so often cultivated together. —

I do not know what more the old man was going to say. I dare say he only meant to tell them that a field, which had maintained them for so many years, would still prove a treasure, if they did not neglect to make the best of it. But he had no sooner spoken the words I have told you, than he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, after which he lay exhausted and speechless; and about sunset he died.⁴⁹

In Croxall, this fable is a simple lesson on the rewards of industry. In that version, the father consciously uses a deceptive metaphor to induce his sons to work the land in his absence. In Godwin's version, the sons debate the meaning of their father's last words (and the first questions the wisdom of literally burying money) but all agree to dig up the field in search of the old man's treasure. Their search is of course fruitless, and they agree to plant the field in order that their work not go to waste.

⁴⁸ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 2*, para. 104.

⁴⁹ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 2*, para. 108–11.

I dare say, said the eldest, this is the treasure our father meant; he knew we were idle young fellows, and he thought the best way to make us industrious was to lead us on with a false hope.

Our father could not tell a lie! said the youngest. If he had lived to finish his speech, you would have seen that he could not!

All the brothers learned a lesson of diligence from this adventure. Young people improve twice as much by experience, as they do by precept. They saw the good effects of the hard labour they had performed, and they turned out more sober and respectable than their poor father had feared.⁵⁰

As we might expect from Godwin, the author rejects the idea that a lesson should be taught through deception. The father's aims are also characteristically Godwinian – he fears that his sons lack wisdom, not industry. The lesson itself reflects the author's conflict with Rousseau (and we should note that Godwin began *Fables Ancient and Modern* within days of completing *Fleetwood*).⁵¹ Regardless of their father's intentions, the sons are deceived by his last words (they mis-read, as *Fleetwood* does). They carry out an otherwise virtuous task (necessary, useful labour) for the wrong reasons, but the mistake is corrected by the application of critical thought: their father could not have lied; therefore his final words must have been a metaphor, rather than a trick. Godwin's final passage reports that the brothers learned a valuable lesson, but it is ambiguous as to whether this lesson was in hard work, or reason. We should note the author's comment on the efficacy of experience – the old man is sure that industry can be taught – and observe that the sons are only able to arrive at the right conclusion because they have always been taught honestly in the past.

'The Labourer and his Sons' is not the most obvious clash between Rousseau and Godwin in the text. Rousseau objected to children's fables on a variety of grounds, but principally argued that to present fiction to children was to lie to them, that the morals offered in fables were too complex for a child reader, and that the insufficiency of children's reason meant that they would invariably draw the wrong conclusions from the stories placed before them. Obviously, the entire project of *Fables Ancient and Modern* demonstrates Godwin's rejection of his predecessor's fundamental argument, but the style of Godwin's fables suggests

⁵⁰ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern*, Volume 2, para. 122–4.

⁵¹ Godwin's diary records that the author finished drafting *Fleetwood* on the 18th February 1805, and began work on *Fables* on the 22nd.

that the author saw himself addressing Rousseau's specific criticisms of La Fontaine. Rousseau archly queries the use of talking animals in fables: 'Foxes speak, then? They speak, then, the same language as crows? Wise preceptor, be careful. Weigh your response well before making it. It is more important than you think'.⁵² Godwin correspondingly foregrounds the conceit:

I have one thing to mention to you for fear of mistakes. Beasts and birds do not talk English; but they have a way of talking that they understand among one another [...] I am going sometimes to tell you what an animal says; that is, I am going to put his meaning into English words.⁵³

Wollstonecraft makes a similar concession in *Original Stories From Real Life* (1788) but Godwin goes further.⁵⁴ Rousseau objects that children lack the knowledge of the world ('If the child has not seen crows, what do you gain by speaking to him about them?') and their cultural context ('Here we are cast suddenly into antiquity's lies, almost into mythology') that fables assume.⁵⁵ Godwin endeavours to provide this, digressing to explain a range of concepts, from the simple ('a mountain'), to the complex ('why people employ servants') and along the way filling in the rudiments of Classical myth.⁵⁶ Finally, Rousseau implicitly dismisses the idea of fantasy ('Fables can instruct men, but the naked truth has to be told to children').⁵⁷ Emile's imagination is carefully policed: even when encouraged to place himself in the position of his only fictional role model, Robinson Crusoe, Emile is shepherded through a range of practical lessons (the skills he would need on the island) to engraft reality onto the boy's fancy. Fantasy, for Rousseau, is only useful where it provides a step towards active learning. Godwin, by contrast, mounts another proactive defence of literary invention, this time for the child reader:

It is not always necessary that a story should be true. Some stories are true, and some are invented; and, if they are very prettily invented, we are

⁵² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or, on Education*, ed. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 114.

⁵³ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 14.

⁵⁴ Wollstonecraft has Mrs. Mason insist that Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories* may only be read to little Fanny 'if you can make her understand that birds never talk'. *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Volume 4*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989), p. 387.

⁵⁵ Rousseau, pp. 113–4.

⁵⁶ The first two examples derive from 'The Mountain in Labour' (Vol.II, para.40-44) and 'The Old Woman and her Maids' (Vol.II, 284-289). Explanations of Classical myth are sprinkled throughout the text; 'The Sun and the Wind' (251-258), 'The Waggoner and Hercules' (Vol.II, 64-70) and 'The Satyr and the Traveller' (Vol.II, 163-170) contain the most extensive.

⁵⁷ Rousseau, p. 112.

much obliged to the people that made them. A lie is what naughty folks say, that they may deceive; like the boy and the wolf. But, if I tell a pretty story of a dog and a fox, or any other animals, I do not mean to deceive, I only mean to tell a pretty story.⁵⁸

The above reminds us of the importance of transparency for Godwin, and the author probably thought the statement necessary for the youngest readers, but we might also read it as the author admonishing both the opponents of children's fiction (like Rousseau) and the new 'moralist' children's authors he attacked in the preface to *Bible Stories*. The passage touches on one of the major issues in Godwin's oeuvre: that the literal truth and the moral/intellectual truth of a literary work are only distantly related concepts. A story that is 'prettily invented' will carry far greater instructive weight than a story ineptly told, regardless of the specific content. Contrast with Rousseau, who dismisses the effect of literary language on young minds ('...this sort of beauty is lost on children'),⁵⁹ or Aikin and Barbauld's list (in *Evenings at Home*) of books that take precedence over 'entertaining stories' – religion, geography, even mineralogy are all needed for 'the discourse of rational and well-educated people'.⁶⁰ Though we cannot assume Godwin's work to be in the same dialogue with Barbauld's writing as it is with Rousseau's, Godwin's 1802 letter to William Cole reveals a conscious desire on the author's part to distinguish his idea of education from that of Barbauld:

But here ~~the~~ my judgment & the ruling passion of my contemporaries divide. They aim at cultivating one faculty, I should aim at cultivating another. [...] I hold that a man is not an atom the less a man, if he lives & dies without the knowledge they are so desirous of accumulating in the heads of children.⁶¹

Reading *Fables Ancient and Modern* as a model text, we see how it attempts to combat these arguments. *Fables* seeks to engage children with familiar language, but uses literary invention to go beyond the familiar and stimulate the mind of the reader. In apparent parallel to this, the text offers 'a compendium of the most familiar points of natural history and the knowledge of life, without being

⁵⁸ Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 15.

