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William Godwin and the Literature of Feeling: an analysis of *Caleb Williams* and *Fleetwood*

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Introduction

The historical context for this study covers a long time period from, roughly, the 1710s until the beginning of the nineteenth century. How to define a period so rich of historical, political, and cultural events and debates? For what concerns the British literary history, those were the years in which the shift from the Enlightenment to the Romantic age was taking place, and, as shall be seen in the first chapter of this thesis, they are also the years which would be later defined as the 'Age of Feeling'. This thesis focuses on an important intellectual who lived during that time period, specifically in the second half of the eighteenth century, a writer that — like the literary genre taken into consideration in this work — is now often unremembered or dismissed as unimportant compared to his other contemporary writers.

It is unfortunate that, nowadays, the name William Godwin is frequently mentioned only to indicate the husband of Mary Wollstonecraft or the father of Mary Shelley, or, rather, to cite an almost forgotten anarchical philosopher who wrote in the years of the French Revolution and shortly after the Jacobite Risings. Contrary to popular belief, Godwin was actually a leading figure for what concerns both his political thoughts and his fictional works. A proof not only that Godwin has been notorious in the second half of the eighteenth century, but also that he has been one of the most influential and prominent political and intellectual figures of his times — also known as the founder of anarchism — as well as a prominent novelist, may be found in a sonnet that Samuel Taylor Coleridge dedicated to him, *To William Godwin*, published on 10th January 1795. In fact, the poem is an actual hymn to Godwin:

> […] And hymn thee, GODWIN! with an arden Lay;
> For that thy voice, in Passion's stormy day,
> When wild I roam'd the bleak Heath of Distress,
> Bade the bright form of JUSTICE meet my way—
> And told me, that her name was HAPPINESS.[1]

[1] J. C. C. Mays, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works I Poems (Reading Text)*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001) p. 166

As pointed out by Coleridge, Godwin was indeed a passionate lover of political justice, who theorized a groundbreaking and revolutionary political philosophy aimed to the general happiness and equality of all citizens. However, it would be unjust to point out only his engagement in politics. In fact, the aim of this study is that of analyzing this author and his interest in novel writing from a sentimental perspective, hence by highlighting his engagement with the 'Age of Feeling'. It is not a coincidence that Coleridge stressed Godwin's strong passion towards the themes of justice and happiness in his poem, since this author, who has been mostly studied in relation to his political thoughts and philosophy, was also interested to the sentimental vogue which was taking place in those years in between the Age of Reason and the Romanticism. This thesis wants to prove Godwin's ability to merge feelings and rationality in his novels. The literature of feeling is not well-known nowadays, however, at that time, it was so popular that it actually became a 'cult'. Godwin himself borrowed some of its features to portray a number of his characters, which could be defined as men of feeling, yet he also criticized the genre and skillfully pointed out its limitedness.

In his fictional works, Godwin managed to put together and mix a number of literary genres and styles, becoming thus a dominant figure in the century of the rise of the novel — as shall be seen in the first chapter of this thesis. Hence, the main aim of this work is to emphasize Godwin's deep engagement with the literature of feeling through an analysis of two of his novels, namely *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *Fleetwood, or: the New Man of Feeling* (1805). In particular, to analyze Godwin's portrait of his characters as men of feeling and prove that he was a sentimentalist, a number of passages from the two novels have been studied from the point of view of their connection with sentimentalism — both in the cases in which Godwin was critical towards this specific literary genre, but also in the cases in which he embraced its features.

Firstly, in order to analyze William Godwin's complex relation with sentimentalism, there is first the need of examine the tumultuous political, historical and intellectual context for this 'Age of Feeling', so as to have an overview of the historical period taken into account. The political background for this length of time has not been a quiet and peaceful one: suffice it to mention the 1715 and in 1745 Jacobite Uprisings in

Scotland and also the French Revolution which was taking place in the years in which Godwin was most active as a radical writer.

The first chapter of this thesis, called 'The Literature of Feeling in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century and William Godwin', opens with a clarification of the dichotomy reason-sensibility, which will be central also for the study of the general criticism towards sentimental writings. Moreover, it deals with the problem of defining the Age of Sensibility together with the importance of its vocabulary, as may be noted from the very first paragraph: 'sentimental vocabulary in eighteenth-century philosophy and medicine'.

Philosophy and medicine are two key fields for this particular study, due to the fact that they laid the basis for the subsequent vogue of sentimentalism in novel writing. Philosophers such as David Hume, Adam Smith, and John Locke, were highly interested in the relationship between sympathy and moral feelings as well as in the debate on the innate benevolence of mankind. On the other hand, the medical roots of sensibility were given by doctors and physicians such as Robert Whytt, Albrecht von Haller, and George Cheyne, who studied the nervous system and the illnesses related to it in order to explain sympathy and over sensibility from a medical perspective.