⁵⁹ Rousseau, p. 114.

⁶⁰ John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Evenings at Home; Or, the Juvenile Budget Opened. Volume I* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1792), pp. 90–2.

⁶¹ Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume II: 1798-1805*, p. 249.

subjected to the discouraging arrangements of a book of science' but this is, in practice, with the aim of supporting further literary invention.⁶² Godwin rejects both Rousseau's pessimism regarding the capacity of his audience, and the Aikins' dichotomy between our enjoyment of a text and its utility. Godwin's fables are intended as an antidote to the shortcomings the author saw in contemporary children's literature – books that he thought sacrificed wonder, excitement and depth to a narrow conception of 'useful' knowledge.

Bible Stories and *Fables* both suggest Godwin's gradual disenchantment with contemporary literature, at least that which was aimed at developing young minds. The author's literary interests certainly become more historical after 1800. Aside from three major works on the Civil War period (*Lives of Edward and John Philips*, 1815; *Mandeville*, 1817; and his *History of the Commonwealth*, 1824-8) and his other biographies and cultural histories (*Life of Chaucer*, 1803; *Lives of the Necromancers*, 1834; and the unpublished *Genius of Christianity*), Godwin's work for children includes a series of histories (of England, Greece and Rome) and an account of Classical mythology (*The Pantheon*, 1806). More telling are the author's revisions to the 1823 edition of *The Enquirer*. The somewhat whiggish tone of the final essay ('Of English Style'), praising the accuracy and beauty of modern English prose, is significantly altered. The passage below appears near the close of Godwin's most substantial alteration:

It is necessary that he who would write well the English of the present day, should study our elder authors, for this reason also. There are great treasures in our native tongue, of which he will remain in complete ignorance, who is acquainted only with the writings of his contemporaries.

*Ut silvae foliis pronos mutantur in annos;
Prima cadunt...
Multa renascentur quae jam cecidere.*

We should read the authors of a forgotten age, that we may revive combinations and beauties that never ought to have perished. We may gain raciness and strength from, it may be, their rude strength; we may give muscle and force and variety, to what might otherwise run the risk of becoming too tame.⁶³

⁶² Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 1*, para. 6.

⁶³ The quotation is Horace, *Ars Poetica*, ll.60-1, 70: 'As forests change their leaves with each year's decline, and the earliest drop off... Many terms that have fallen out of use shall be born

Thirty years after *Political Justice* had established Godwin as a modern man of letters, the author had reached the conclusion that contemporary literature had lost some of the vibrancy that characterised the best of English literature. As noted earlier, Godwin's interests and reading reached back into the past in the years after finishing *The Enquirer*. In addition to his research for the *Life of Chaucer*, we can see Godwin reading the 'greats' of early modern poetry and drama. *Fleetwood* turns a scene on John Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month* (1624), in addition to the novel's obvious homage to *Othello*. In his diary, we see that Godwin spends much of the summer of 1808 reading Donne (and again in 1811). The author regularly returns to Spenser, or Spenser criticism, from 1801-1815 (27 diary entries). In one of his early letters to Percy Shelley (10th December 1812) Godwin provides a long list of 'our elder writers', all of whom date from before the Civil War.⁶⁴ We see further hints of this in the *Letter of Advice*, where Godwin not only recommends the 'greats' of the seventeenth century, but reiterates the importance of Classical literature in its original languages.

Letter of Advice to a Young American stands apart from the other texts discussed here, written some thirteen years after the establishment of the Juvenile Library. It was, like many (but not all) 'letters on education', genuinely written in response to a correspondent's plea for guidance. The young American in question, Joseph Vallence Bevan, had visited Godwin in the summer of 1817 and apparently extracted a promise from the author to provide suggestions for the younger man's reading. The first letter was later published in pamphlet form, with later correspondence published in a handful of American magazines. It is, arguably, the only one of Godwin's educational works that exists primarily to outline a curriculum, and it is worth noting the reluctance with which the author sets about this task:

I have thought, at least twenty times since you left London, of the promise I made you, and was at first inclined to consider it, as you appear to have done, as wholly unconditional, and to be performed out of hand. [...] I then altered my mind, and made a resolution, that you should never have the thing you asked for, unless you wrote to remind me of my promise. [...]

again.' Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 345.

⁶⁴ Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 1: Memoirs*, p. 82.

And, now that you have discharged your part of the condition I secretly prescribed, I am very apprehensive that you have formed an exaggerated idea of what I can do for you in this respect.⁶⁵

To simply provide suggestions as to what a young man should read is perfectly consistent with the educational method sketched in Godwin's earlier works. Recalling the author's seed metaphor in *The Enquirer*, we might ponder the source of Godwin's apprehension. If the sower of seed cannot predict which will sprout and which will fail – if we cannot control which of the books we place before a young person will be taken up – anxiety over which of them are is, as Godwin wrote in the earlier text, irrational. Yet the author had before only issued such recommendations as a secondary consideration. Though Godwin discusses many texts in detail throughout 'Of English Style', the essay is principally a work of literary criticism. Elsewhere, Godwin recommends authors, but rarely texts. To what end had the author resisted publishing a curriculum piece, when on the surface it appears a harmless addition to the educationalist's portfolio?

We might speculate that what the author fears is that Bevan has constructed him as an authority. Godwin takes pains to disabuse his young American of this notion, insisting that he is 'a man of very limited observation and enquiry' and, were he to form a library, he would seek the contribution of persons more knowledgeable than he in many fields of literature.⁶⁶ We should not read this purely as modesty. The author seeks here to establish the boundaries of his expertise and to mark the distinction between his educated opinion and the voice of pedagogic authority. Godwin seeks here to discourage Bevan from accepting his advice uncritically – because to unthinkingly accept *what* one should read is to breed the habit of accepting the argument of what we *do* read with an equal lack of reflection (although this is not a serious consideration in Godwin's theory of reading, it seems possible that it remained a concern). This conclusion offers us some insight as to why the author had avoided dictating a curriculum previously: to purposefully publish a reading list would be to insist on his authority as a man of letters, a position counterproductive to the sort of reading such a list would hope to encourage. Not only does a reading list invest texts with further

⁶⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 320.

⁶⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 320.

(and specious) authority, it allows a reader to feel they have read ‘enough’ when the list is completed – something antithetical to Godwin’s belief in the importance of wide and eclectic reading (a point he makes later in the correspondence). The advice contained in Godwin’s letters to Bevan is considerably less problematic. The letters are, first and foremost, part of a dialogue – a correspondent has always the right of reply. The advice itself was solicited (not idly, but in earnest, as Godwin’s preamble would indicate) and the author could not be accused of pontificating without invitation. Godwin had suggested books to his correspondents in the past, but commonly in response to direct requests for guidance, as seen in his letters to Marmaduke Martin (10th February 1798), William Cole (2nd March 1802).⁶⁷ In Godwin’s early correspondence with Percy Shelley (another recipient of a reading list), the younger man very quickly casts himself in the role of Godwin’s pupil. Shelley’s pupillage is implicit at first (he describes how *Political Justice* has ‘materially influenced’ his character) but is referred to explicitly in his letter of the 16th January 1812.⁶⁸ In this regard, the correspondence resembles the model of how advice should be given suggested in *Political Justice*: it is invited, and carries no authority with it but its truth.

Peter Marshall’s biography claims the *Letter of Advice* was initially published for private distribution, and this may have been an extension of the same principles (it is one thing to give out one’s advice to those who ask for it, quite another to sell that advice in the marketplace).⁶⁹ Godwin explains in his second letter that he had printed his letter for pragmatic reasons – he was so commonly asked for such advice, it was useful to have a copy on hand.⁷⁰ The author would go on to offer the piece to Archibald Constable & Co. for wider publication, which Constable accepted. Godwin mentions Constable’s publication in the second letter, but he presents his level of his involvement ambiguously (he says that he would not wish to inhibit sales of Constable’s *Edinburgh [Scots] Magazine* by distributing his own pamphlet widely). It is difficult to divine Godwin’s thinking here

⁶⁷ Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume II: 1798-1805*, pp. 8–11 and 248–251. See also Godwin’s 1802 letters to David Booth, where the author responds to professional queries in much the same manner. Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin, Volume II: 1798-1805*, p. 264 and 333–4.

⁶⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Shelley, Volume 1: Shelley in England*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 157–161.

⁶⁹ Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 342.

⁷⁰ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 329.

– having taken pains to deny his authority as a literary figure in the letter, he had now sought out a wider platform for his opinion. It may be that the author felt his caveats were sufficient to make the letter a useful contribution to the public discussion of literature, rather than a strict programme of study.

In keeping with Godwin's turn away from modern literature, the author's advice to Bevan speaks warmly of the Classics but advises the student not to postpone his study of Greece and Rome for lack of facility with their languages ('...it would be a dangerous delusion to put off the study long, under the idea that a few years hence we will read these things in the originals').⁷¹ Godwin does not dismiss contemporary authors entirely, recommending Southey's translation of the *Chronicle of the Cid* (1808) in his brief comment on medieval literature. The author advises Bevan to read a number of works of criticism: Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (1595), Temple's *Miscellanea* (1701) and Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1809-11), as well as his own *Enquirer*. Effusive in his praise of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Godwin's only recommendation of prose fiction in the first letter is Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-16), though he added in a later missive that he had remained silent on that subject because he was a novelist himself. Godwin eventually praises *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) towards the end of the correspondence. The author's endorsements in the field of philosophy are comparatively modern, listing a range of eighteenth-century thinkers and identifying Berkeley, Hume, Hutcheson, Baxter and Hazlitt for particular praise.

More interesting than Godwin's advice on what to read, however, is Godwin's advice on how it should be read.

I am not anxious to recommend a complete cycle of the best writers on any subject. You cannot do better perhaps in that respect, than I have done before you. I always found one writer in his occasional remembrances and references leading to another, till I might, if I had chosen it, have collected a complete library of the best books on any given topic, without being obliged to recur to any one living counsellor for his advice.⁷²

⁷¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 321.

⁷² Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 322.

The author exhorts his student to explore literature, rather than to accept what older and wiser heads have told him to read. In his final letter, Godwin encourages Bevan to read poetry widely:

...if your (sic) guided by common fame, you will not materially err; it will be good that you should somewhat use your own independent judgement in saying. 'This has been praised too much, and this not enough.' You will have much aid in your decision if you make Shakespeare, and Milton, and Chaucer, and Spenser, your standards.⁷³

In some respects, the comment illustrates Godwin's image of the ideal reader: a mind that has been trained by exposure to the best works, informed by consensus, but willing to exercise their own critical judgment. The advice here also addresses the issue of a list excluding valuable reading simply by virtue of being finite, using 'great works' as critical tools to assess the merit of texts found in one's wider reading. The thread that runs through the entirety of the correspondence is, however, the implication that this critical judgment is formed by imagination and empathy, rather than from comparisons with canonical works. In the original letter, Godwin cites the preface to *Bible Stories* alongside *The Enquirer* as his most important works on education. His argument here displays a contrasting emphasis to the earlier work, but the position is fundamentally the same: where in *Bible Stories* Godwin insisted that imagination was the basis of morality, in the *Letter of Advice* he claims that it principally depends on empathy.

The noblest part of man is his moral nature; and I hold morality principally to depend, agreeably to the admirable maxim of Jesus, upon our putting ourselves in the place of another, feeling his feelings, and apprehending his desires; in a word, doing to others, as we would wish, were we they, to be done unto.⁷⁴

Imagination and empathy are, for Godwin, inextricably linked. Imagination makes empathy possible, empathy makes morality meaningful and not arbitrary ('a cold

⁷³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 336.

⁷⁴ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 321.

and arid circle of principles').⁷⁵ Reading is the principal means by which we can develop the imagination, making it the foundation of moral education.

Godwin was not content to entirely leave education to reading, however, and in the correspondence we catch a glimpse of the author as a teacher. In the third letter, Godwin attempts to dispel Bevan's fear that the opening of the philosopher's first letter contained some degree of reproach: 'I was only ingenuously giving the reason that influenced my mind at the time I penned my advice. When I mean to find fault with you, it shall be in unambiguous terms'.⁷⁶ Those unambiguous terms were at the head of Godwin's next letter:

You will be a little mortified at my telling you (which in frankness and after what has passed between us I think I ought to do) that I do not quite like your last letter. It has too much egotism in it. [...] the egotism of this letter is like what some philosophers have called *egomism*, as if there was nobody but yourself in the world...⁷⁷

Godwin's criticism is forceful, but he does not dwell on it, and the remainder of the letter continues with both topical advice (on the instructive example afforded by the on-going general election) and gossip regarding their mutual acquaintances. The example is noteworthy because it shows Godwin in a practical light – as someone engaged in individual education, as well as a theorist of it. We see reflections of Godwin's theory here too, in the substance of the author's concerns (he accuses Bevan of solipsism). The subsequent letter suggests that the young American took Godwin's reproof in positive spirit, and the philosopher praises his student's modesty and candour, '...the plain utterance of our sentiments respecting each other is essential to the best kind of human intercourse'.⁷⁸

The letters demonstrate that Godwin in 1818 had lost none of his zeal for the educational ideas he had outlined twenty years before. The significance that the author attached to the preface of *Bible Stories*, both here and in the 1828 manuscript, suggests that Godwin saw its argument as an important addition to

⁷⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 314.