It would be impossible to analyze in full sentimentalism in literature without mentioning the question of gender related to it. Feeling and gender are strongly connected with sentimentalism due to the erroneous and sexist notion that women allegedly had greater sensibility than men due to their fragile nervous system — further reinforced by the above-mentioned medical studies on the topic. This question of gender is essential for this particular study because the literature of feeling was subsequently thought to be a bourgeois genre mainly aimed to a female public, or, on the other hand, an ironic genre in which the feminized man of feeling was ridiculed.

In particular, for what concerns gender and sentimentalism, the question is even more important due to the influence of the figure of Mary Wollstonecraft on William Godwin's philosophical and political ideals as well as in his private life. Wollstonecraft is a crucial figure because in her famous pamphlet *A Vindication of Rights of Woman* she challenged the vision of women as over sensitive and physiologically weaker for what concerns the texture of their nerves, claiming that it was a question related to

women's wrong educational system. She promoted a better education for women, in order to free them from their condition of 'sexual slaves' confined in their domestic spheres. Furthermore, for what concerns sentimentalism, Wollstonecraft argued that there was indeed the need of a balance between reason and feelings, in order to being able to drive the human passions with moral feelings and therefore being virtuous. This specific topic of balancing the two poles would then be highly influential in Godwin's own criticism towards sentimentalism, as will be seen specifically in his novels, in which the characters are mostly shown as unable to control their passions.

Chapter one then proceeds with Godwin's biography, which is essential to fully understand his political and religious views — and therefore for thoroughly analyzing his novels. This first chapter closes with a paragraph dedicated to the criticism towards the literature of sensibility. In fact, interestingly, this genre did not have a long lifeline, it quickly went from being a huge success to being ridiculed and then unremembered. The last paragraph of this first chapter also mentions two other key novels, which can be defined as the milestones of the literature of feeling: Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), and Henry MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771). These two novels will be crucial also for Godwin's own works — as can be noted also from *Fleetwood*'s subtitle '*the New Man of Feeling'*.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses entirely on the analysis of Godwin's very first work of fiction, namely *Caleb Williams* (1794), published just one year after his notorious political pamphlet *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. This chapter starts from an examination of *Caleb Williams*'s intricate plot and main characters, in particular Caleb and Mr Falkland. These two characters are central not only for the plot but also for the specific analysis of this study, that is to say, from the point of view of the literature of feeling. The second paragraph is entirely dedicated to these two characters: 'Mr Falkland and Caleb Williams as Men of Feeling: *Caleb Williams* and its Relationship with the Literature of Sensibility', showing how not only Godwin embraced a number of traits from sentimentalism in portraying these two characters, but also that he took it to extremes by exaggerating their sentimental traits. This paragraph also deals with the mirroring relationship between Falkland and Caleb, together with their pathological behaviors. Moreover, a part of this analysis is dedicated to an

hypothesis raised by a number of critics, regarding the Freudian psychological interpretation which might explain the irrational passions and emotions which connects Caleb and Falkland. Many have interpreted their servant-master relationship as a sort of courtship, a homosexual story of fear and desire which is mentioned in this specific thesis due to its importance in relation of the gender-related issues in Godwin's novel, which shall be studied also in *Fleetwood*.

The third paragraph of the second chapter deals with another significant element in *Caleb Williams*'s narrative, which is its Gothic rhetoric. In his novel, Godwin managed to link sublimity and sensibility together, which makes it not only sentimental but also pre Romantic. Godwin aimed to analyze the complexity of the human soul and psyche in a Gothic environment, creating an atmosphere of fear and suspense thanks to an exaggeration of the sentimental vocabulary previously mentioned. This paragraph introduces the theme of the sublime by taking into account Edmund Burke — who turns out to be a crucial figure also in Godwin's life — and, in particular, his pamphlet *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Moreover, this Enquiry as well as the concern for the Gothic are clearly linked also to the historical period taken into account and its turmoils, such as the bloodshed of the French Revolution, which was criticized by Burke. The paragraph closes with a comparison between *Caleb Williams* and *Frankestein*, due to the fact that Mary Shelley was indeed influenced by her father's work in creating her novel, known as the milestone of the Gothic literature, and therefore a passage from both novels is taken in order to demonstrate their similarity and their sublimity.

The final paragraph of the Chapter dedicated to *Caleb Williams* deals with its theatricality and its relation to politics. The first, due to the fact that it has been considered as a theatrical novel, both for what concerns its language and also for the recurrent Shakespearean references in the plot. The second, due to its obvious connection with Godwin's radical political thoughts which he expressed only one year earlier in his pamphlet P*olitical Justice*. This novel is indeed so intrinsically politic that for many years it has been studied only as the fictionalization of Godwin's political pamphlet. Nevertheless, even though he indeed criticized the British political system in it, it is definitely unjust to consider it only as a political and didactical novel. The aim of

this chapter is to study Caleb Williams and Falkland as men of feeling, hence to analyze the whole novel from a point of view different from that of its political background.

The third and last chapter of this study is entirely dedicated to the third fiction written by William Godwin, namely *Fleetwood, or: The New Man of Feeling*, which is especially relevant for this study — as can be noted by its title and its reference to MacKenzie's sentimental milestone *The Man of Feeling* — due to its clear reference to sentimentalism. In this novel, Godwin wanted to express his doubts on the literary vogue (which was starting to decline at that point), but without the use of irony — such as in Sterne's case. In fact, he perhaps preferred to give the audience his own version of a man of feeling by pointing out the risks of living a life only driven by uncontrolled passions, implicitly claiming that there is the need to balance one's feelings with morality. In the first paragraph, Casimir Fleetwood's character and psyche are thoroughly studied in order to prove his condition as a man of feeling. Moreover, his complex temper and psychology are analyzed in full by following his *bildungsroman* throughout the novel's plot, in order to find the causes of his madness at the end of the book.

Additionally, this novel may be read as a direct critique to Rousseau's pedagogical ideals, theorized in his popular novel *Émile ou De L'éducation*, and the implication of being educated in an isolated environment away from society. Godwin had always claimed that society is key in shaping an individual and, therefore, throughout the first paragraph there is also a brief analysis of his critique to the philosopher. Godwin even shaped some of the characters of the novel to intellectually resemble Rousseau — namely, Mr Ruffigny and Mr Macneil.

The second paragraph of the third chapter of this thesis, as the first and second chapters, deals with gender. Indeed, misogyny is a crucial theme in *Fleetwood*, and this work argues that this gender issue is but the result of Casimir's need to confirm his masculinity. Godwin laid the basis for Casimir's misogyny during the period he spent in Paris, where he had two unsuccessful affairs with women which are defined by this particular study as *femmes fatales*. However, the climax of this gender issue together with Casimir's insanity is reached with his marriage, since he is shown as unfit for it, as

shall be analyzed throughout the paragraph, also by taking into account the importance of Mary Wollstonecraft for Godwin's growing interest towards the condition of women.

The third and final paragraph of *Fleetwood*'s analysis deals with the main aspect of Casimir's condition as a man of feeling, which is his social ineptitude. The paragraph is called 'the man of goodwill corrupted by the social environment: the relationship between sensibility and social ineptitude' due to the fact that it analyzes Casimir's innate benevolence and the subsequent corruption he suffers from external agents. Godwin is particularly interested in the relationship between sensibility and social feeling, thus it studies Casimir's struggle in every social circle he enters. Again, it also points out Rousseau's flawed pedagogical theory, since Godwin clearly blames Casimir's isolation for his social ineptitude.

Casimir is indeed trying to hide behind a social mask and live a life guided by morality, but he fails. Nevertheless, he is not a fully negative character, since he might be seen as a man of goodwill. This aspect links Godwin with another author of the 'Age of Feeling', namely Henry Fielding, who, like Godwin, was not an archetypal sentimental author, but he indeed was engaged to it.

Finally, this thesis aims to read two novels of this less known and often underestimated intellectual in a different perspective, that is to say, to study in depth Godwin's involvement with sentimentalism, therefore avoiding to analyzing him only as a political and radical revolutionary.

Chapter One

The Literature of Feeling in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century and William Godwin

'No *rational* creature can possibly be *insensitive*'
Shaftesbury, *An Enquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*[2]

Literary critics have often labelled historical periods as 'ages' or 'movements' in order to trace the evolution of literature. However, for what concerns the field of English literary studies, the time period covering the second half of the eighteenth century — generally considered as the 'Age of Reason' — has not been an easy one to label, since it has usually been dismissed as a period of transition between other two major literary periods: namely, the Augustan Age and Romanticism. A number of critics still refer to it as the 'pre-Romantic' period, due to the fact that it had laid the basis for some of the main features universally attributed to the Romantics, such as: the bond with nature, the exaltation of imagination, the concept of the sublime, and the focus on individualism.

Nevertheless, this definition cannot be considered exhaustive to indicate the many other complex philosophical, political, cultural, medical, artistic and literary changes and controversies which were developing from, roughly, the 1740s to 1800. The extent of its importance can be comprehended by the fact that 'both Romanticism and modernism organized themselves in relation to the traditions of sensibility and sentiment'[3]. Only recently, in 1959, this influential — but underrated — time period was finally beginning to be recognized, when it was labelled by the renowned literary

[2] Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Douglas den Uyl (Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2001). 3 vols. Vol. 2. 14/6/2019. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/812> p. 24

[3] Gerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: a Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 1

critic Northrop Frye as the 'Age of Sensibility'[4] - or, as some other critics prefer to call it, the 'Age of Feeling'. In fact, the shift from the Enlightenment ideals to the Romantic movement was not the only one which was taking place in that specific period: it should also be noted a shift of emphasis, as Brissenden suggests, from the hegemony of reason to a gradually more interest in the feelings and in the sensibility of human beings[5], especially with regard to the novel, which was emerging as the main literary form at that time.