⁷⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 330.

⁷⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 332.

⁷⁸ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 334.

his theory of reading. I would argue that the preface serves as a useful clarification of the author's moral/tendency argument in *The Enquirer*, but there is little to suggest that Godwin recognised the need for a clarification at all. Although in the *Letter of Advice* Godwin clearly regards the preface as a companion text to *The Enquirer*, he seems to have made no attempt to incorporate the later work's argument in his revisions for the second edition (despite making major alterations elsewhere). It seems likely, therefore, that Godwin saw no inconsistency between these positions. Imagination, empathy and critical reading are all bound together in a form of decentralised, de-authoritised education. Our intellectual development, though important, is a secondary and supporting element to our use of imagination. We might find here a hint of the self-image that Godwin constructed in his *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft*:

I have perhaps a strong and lively sense of the pleasures of the imagination; but I have seldom been right in assigning to them their proportionate value, but by dint of persevering examination, and the change and correction of my first opinions.⁷⁹

Godwin was conscious of the awkward dichotomy he had created between his own reason and Wollstonecraft's intuition. Godwin's children's books are an attempt to address that mistake – the search for a third way between intellect and feeling – but an attempt that defies conclusive answers. I shall discuss this defiance (or rather, Godwin's rejection of certainty) fully in the conclusion.

⁷⁹ Godwin attempted to revise this passage in the second edition of the *Memoirs*. Although more qualified, the revised statement speaks of a similar self-image. Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin Volume 1: Memoirs*, p. 140 and 156–7.

Conclusion

To fully explore the implications of the author's theory of education, we must return to the beginning – to what the author thinks of as knowledge. Throughout his writings Godwin refers to himself as a sceptic but, because he considers sense experience to be ultimately reliable (indeed, he considers it to be the only reliable source of knowledge); he should be more properly described as an empiricist. Most importantly for our purposes, Godwin's empiricism is of a particularly severe kind. The author frequently returns to pseudo-Platonic ideals of truth, volition and intention that he accepts are most likely unattainable by human minds. Implicitly, any knowledge not entirely rooted in direct sense experience is epistemologically suspect, and this category encompasses the vast majority of human endeavour. The author admits varied standards of epistemological reliability for relative purposes:

Scepticism, as has abundantly appeared, consists, not in indifference, but in a nice perception of the degrees of evidence. It is one of the oldest remarks of ethical writers, that in all the ordinary concerns of human life we must act upon what they denominate moral evidence, that is, a considerable degree of probability. ¹

Certainty, however, is an ideal beyond the reach of our comprehension. Certainty requires a concrete knowledge of all variables, many of which are impossible to access through sense experience (the most common example of this being events that occurred in the past which, even if the actor was a participant in them, are subject to the vagaries of memory and recall). Though Godwin's essay 'Of Scepticism' is not explicit on this point, placed alongside Godwin's philosophical ideals of volition and ethical action we can infer that the author regards certainty as another aspirational referent – that is, a point of perfection that we should aim for, regardless of the fact that we cannot achieve it. Godwin's understanding of learning confronts the rarity of certain knowledge, both in terms of questioning how things are taught, and how they are understood.

¹ William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 308.

If it is impossible to be certain about any matter beyond our direct experience, then any model of education that relies on the communication of knowledge from one individual to another is fraught with problems. A case can be made for a tutor who leads their charge through a course of experiential learning (as Rousseau claims to do) but Godwin regards this solution as inadequate (setting aside the compromises of Rousseau's specific method) because it neglects the many great advances in knowledge that modern society has achieved. The course of human improvement will advance at a crawl if every generation is required to re-learn every mistake made by its predecessors. We must, effectively, allow young people to stand on the shoulders of giants if they are to achieve better moral outcomes (and therefore, greater happiness) than their parents.

We cannot simply drill young people with the knowledge of their ancestors, because that knowledge itself may be riddled with errors. Not only must we interrogate accounts of 'what our ancestors did' for inaccuracies, mysteries and misrepresentations, but we must take care not to assume that the ways of the past are suitable for the future. This is the most socially radical aspect of Godwin's theory of education: that we cannot ethically indoctrinate young people into any existing practice without allowing them to examine its moral rectitude and utility for their own lives. Since Godwin accepts that young people are impressionable and credulous until their critical powers have sufficiently developed, the feasibility of this examination renders an education in the assumptions and practices of past and contemporary society a distinctly secondary priority after the development of the critical faculty itself.

In the case of either experiential or conventional education, the difficulty of certainty presents an additional problem for educators: any programme of education is in part derived from the experience of its tutors (who, at the very least, will prioritise some forms of learning over others) and the relevance of this experience for the student cannot be assured, nor can its effective communication. Even an attempt to replicate direct sense experience (as a form of experiential learning) is affected by the impossibility of either perfectly replicating a past experience, or knowing (qualitatively) that this replication has been successful. In conventional education, the problem is more simply rendered as 'teaching the wrong thing', by which the knowledge that the tutor attempts to communicate is faulty or irrelevant. These doubts would make the basic notion of

pedagogic authority unstable for Godwin, even if he had not already arrived at fundamental objections to authority elsewhere.

The philosopher's objections to authority are numerous and wide-ranging but, for the purposes of discussing his educational thought, we should focus on one in particular. Writing of positive institutions in *Political Justice* (that is, of authority exerting power to 'correct' the judgments of the less powerful):

'I have deeply reflected,' suppose, 'upon the nature of virtue, and am convinced that a certain proceeding is incumbent on me. But the hangman, supported by an act of parliament, assures me I am mistaken.' If I yield my opinion to his *dictum*, my action becomes modified, and my character too. An influence like this is inconsistent with all generous magnanimity of spirit, all ardent impartiality in the discovery of truth, and all inflexible perseverance in its assertion.²

If the exertion of authority is detrimental to adult moral reasoning (the 'impartial discovery of truth'), then it is possibly *more* harmful to impressionable young minds. Tuition treads a fine line between the damage done by the careless imposition of authority, and the damage done by a laissez-faire attitude to children's intellectual and moral development (among other reasons, because a young mind's reason is unlikely to develop the necessary rigour without discipline and challenge).