The question of reason opposed to the passions and the sensibility of the humankind was not born in the eighteenth century though. It had been debated since the ancient times. Nevertheless, if, for example, the word *sensibility* is taken into consideration, during the eighteenth century there are some notable changes in its meanings: in that specific historical period, it was no more a word which merely described the perceiving of the senses. In fact, *sensibility* now began to imply different meanings and related philosophical and medical notions — which will be analyzed in paragraph 1.1. In general, man was now starting to be studied not only as a rational and moral being, and human feelings were now taken into consideration as well. The predominant belief was that 'the passions were increasingly assumed to exercise dominance over the reason'[6]. Therefore, feelings were thought to be key also in the process of forming moral sentiments, in which they would coexist: morality would not overcome feelings and vice versa.

Additionally, the notion of experience is also extremely important in this sense, as explained by Robert Francis Brissenden: 'the assumption that the source of all knowledge and value is the individual human experience is not, of course, peculiar to sentimentalism, but it is essential to it'[7]. It is essential due to the fact that a new focus was now given to the perception of individual human experience in terms of feelings, a sort of sympathetic awareness of human emotions. As will be analyzed in chapter 1.3,

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[4] Northrop Frye, 'Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility', *ELH*, 23-2 (Jun., 1956), pp. 144-152 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2871949> accessed on 13 February, 2019

[5] Robert Francis Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress, Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*. (London, Macmillan, 1974) p. 50

[6] *Ibid.* p.50

[7] *Ibid.* p. 49

this is crucial also for the philosophical studies of John Locke - in particular for his famous concept of the *tabula rasa* — and, subsequently, for William Godwin's political and philosophical ideals.

It is fundamental to highlight the fact that all the ideals related to sentimentalism are strongly connected with the historical period in which these concepts were starting to develop, which coincided with the uprising and the outbreak of the French Revolution. In fact, the ideals of the Revolution were sympathetic liberal ideals of human rights and equality opposed to the despotism of the oppressive monarchy, therefore the spreads of democratic ideals could be read as the victory of the sensibility over the hegemony of reason.

Considering the historical period taken into consideration and its controversies, the humanitarian ideals of the French Revolution — and the language in which they are expressed — should be regarded as, broadly speaking, sentimental. As Brissenden notes, 'it is in the context of the Revolution that the semantic changes in words like "sentiment", "sentimental", and "sensibility", most obviously took place'[8]. In fact, this lexicon was key for the French revolutionaries, who used a sentimental vocabulary in order to express their intense emotions about the events preceding and during the Revolution, as can be noted for example in official records written during the National Assembly of august the fourth: 'After this observation [on the abolition of the tithe], which seemed to exhaust the extensive subject of reforms, the attention and the *sensibility* of the Assembly were again awakened and focused by an offer of an entirely new kind'[9] (emphasis added). Nevertheless, it is important also to point out that the meaning and the connotations of some of these words, in particular the word *sentimental*, radically changed in the period between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, denoting the beginning of the decadence of the sentimental ideas.

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[8] *Ibid.* p. 49

[9] William M. Reddy, 'Sentimentalism and Its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution' *The Journal of Modern History*, 72-1, New Work on the Old Regime and the French Revolution:A Special Issue in Honor of François Furet (March 2000), pp. 109-152 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/315931> accessed in February, 2019, p. 134

1.1 Sentimental vocabulary in eighteenth-century philosophy and medicine.

The connotation of the key word *sentimental*, as mentioned above, radically changed in a short period of time: in the 1740s it meant 'to be characterized by or exhibiting refined and elevated feeling', by contrast, at the end of the century it indicated 'to be addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion: apt to be swayed by sentiment'[10]. That is one of the reasons why the vocabulary which constitutes the lexicon of sensibility is crucial for the analysis of this Age of Sensibility, even though the word *sensibility* itself is challenging, because it has a number of connotations and thus it is difficult to define. The influence of the vocabulary of feeling was so relevant that it created a sort of semi religious myth around it, as G. J. Barker-Benfield observes: 'the relationship between the readers and writers of sentimental literature was defined as 'the cult of sensibility' […] which was an epiphenomenon of a "culture" of sensibility'[11]. To begin with, in order to understand the concept of *sensibility*, one should probably start by analyzing two related terms: *delicacy* and *sympathy*.

Chronologically speaking, *delicacy* appeared before *sensibility* and, as Ann Jessie Van Sant points out, it 'brought several ideas into close associations: sensuous delight, superiority of class, fragility or weakness of constitution, tenderness of feelings, and fastidiousness"[12]. Van Sant generally defines *sensibility* as "an organic sensitivity dependent on brain and nerves and underlying a) delicate moral and aesthetic perception; b) acuteness of feeling, both emotional and physical; and c) susceptibility to delicate passional arousal"[13]. Van Sant demonstrates how influential the concepts previously associated with *delicacy* were in defining the idea of *sensibility*. The latter, though, developed also in connecting body and mind, heart and head. Significantly, this new sensibility opposed the prominent focus on individualism adopted by a number of

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[10] *Ibid.* p. 2

[11] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain.* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. xix

[12] Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel, the Senses in Social Context.* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 3

[13] *Ibid.* p. 1

eighteenth-century philosophers; by contrast, it exalted the sympathetic nature of humankind. This may be one of the reasons why sensibility also implies the fundamental notion of *sympathy* — which was sometimes used as a synonym for *delicacy* as well — as for instance in the definition given by Dr S. Johnson in the *Dictionary of English Language* (1755): 'quickness of sensation: quickness of perception: delicacy'[14].

As showed by Brissenden, from the time of the Restoration into the mid-eighteenth century, there was a general belief in the innate benevolence of man. In other words, in the basic capacity of human beings to be innately sympatethic[15]. It is of particular interest how this belief developed in the time in which the idea of sentimental and the figure of 'the man of feeling' were born, that is to say, in the time in which philosophers, doctors, and writers were all engaged in expanding the meanings of the concept of sensibility. These modern 'sentimental' thinkers sharply criticized previous philosophers, such as René Descartes, who thought that 'rational consciousness can fail only because of the influence of emotional and affective motions that originate from the opacity of the bodily machine'[16]. In particular, the Earl of Shaftesbury — who was influenced by the thoughts of the Cambridge Platonists — strongly criticized Locke in his book *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), by asserting that men have an 'inward eye' that enable them to perceive the morally good. According to him, feelings did shape moral judgement.

The Earl of Shaftesbury's attack as well as the fundamental question of sympathy impacted the ideas of two highly influential philosophers of the eighteenth century: namely, David Hume and Adam Smith, whose thoughts became central in the developing eighteenth-century school of moral philosophy. In fact, Hume strongly supported the crucial concept of the innate benevolence of man, and in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739) he asserted that at the core of human nature there is sympathy, which he defines as the ground for moral experience: 'sympathy is the chief source of

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[14] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, cit, p. 1

[15] *Ibid.* p.30

[16] Gabriele De Anna and Riccardo Martinelli, *Moral Realism and Political Decisions, Practical Rationality in Contemporary Public Contests.* (Bamberg, University of Bamberg Press, 2015) p. 64

moral distinction', referring to the 'communication of sentiments which made possible the objectivity of the moral judgment'[17]. Philosophers who recognized the importance of sympathy for the wellbeing of the community generally did not approve the exaltation of the individuality of man which would be later praised by the Romantics; on the contrary, as Hume points out, the sentiments of an individual were thought to be fundamental not for their own sake as a single person's own feelings, but because they are able to develop through communication and mutual influence among groups of men. That is why he strongly believed that sympathy was fundamental for the building of a good society and, consequently, for progress.

Like Hume, Smith further developed the dualism of sympathy and morality in his *Treatise of Moral Sentiments* (1759) as he points out that 'each of the natural sentiments, such as love, gratitude, resentment, self-interest, has a particular object or purpose; the ability to sympathize with a similar passion in others is a general principle involved in them all, and the only basis of morality'[18]. Basically he argued that if we see someone feeling sad, we are going to feel sad too because we tend to sympathize with him/her:

> When I sympathize with your sorrow or your indignation […] When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such a character and profession should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters.[19]

Smith also believed that in order to develop a moral consciousness one ought not to be isolated; in fact, he thought social conscience to be essential for the individual. Therefore, it could be argued that his treatise's main argument is that our moral ideas are a product of our nature as social beings, which would be the basis for Godwin's

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[17] Glenn R. Morrow "The Significance of the Doctrine of Sympathy in Hume and Adam Smith" *The Philosophical Review*, 32-1, 1923, pp. 60–78 <www.jstor.org/stable/2179032> accessed in February, 2019, p. 64

[18] Evelyn L. Forget, 'Evocations of Sympathy: Sympathetic Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Physiology' *History of Political Economy,* 35, annual supplement, 2003, (article) pp. 282-308., p. 287

[19] *Ibid.* p. 285

belief in the importance of social experience in shaping the individual, as explained in chapter 1.3.

As pointed out by Evelyn Forget, there is:

> a logical continuity between physiological and sociological investigations. The same physiological communication that was imagined to account for somatic sympathy was used to explain the effects of the 'passions of the mind' on the sensations and impressions of the body[20]

At the same time as these philosophical discourses were taking place, medicine too was studying the ideas of sympathy and sensibility. Ildiko Csengei points out how the medical roots of sensibility can be traced back to the 1660s with the work of Thomas Willis[21]. In fact, Willis was the first to identify the brain as the centre of the soul, and also claimed that it depended entirely on the nerves for all its functions, including sensory impressions and, consequently, knowledge[22].

The result of Willis's claims are a number of latter studies about the pathological side of sensibility. One of the most renowned of these eighteenth-century studies was made by the Scottish physician Robert Whytt, who was the first to explain the discourse of sympathy from a physiological point of view, in his *Observations on the Nature, Causes and Cure of those Diseases which are commonly called Nervous, Hypochondriac or Hysteric: to which are prefixed Some Remarks on the Sympathy of the Nerves* (1764) . In it, he observed the influence of sympathy for the nervous system, distancing himself from the previous Cartesian dualistic notion of body and soul[23]. The very fact that we human beings tend to feel the emotions we see in others had then become also medical field of study and, interestingly, these studies began in the period after the Restoration, in the 1660s, and became fashionable precisely during the historical period in which the heated debate between reason and feeling was taking place, in the first half of the eighteenth-century.