None of this is to say that Godwin regards education or tuition as without value, or that he entirely rejects the existing forms of education that we are familiar with. What it does mean, however, is that our use of existing educational methods should always be qualified by an acknowledgment of their (and our) fallibility. We might also infer that the value of an educational method is tied directly to the degree to which it engages the subject's direct sense experience. That Godwin does not apparently find this remarkable, and that it does not lead to him endorsing what we would consider a primarily experiential education (as Rousseau does), is a result of what the author considers to constitute direct sensory experience.

² William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 75. The passage is not substantially altered in the revisions.

In 'Of Scepticism', Godwin's examples of sensory information are all confined to the common perceptions (sight, sound and touch, in his explanation). The author stresses that determinations beyond this are inferences *from* sense, and therefore subject to doubt. Godwin takes this so far as to say that the existence of external matter is itself an inference from sense, '...and the sceptic knows that it is open to discussion and question.'³ This (and other factors) suggests the influence of Berkeleyian immaterialism (subjective idealism) on Godwin's empiricism.⁴ The character of Godwin's work elsewhere also privileges the internal life of the mind. We might consider the author's distinction in *The Enquirer* between the man of talent and the man without, walking to Hyde Park Corner. 'The dull man goes straight forward... if he experience any flights of fancy, they are of a short extent; of the same nature as the flights of a forest-bird, clipped of his wings...'.⁵ The man of talent 'gives full scope to his imagination' as he walks. The man reasons, calculates, imagines a multitude of different scenes; 'unindebted to the suggestions of surrounding objects, his whole soul is employed.'⁶ Godwin is not, however, a rationalist. The ideas present in the mind are not generated in the mind, nor are they innate. The full scope of the imagination is a succession of ideas derived from experience ('we know nothing of any substance [...] but by experience'),⁷ reorganised, combined and reinterpreted. 'In all cases the operations of our understanding are rather analytical than synthetical, rather those of resolution than composition.'⁸

If all ideas are derived from experience, but all ideas that are not immediate sensory perception are subject to doubt (we cannot be perfectly sure about the existence of physical matter, but we can be sure of the sensations associated

³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 303.

⁴ In his letter to Marmaduke Martin (10.02.1798), the author calls Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) '...the most closely reasoned book in the world.' The same work is the first philosophical text that Godwin recommends to the young Joseph Bevan.

⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 95.

⁶ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 95.

⁷ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 159.

⁸ In the interests of clarity, the quotation is taken from the 1798 Political Justice, though the revision is a minor one. Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 179; William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 4: A Enquiry Concerning Political Justice Variants*, ed. by Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 192.

with it), then we must infer that Godwin means to balance the weight of 'knowledge' on the feelings generated by experience, rather than the apparent facts of experience themselves. This requires further explanation: various epistemological issues mean that I cannot perfectly verify that an event has occurred, nor can I claim that my interpretation of the event is accurate. I can, however, claim to know my own feelings regarding the event. No other element of the experience can be verified beyond all doubt – regardless of whether my feelings were generated by a mistaken assessment of the event, I have felt them and know that they exist. This opens the door to defining feeling more broadly than mere sensory perception. If sensations such as pain, warmth and texture are empirically valid, what reason do we have to dismiss more complex feelings such as pride, pity or love? Though these feelings are indeed more complex, they rest on the same epistemological basis. It is with this basis in mind that we should read the author's words to Joseph Bevan: 'If the story be a falsehood, the emotions, and in many readers the never-to-be-destroyed impressions it produces, are real...'.⁹

This has major implications for Godwin's theory of education, underpinning the author's idea of learning. If the feelings generated by an experience are the most valuable thing learned from it (in that they are the most empirically sound element), then the source of the experience is not of significant importance. An experiential education is no better than a conventional one, if the subject is emotionally and intellectually engaged to an equal extent. This may be why the author regards the relationship between tutor and student to be important, but not crucial. A close relationship would facilitate the student's engagement with learning, but a sufficiently eager and self-motivated pupil might achieve great things with a tutor who remained emotionally distant.

Godwin's epistemological underpinning validates reading as an educational practice. The experience of reading gives rise to the same feelings that might be generated by lived experience (it achieves the same level of validity) but suffers none of the issues associated with attempting to live all the things one might wish to learn about (it is much safer to read about moral perdition than it is to live through it, to use the topic the author is most concerned about). Furthermore,

⁹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 321.

Godwin suggests that reading cannot significantly deceive us. Though we may not be conscious of the biases of a text before we engage with it, they are there to be discovered and can be ignored if we so choose. In contrast, a tutor may lie to us, or punish us when we do not concur with their arguments. Organic, lived, experience can deceive us through subjectivity – we cannot see the whole picture of an event and thus the inferences we draw from it may well be flawed. A text is, in principle, self-contained, and so grants the reader the perfect knowledge of all variables necessary to arrive at the best possible interpretation of its content. It is interesting to note that Godwin here resists applying an ideal of interpretation (as he does in the case of voluntary action), acknowledging that interpretation remains a personal matter. We can surmise that, while the author believes in the possibility of a perfect readerly interpretation, the differences between readers will (in all practical cases) lead to variations in interpretation.¹⁰ The learner's freedom to interpret a text means that reading has much to recommend it as a de-authoritised method of education.

* * *

Godwin often appears to suggest that reading is the only form of education one needs:

Books are the depositary of every thing that is most honourable to man. Literature, taken in all its bearings, forms the grand line of demarcation between the human and the animal kingdoms. He that loves reading, has every thing within his reach. He has but to desire; and he may possess himself of every species of wisdom to judge, and power to perform.¹¹

It even performs the role of companion, providing better conversation than the dull people one encounters in everyday life. As the student of *Fables Ancient and Modern* tells his cousin, Ignoramus:

Since you came in, cousin, my books have been shut. I no longer talk with Plato and Socrates, the wise and the good, the illustrious dead of all ages and countries. They talk like oracles, with the depth of enlightened knowledge, and the kindness of the most affectionate friend. Your talk is

¹⁰ Approaching from a different angle, my reading here concurs broadly with that of Rajan.

¹¹ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 95.

hardly worthy of a rational being. Yet among the lessons they have taught me is that of patience and good-humour; and I have listened to your unmeaning impertinence, without being once out of temper.¹²

The author pragmatically recognises that reading cannot entirely replace lived experience. 'We cannot understand books till we have seen the subjects of which they treat', but we should explore to what extent this comment is borne out in Godwin's work.¹³ The author so passionately recommends a literary education that we might consider his few comments on the value of lived experience to be a half-hearted attempt to balance his own rhetoric. If the most valuable element of experience is internal (that is, feeling), and this can be accessed from any source, to what extent does lived experience matter? Godwin's response to Rousseau, both in *The Enquirer* and *Fleetwood*, allows us to draw a distinction between different types of experience that illustrates their relative value.