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[20] *Ibid.* p. 283

[21] Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*. (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 6
See also the pioneering work of George S. Rousseau, *Nervous Acts, Essays on Literature, Culture, and Sensibility* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

[22] *Ibid.* p. 6

[23] *Ibid.* p. 7

The vocabulary linked to sensibility was widely used not only in philosophy and literature, but also in neurology and physiology, as can be noted in Robert Whytt's own words: "In some the *feelings*, *perceptions*, and *passions*, are naturally dull, slow, and difficult to be roused; in others, they are very quick and easily excited, on account of a greater *sensibility* of brain and nerves"[24]. Additionally, Whytt demonstrated the relation between sensibility and irritability concerning involuntary actions in his well-known *Essay on the Vital and Other Involuntary Motions of Animals* (1751), where not only did he state that the irritability of muscles depended on the nervous system, but he also implied that every part of the body is sensible, which he thought to be the basis of all animate motion, voluntary or involuntary[25]. Notoriously, Whytt did not agree with the ideas of his fellow doctor Albrecht von Haller, who chronologically preceded him. Haller did not believe that motion was under the governance of feeling, on the contrary, he claimed that irritability and sensibility were two different aspects[26]. Nevertheless, Von Haller is worth to be cited because he too widely discussed the topic of the nerves, in particular the nerve *fluid*, which he called "the noblest humor of the body"[27], therefore laying the basis for a physiological analysis of the communication through nerves, which then would develop in further studies on somatic communication between men.

Again, it is important to highlight how eighteenth-century studies on the nervous system incorporate the lexicon of sensibility, employing technical words, such as *vibrations*, and it will be recurrent also in the sentimental novels. Specifically, the word *vibrations* was taken from the Newtonian study of the nervous system, which he investigated in his treatise *Opticks* (1704). Newton 'had argued from 1675 that the nerve

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[24] Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel, the Senses in Social Context*, cit, p. 14

[25] Robert Francis Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress, Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*,cit, p. 42

[26] Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*,cit, p. 8

[27] Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel, the Senses in Social Context*,cit, p. 105

was solid and transmitted sense impressions by vibrations'[28]. Furthermore, when analyzing the complex topic of the nerves, it is worth mentioning the Scottish physician George Cheyne, and, in particular, his studies on the nature and causes of nervous illnesses, which aimed at dispelling the popular myth that those diseases were somehow related to witchcraft.

Cheyne believed that the pathologies related to the nervous system were caused by 'the weakening or breaking' of the nerves and their delicate fibres[29]. In his book, *English Malady* (1733), he also noticed how there are 'as many and as different Degrees of *Sensibility* or of *Feeling* as there are Degrees of *Intelligence* and Perception in *human* Creatures; and the *Principle* of both may be perhaps one and the same'[30], a concept which was central for the work of the sentimental writer — and Cheyne's friend — Samuel Richardson. The literature of sensibility — in particular the sentimental novel — embraced the vocabulary of the nerves which was so fashionable at that particular time period, as could be noticed in many writers such as Richardson, MacKenzie, Sterne, Burke as well as philosophers like John Locke and Hume. All of them used in their works the words related to the sensational anatomy: *nerves, fluid, fibres, spirits, vapours, Sensorium*… therefore creating 'a powerful medium for the spread of popular knowledge of sensational psychology'[31].

The readers of sentimental novels thus used their own physical response to understand the language of feeling, a sort of 'bodily level of experience'[32] which measured one's sensibility according to the reaction to such fiction. Readers of the sentimental fiction thus used the rhetoric of the senses to excite their sensibility, 'to be thrilled and have their fibers shaken'[33]. Hence, it could be argued that they used their

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[28] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*,cit, p. 4

[29] *Ibid.* p. 8

[30] Cheyne George. *The English Malady* [electronic resource]*: or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysterical Distempers, &c. In Three Parts*. M.D printed for G. Strahan, and J. Leake at Bath, London, 1733.

[31] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, cit, p. 6

[32] Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel, the Senses in Social Context*, cit, p. 116

[33] *Ibid.* p. 189

body and their own sensations to measure these novels' worth, proving once again that behind this particular kind of literature there must be a focus on the physiological aspect of the passions and its medical studies.

1.2 Feeling and gender: Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin

All of the above-mentioned philosophical theories and medical studies describe a delicate constitution inclined to illness, weakness of nerves, and delicacy which was generally linked to the female body, therefore also creating a degrading vision of femininity while it became a social convention. Both in medicine and in literature, women were thought to have greater sensibility than men due to their allegedly fragile nervous system. This sentimental sexism was firstly 'confirmed' by religious and medical theories which tried to explain how women had 'finer texture of their Nerves'[34], while men were generally seen as more insensitive and intellectually stronger. A discourse on sensibility, thus, implies a reflection on the question of gender, since a number of modern anatomists, doctors, and writers contributed to feminize it, reinforcing the commonplace patriarchal stereotype of the physical and intellectual superiority of men over women.