As we are well familiar, Godwin refers to Rousseau's method as a 'puppet-show exhibition'. *Emile* purports to describe a childhood-long course of experiential tuition, but its method is one of illusion. What its subject believes to be lived experiences are, in most respects, false. Placing Godwin's ethical and practical objections to this to one side for a moment, we might opine that Rousseau's stage-managing offers theoretically better (or at least, equal) results than a real, lived, experiential education. How might we meaningfully distinguish Rousseau's false experience from lived experience, when the feeling it engenders is not (in principle) affected by its method? To put it another way: if Emile's education is successful (he follows its full course and its method is not apocalyptically uncovered), how is his experience any worse than one that came about organically? While *The Enquirer* dismisses Rousseau's system as impractical ('in hourly danger of discovery'); the author's observations on the interpretation of reading, alongside the example of *Fleetwood*, suggest a three-way distinction between lived experience, false experience and the experience gained through reading. Though all three achieve the same level of empirical validity (feeling) in

¹² William Godwin, *Fables Ancient and Modern, Volume 2*, ed. by Suzanne L. Barnett and Katherine Bennett Gustafson (Romantic Circles, University of Maryland, 2014), para. 218.

¹³ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 3: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 211.

Godwin's epistemology, the course by which they reach it colours their overall value as experiences.

False experience is conceptually closer to the experience gained from reading, though it presents itself as a substitute for lived. False experience exists within boundaries established by its creator, at least in Rousseau's method, because the terms of the lesson have been dictated and organised by the tutor. The people Emile meets are essentially performers, either consciously playing a part or manipulated into a role that suits the tutor's agenda. The tutor's wisdom is perfect; nothing ever happens that has not been foreseen – he is the author of his pupil's education. What false experience lacks, compared with experienced derived from reading, is transparency. The feelings generated by either may be the same, but the individual has a limitless capacity to question and reinterpret the feelings encountered in reading thanks to a well-defined sense of the text's boundaries. The individual is always broadly aware of how valid the inferences they make are, when based on the evidence of a read experience. A false experiential education provides quite the opposite, encouraging a false certainty about the significance of the individual's experience. Rousseau seems to regard this as a feature, rather than a flaw: we see in the *Social Contract* that he founds the republic on the pretence of divine authority, in order to give the people confidence in their own project. The author is happy with 'useful lies' provided they are turned to socially positive ends. Rousseau's authority figures are, of course, always unerringly wise. The objection that the subject's certainty is unfounded appears academic if the experience itself is morally 'true'. To passionately believe something that is identifiably true, on only flimsy evidence is (for Rousseau) functionally the same as the same truth arrived at logically – and according to the author's method, far easier to achieve. Godwin rejects this, not only ethically but epistemologically. It is impossible (though, like a good sceptic, Godwin says 'probably' impossible) for the tutor to be perfectly correct in every aspect of every moral and intellectual question. Neither is it possible that the message the tutor intends to communicate will be passed along perfectly and accepted exactly by the subject. Somewhere along this sceptical chain, error will be introduced and then compounded by the illusion of certainty offered by false experience.

Lived experience suffers from similar issues of certainty. At its most basic level, the problem of induction presents us with the concern that past experience is not

a perfect guide for future events. This is an issue for all three types, but the clearly demarcated boundaries of experience derived from reading lead us away from such assumptions. Conversely, lived (and false) experience encourages an assurance in our 'first-hand' knowledge. These types more fully engage our direct senses, appear unmediated by other minds (we are not consciously responding to another's account of the matter), and are not apparently bounded by anything other than the limits of existence – we make wide-ranging assumptions based on first-hand sensory data that we would not credit had we received them any other way (such as the existence of the physical world). Godwin is clear that these latter two points are epistemologically problematic. The author considers the input of other minds to be of considerable importance (a position arrived at through conversation with others is stronger than one arrived at alone), and considers the evidence of the senses in a narrow sense rather than an expansive one (Godwin is explicit that even the most limited inferences from sense are open to question). False experience presents these problems *in addition* to its potential to introduce erroneous variables to the cognitive process. Even accuracy fails to guarantee validity. The extent to which our reading experiences are accurate is clear. At the most essential level, Godwin believes it best to be open about the boundaries of what we know (and can know), thus signalling the inadequacy of our conclusions.

If this frankness significantly separates the experience we gain from reading from the other types (and shows it to be better in that regard), why does Godwin not dismiss experiential education entirely? The answer lies in what lived experience has to offer over the other two: failure. False experience and reading experience exist within the boundaries established by their authors, nothing happens within them that has not been accounted for. Lived experience is a kind of 'wild' education, and its unpredictability makes it useful in ways that the other types cannot replicate.

It is difficult to meaningfully fail at reading. We may not finish a text, or we may struggle to understand it, but this is an inability to access an experience rather than the experience of failure itself. To read a text and come to illogical or perverse conclusions about its meaning should not be considered failure, either. These are contextually determined interpretations of the text's tendency, that they do not accord with the intentions of the author or the consensus of other readers

is not the same as the awareness of one's lack of success in a particular endeavour (nor does it have identifiable consequences, but more of this below).

False experience can provide only the illusion of failure. Emile believes himself to fail on a number of occasions, but these are lessons intended to teach him the limits of his capacity. Emile's failures are rarely moral ones, and we should make the distinction here between shortcomings of physical or intellectual ability, and moral errors. Knowing our individual limitations is not something of major interest to Godwin or Rousseau, but our capacity to explore moral questions is. Emile's 'failures' have no consequences because they occur within the lines established by the tutor. The key element is control: so long as the effects of the student's actions take place as the tutor has foreseen, the experience is false. Were the tutor to contrive a lesson without a resolution in mind, the experience would be in all respects real – constituting genuine lived experience. The end may be the same, but the journey is different. Both real and false failure may teach the subject about their own fallibility, but in qualitatively different ways. Failure engineered by the tutor is necessarily based on the subject's capacity, else it could not be foreseen. Emile fails to win his first foot race because the tutor knows that his pupil is unaware of the shortest route around the track. Real failure may come about because of factors beyond anyone's control. Lived experience offers a considerably wider range of possible outcomes, giving rise to a wider range of feeling. *Fleetwood* also demonstrates that the real consequences of real failure hinge on the feelings of others. Forbearance and forgiveness only matter if the feelings of others can be genuinely hurt by our errors. Not only is the idea of condemning the subject for mistakes that have been foreseen unnecessarily cruel, it also raises the uncomfortable image of a young person surrounded by people who are willing and able to castigate them for offences they have been manipulated into committing, then able to convincingly 'forgive' them when they have done penance. Not only would Godwin find this abhorrent, but he would also likely doubt its efficacy. To what extent could these performers accurately imitate the hurt feelings of those wounded by real moral error? Additionally, an accurate simulation would need to model the long-term repercussions of the error (others holding a grudge over years, perhaps) which seems beyond practicality. The solipsism and misplaced paranoia of Casimir Fleetwood suggests the grave consequences of misrepresenting the pain of others. The final point of contention

is both ethical and epistemological: were a tutor to manipulate a student into moral failure, the student would genuinely have committed a moral error. Aside from the ethical issue here (the tutor is doubly responsible for the crime), it is entirely possible that others will be genuinely hurt by this – their reactions might not be ‘scripted’ and so the repercussions of the student’s transgression would qualify as real, lived experience.

The student is, however, unlikely to perceive the transition from controlled to wild experience. So long as they do not perceive this transition, most of their feelings are likely to be the same. But Godwin’s empiricism is not binary. While the student’s direct sense experience is the most reliable part of their cognitive toolkit, an event consists of more than simply the student’s direct perception. Conscious of this, the student is able to explore the less reliable elements of experience and the critical mind is able to consider the degrees of evidence at hand. Though the subject’s initial feelings are likely the same between an event that has occurred organically and one that has been contrived, their reflections will be different. The reflections based on a controlled experience will be narrow because the evidence they have to work with is tidy and logical (it is intended to convey a message, so contains as little ambiguity as the tutor can manage). There are a limited range of conclusions that can be drawn. By contrast, reflections on lived experience will vary considerably. Lived experience may abound with ambiguities - any element of an event that is beyond the student’s direct perception might respond to investigation (whereas in false experience elements have no substance beyond their direct interaction with the student).¹⁴ The unpredictability of lived experience creates possibly limitless potential for reflection. The corresponding strength of the experience we derive from reading is that, although its boundaries are more obviously finite, its mode of operation *demand*s reflection. It is possible for the dull and incurious to assume that nothing of importance takes place beyond their direct interactions with the world (indeed, Rousseau’s illusion seems to balance on Emile rarely venturing beyond that outlook on life), and thus never reflecting on their lived experience or attempting to make significant inferences from it.

¹⁴ Elements of a false experience are, in theory, defined by their relation to the learner (they are playing a role in a specific moral lesson). Were these roles constructed in greater depth, if these characters had an internal life away from the message they are intended to convey, we might question if interaction with these elements still constituted false experience - as it would have grown beyond the control of the tutor and into an essentially parallel world. This, however, presents a very different question about reality than I think either Godwin or Rousseau intends.

Godwin does not imagine the same to be true of reading. All reading is an act of interpretation. Reading and living temper one another in Godwin's emergent theory of experience: the former is bounded by the limits of the text, but necessitates the use of reflection and critical thought; the latter is potentially limitless, but encourages false certainty and a banal engagement with the objects of experience. Each benefits the other and allows us to reject the need for controlled (false) experience that embodies the negative qualities of both.

* * *

Reading offers more than Godwin's theory of experience would seem to suggest, but this should come as no surprise when we consider the passion with which the author recommends literary education. Reading offers its own experience, and this experience achieves the same level of validity as other kinds, while bringing with it the additional merits of critical reflection. This critical reflection enables a function even more vital for human happiness: the imagination. The potential for reading to empower the imagination is what lifts a literary education above all other forms in Godwin's estimation.

Imagination enables reading, and reading enables the imagination. The business of interpretation requires at least the rudimentary ability to go beyond one's current experience to conceive the point the text is appears to convey. We should remember that Godwin conceives of only a loose connection between the intended purpose of a text (its moral) and the meaning the reader discerns from it (the tendency). The imagination is clearly an active player in this, as the author rejects the idea that the reader passively accepts the meaning of the words on the page; 'It seems that the impression we derive from a book, depends much less upon its real contents, than upon the temper of mind and preparation with which we read it.'¹⁵ There is nothing to suggest that this use of imagination is confined to literary reading. A reader interprets, even when decoding the most basic texts. A restaurant menu encourages the reader to reflect on which dishes are most palatable; a road sign prompts a reader to situate themselves spatially. In many cases, the active imagination operates at only a nominal level – but it must always be present if, as the author says, the existing conditions of mind are

¹⁵ Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, p. 138.

the primary element in the reader's understanding of the text. In turn, the impressions gathered become part of the reader's memory (as read experience) and provide the basis of future imaginative reflections.

We can envisage how the same process might occur in lived experience, as the individual infers from past feelings and events what might occur in the future. A limited imagination, of course, falls prey to the illusion of certainty. The imagination must be enriched by wide and varied experience (the simplest route to which is through reading), and exercised. This exercise is the critical evaluation of ideas, the 'work' of empathy, and the fashioning of simple ideas into complex ones. Godwin's theory of cognition denies that ideas are created in the mind. Rather, apparently new concepts are compositions of existing ones creating more complex forms. We can infer that the author regards this as a capacity that must be developed, as some minds are more advanced than others (the 'signs of genius') despite the absence of innate ideas and Godwin's insistence on the relatively limited physical differences between individuals and their equal potential for moral action.¹⁶ Such development, then, is the fundamental business of education – providing experience, yes, but more importantly training the mind to use and go beyond their experience. It is clear, however, that Godwin does not consider this development to be purely (or even primarily) intellectual. We might be inclined to associate the training of cognitive skills with reason, but Godwin insists that feeling is both the instigator of the cognitive process (the mind must be excited *to* reason) and the bedrock of reliable judgments (since feeling is the most empirically valid point of reference). As such, though I have referred to the training of the mind to use its experience, it seems likely that this the 'cultivation of the heart' to which Godwin refers. Imagination (a faculty that is both felt and reasoned) is the training in critical reflection that allows reading experience to temper lived experience, and so allows for moral judgments that improve upon those which have gone before.

¹⁶ *Political Justice* (1798), II.3. Godwin would eventually amend his thoughts on the equality of individuals at birth, a change that significantly troubles Mark Philp in *Godwin's Political Justice* (p.223). His rejection of Helvétius in this area, to allow for the possibility of certain inherited tendencies, is discussed in *Thoughts on Man* (p.41-8). Godwin's revised position, however, concedes no more to the concept of innate ideas than Locke's does (Locke, indeed, argues in both the *Essay* and *Some Thoughts* that we may have natural inclinations and aptitudes; *Essay* 1.3.3 and *Some Thoughts*, n.66).