Nicolas Malebranche, for example, was one of the first philosophers to assert that women were 'intellectually inferior to men because of the greater sensibility of the nerve fibers in their brain'[35], which subsequently lead to a number of medical studies on the 'female disorder' called hysteria. Again, this illness was related to the nervous system and therefore only to the female body, which further reinforced the gendering of sensibility and sympathy, as if women could not have control over their nerves - and therefore over their feelings.

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[34] *Ibid.* p. 27

[35] *Ibid.* p. 26

As G. J. Barker-Benfield points out: 'If feminism was in part born in women's "awareness of their mistreatment by men," or "felt oppression" and victimization, then it was born in the culture of sensibility'[36]. One of the very first radical writers — as well as the 'mother' of British feminism — who addressed this gender issue at the heart of the vogue of sensibility was Mary Wollstonecraft. In 1792, she published her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, which can be considered the first literary work of feminist philosophy. In her pamphlet, Wollstonecraft reflects on the contemporary condition of women in England, arguing that women deserve to be educated just like men in order to gain a place in the society. She thought education to be the only key for female emancipation: 'If woman isn't fitted by education to become man's companion, she will stop the progress of knowledge, because truth must be common to all'[37]. Her work is crucial since the 'critique of the feminization of sensibility was at the heart of her feminism'[38]:

> So I dismiss those pretty feminine phrases that the men condescendingly use to make our slavish dependence easier for us, and I despise the weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners that are supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker sex. […] The education of women has been attended to more in recent years than formerly; but they're still regarded as a frivolous sex, and are ridiculed or pitied by writers who try to improve them by satire or instruction[39]

Her challenge to the patriarchal vision of the female body as weaker than man's started by dismissing the language associated with the idea that women were over-sensitive and delicate creatures inclined to illness, which again involves the lexicon of sensibility previously taken into account. According to Wollstonecraft, women were 'made weak'[40]

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[36] *Ibid.* p. xviii

[37] Mary Wollstonecraft, 1759-1797. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*. London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1792. p. 2

[38] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, cit, p. 2

[39] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, cit, p. 5

[40] *Ibid.* p. 3

by external agents, an 'artificial weakness' created by a society which implied the subordination of women, also for what concerned their education.

According to Wollstonecraft, women were taught to be over-sensitive, and their education revolved around their only aim in life according to a patriarchal view: marriage. Her suggestion for a progress of women's rights — and therefore for society — was a national system of education, where women could be active agents of their own instruction and finally be free from their subjugation in the domestic sphere and its purely sexual purposes (she actually defined them as 'sexual slaves')[41]. Wollstonecraft writes: 'If woman isn't fitted by education to become man's companion, she will stop the progress of knowledge, because truth must be common to all'[42]. Thus, she argues that, in order to cooperate in society, women need to have the right to get an education just like men, suggesting that family and educators should stop raising girls teaching them to be mere objects of male desire, thus men should start considering them as rational and independent beings instead.

Furthermore, she strongly criticizes the monopolization of the power of intellect by men, asserting that stereotypically male traits such as the inclination to study were actually products of their patriarchal society and not a scientific truth. Barker-Benfield points out how 'crucial to feminist and antifeminist arguments was the Hobbesian view that there was "no basis in nature" for man authority over woman'[43]. However, for her being a woman herself and for that specific historical period, the points she made in her work were revolutionary, and her timing was perfect since *A Vindication on The Rights of Women* appeared during a deeply complex historical period, in which, among political turmoils, there was also one of the very first wave of feminist writings. As noted by Barker-Benfield, there was a 'public "awakening" of a critical mass of Englishwomen [which] can be seen as another aspect of the transition to modernity marked by the Protestant Revolution'[44].

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[41] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, cit, p. 30

[42] *Ibid.* p. 2

[43] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, cit, p. 23

[44] *Ibid.* p. xviii

Returning to the topic of Wollstonecrafts's critique of sensibility, it is important to notice how she suggests a balance between reason and sensibility, rather than hegemony of the former over the latter. Wollstonecraft herself 'struggled to develop an account of women's moral agency that would incorporate a recognition not only of women's capacity to reason but also of their right to experience and give expression to passion, including sexual desire'[45]. In fact, Wollstonecraft widely discussed the distinction between reason and passions, and even though in her *Vindication* she linked virtue with reason, she also admitted the importance of passions, in particular when it concerned sexual freedom: 'Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature, they are only brutal when unchecked by reason: but the obligation to check them is the duty of mankind, not a sexual duty'[46].