It is at the intersection of experience, imagination and moral judgment that we find Godwin's vision of the progressive nature of man. This visionary zeal was greatly prized, but critically misunderstood, by the author's contemporaries. Rather than what Wordsworth saw as a promise 'to abstract the hopes of man / Out of his feelings', Godwin makes feeling and reason inseparable parts of the individual's capacity for private judgment.¹⁷ Godwin claims that we know nothing, except by experience. The most empirically valid form of experience is the direct experience of feelings, and the imagination (utilising both our prior experience of feeling and our ability to reason) allows us to conceive of the feelings of others. The most accurate moral judgments we can make are based on the conclusions we draw from these two sources – reasoned decisions, based on the evidence of feeling. The author implies that the accuracy of moral judgments is relative, though their actual moral value is not. Godwin actively rejects the idea of relative good and evil, arguing that a decision that causes even a limited amount of suffering cannot be considered 'good', even if it constitutes the best choice apparent to the individual. Perfectly reasoned ethical assessments and decisions, however, are presented as an ideal beyond human capacity, forcing us to infer that 'good' actions are possible based on an incomplete understanding of the dilemma at hand. The author's definition of virtue (the balance of an individual's actions tending towards good over evil) suggests that it is possible to perform a wholly good action, from the purest motives, without total understanding. The visionary development of this is that Godwin argues all relatively accurate moral judgments tend towards the spread of happiness for all. Furthermore, that the process by which accurate moral judgments are arrived at contains the potential for continuous (to all intents and purposes, infinite) improvement, and that it is only the forces discouraging or preventing the exercise of individual judgment that retard the advancement of human happiness. The intrinsic hope of Godwin's argument is taken up by Percy Shelley in the *Defence of Poetry* (1821, published 1840), and we might look on Shelley's essay as a branch from Godwin's experiential-imaginative-moral thesis that draws on its most prophetic elements. Shelley describes imagination as the agent of change, expressed in its purest

¹⁷ The quotation appears in Book X (ll.807-8) in the 1805 *Prelude*, and in Book XI (ll.225-6) in the 1850.

form through language. We see the parallels with Godwin's thesis instantly, but Shelley's argument is less parallel than it is mirror. Where Godwin stresses the importance of imagination in interpretation, Shelley exhorts its power in creation. Imagination grants the poet access to a world of perfect forms and, for Shelley, true poetry communicates some of that essence to the reader. Shelley assumes that an uncomplicated transmission is possible from idea, to expression, to reader (though language is the only medium that has this potential, all other forms of art obscuring the intended message). The role of the reader in the *Defence* seems mostly passive – they exist to receive the poet's words (and are inspired by them, because they touch the perfection of human nature). By contrast, Godwin sees the liberatory power of the imagination in the act of interpretation. Literature does not then provide a vision of a better world, but instead enables the reader to compose their own vision of the world they wish to live in.

The difference between the two thinkers is significant because it serves as a reminder of Godwin's scepticism, his faith in individual judgment, and the value of reading to both of these principles. Godwin places no weight on the communication of the author's ideas and instead balances his hopes on the ideas that the reader develops from the text. Where Shelley believes in the possibility of a 'correct' interpretation that recognises the full prophetic voice of the poet, Godwin's scepticism implies this to be impossible and his philosophy of private judgment renders it irrelevant. Shelley's vision, like Rousseau's, provides only the illusion of certainty and effectively discourages the enquiry and critical thought that Godwin regards as the essence of genius.

Godwin's definition of genius is, perhaps, the most empowering part of his theory of education. For the author, 'genius' is fundamentally the spirit of enquiry – a spirit that might be generated at any point in life if the environment encourages it and the mind is ready for it. Godwin's theory assumes an equality of potential that rejects 'genius as cultural leadership' (as in Shelley's arguably self-congratulatory image of the inspired poet in the *Defence*, or the guidance of Coleridge's 'clerisy') in favour of a libertarian vision of human improvement driven by independent endeavour. The future, Godwin seems to say, lies in change from the bottom up. Every individual has chance to live a happier life than their predecessors, and contribute to the happiness of people around them, if only they are equipped (mentally prepared, as active thinkers) to grab the chance when it presents itself.

Though Godwin denies the efficacy of positive education (that is, tuition) to prepare people in this way in *The Enquirer*, the rest of his oeuvre betrays an unconscious sense that education presents the best method by which this can be effected, if we are not simply to place our hopes in providence (a doctrine Godwin rejects with vehemence). We might think of this opposition as a distinction between active and passive hope, and the author's theory of cognition makes it clear which of the two he would favour.

The influence of the environment should not be discounted, of course, and it is possible to infer from *Political Justice* that Godwin imagines the reform of personal behaviour and social institutions would do much to support the development of individual genius – indeed we might use such logic to explain the author's scepticism regarding the development of genius through tuition. It is clear that Godwin does not regard the shielding of the learner from experiences beyond their tuition to be possible or desirable. Since such experiences must happen, we should aim for them to be beneficial to, and in the spirit of, the character of genius we would aim for future generations to develop (that is, encouraging enquiry and respecting private judgment).

There are, however, two aspects to Godwin's theory of education that foreground the importance of individual learning (and the role that tuition plays in supporting this). Firstly: the only method of societal reform that respects the individual's duty to act according to their private judgment is the education of individuals. If it is wrong to impose change from above, we must work with individuals to improve themselves and therefore bring about greater happiness from below. Secondly: if the spark of genius may break out at any time, it requires a mind prepared for the event. Godwin imagines genius as a sudden fire of enthusiasm, and for this to be turned to productive ends necessitates a mind with the self-discipline to see things through to their conclusion. Not only must the mind be trained (a goal that we see in the style of Godwin's writing for children) but it must be shielded, not from moral dangers or difficult ideas, but from the hardship and suffering that might leave them unable to sustain the fire of genius at all.

Tuition presents one of many apparent paradoxes in Godwin's theory of education – how might one train a student in the habits of independent thought, when everything about tuition carries with it the implication that the student should

follow the wisdom of the tutor? Though reading presents a de-authoritised method of learning, it is clear that Godwin still sees a role for teachers in his model, and the matter is never entirely resolved in his work. Equally the author never arrives at a definite position on public, private, or self-education, and we see the merits and flaws of each in more than one of Godwin's texts. The author denies that such conclusions are necessary. Godwin rejects the programmatic and insists that his essays in *The Enquirer* should be taken as 'the materials of thinking'. His discussion of interpretation suggests that his fiction should also be read as a discussion of issues rather than an argument to be accepted or denied. Yet the work of this dissertation has been to extrapolate Godwin's argument from the evidence of his texts, and despite the need for considerable inference in drawing conclusions from between texts (rather than from inside them), an argument emerges. Godwin's thesis is a humble one – that we cannot have all the answers, and so cannot insist that our answers are the right ones for other people's questions. For many other authors, such an argument would be an evasion, a qualification to absolve their work from the responsibility of significance. What I hope to have shown here is that, for Godwin, such a qualification is rooted in the most essential ethical and epistemological principles of his philosophy. Godwin's denial of authority is not a fear of significance but, in practice, his claim to significance: as Britain's first anarchist educator.

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