Her concern with sensibility further confirms that the heated debate on the reason/ passion relationship was in a period of vogue among intellectuals. Additionally, Wollstonecraft's life and thought are of great interest also due to her marriage with William Godwin. The two first met in 1791, but started dating around 1796. In her *Memoirs*, written by Godwin after her death, he recalls the first time Wollstonecraft showed up, uninvited, at his house: 'Her visit, it seems is to be deemed a deviation from etiquette; but she had badly through life trampled on those rules which are built on the assumption of the imbecility of her sex'[47]. Both intellectuals, writers and radicals, they were indeed an unusual couple, because they both praised the importance of personal independence and freedom — so much so that they lived in separate houses and had different social circles — and both rejected the institution of marriage. Wollstonecraft thought that wives were forced to be subordinated to their husbands just like citizens were subordinated to their King. She strongly criticized the '*divine right* of husbands'[48], who were despotic householders and treated women like mere objects. Godwin too

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[45] Catriona Mackenzie, 'The Ideal of Women's Self-Governance in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft' *Hypatia,* Vol. 8, No. 4 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 35-55, p. 36 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3810368> accessed on 20 February, 2019.

[46] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, cit, p. 238

[47] Adriana Corrado, *William Godwin Illuminista* Romantico, (Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane s.p.a., 1984) p. 23

[48] *Ibid.* p. 28

rejected the institution of marriage, defining it as 'a system of fraud'[49], and that 'marriage is law, and the worst of all laws. […] Add to this, that marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties'[50]. According to his ideals, marriage was but a restriction to the freedom and happiness of the individuals, both male and female. He believed that two people should be free to live together happily, if that was their desire, without the need of legal constraint which legally permits to see one person - the woman - as a possession of the other - the man. According to Godwin, in marriage 'there is no room for repentance and […] liberty and hope are equally strangers'[51].

Nevertheless, in order to protect their future daughter as well as Mary's reputation, when they found out that Mary was pregnant they decided to get married in London, on the 29th of March, 1797. She already had an illegitimate child from her previous romance with the American diplomat Gilbert Imlay, therefore she knew perfectly well the pressures and the prejudices of the society which they would have had to face - before meeting Godwin she tried to commit suicide twice. Nevertheless, even though they both agreed on getting married, they also firmly decided to maintain their personal spaces, freedom and independence, and by doing so they lived a period of happiness which lasted for six months. Unfortunately, ten days after their daughter Mary Godwin was born, on August the 30th, 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft unexpectedly died due to childbirth complications. Godwin was then left alone with two infant daughters, Fanny Imlay and Mary Godwin, and he was so shocked and in deep grief for his loss that his reaction was that of immediately starting to work on the *Memoirs* of the woman of his life, as shall be seen in the next chapter.

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[49] William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, vol. 2 (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1793). 17/6/2019. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/236> p. 228

[50] *Ibidem*

[51] *Ibid.* p. 764

1.3 Godwin's biography

'Godwin is among the smaller giants: those rather of an age than for all time' [52]

Born in 1756 in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, the seventh of thirteenth children of a strict and oppressive family of Dissenters[53], William Godwin can be defined the first and greatest philosopher of the anarchism, even though he has often been underrated and overshadowed by some of his contemporary thinkers. Since he was a boy he was intellectually precocious. As a result, at a very early age he was sent to be educated firstly by a severe Calvinist, Samuel Newton, and subsequently in a renowned Dissenting academy called Hoxton Missionary College.

As observed by A. E. Rodway, the emotional bases of Godwin's thoughts are largely the result of his Dissenting upbringing[54], which then affected the rest of his career. Indeed he was born and raised with an 'element of rebellion' in his nature[55], as Rodway puts it, influenced by his education, and by the 'fervent championship of independence and tolerance' as a reaction 'against the severity of a father he disliked'[56]. Godwin's first purpose in life was to be a minister of religion, in 1778 he finished his studies in Hoxton and finally became a Dissenting preacher in Ware, Hertfordshire. However, Godwin rapidly changed his mind after many of his sermons were rejected by calvinist congregations, and also after having studied the works of Jonathan Swift as well as the thoughts of philosophers such as Rousseau and D'Holbach. Thus, he left the priesthood and moved to London to start his literary career in 1783.

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[52] A. E. Rodway, *Godwin and the Age of Transition.* (London, George G. Harrap & Co. LTD, 1952) Preface

[53] The British Dissenters were those independent Protestant denominations that stood in active intellectual and social opposition to the dominant, state-sponsored Anglican Church. Godwin was part of an extremist Dissenting sect called Sandemanians.
See Introduction to William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*. (edited by Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley, Ontario, Broadview Literary texts, 2000)

[54] A. E. Rodway, *Godwin and the Age of Transition*, cit, p. 28

[55] *Ibid.* p. 26

[56] *Ibid.* p. 27

The influence of Rousseau was key — as will be further explained in Chapter three — since in his works Godwin encountered the above-mentioned discourse on the innate benevolence of man corrupted by the institutions, a crucial topic for his future radical political ideals. Godwin started his literary career by writing some political pamphlets, which however were not able to financially sustain him. Therefore he seeked a new employment as a historian and political writer for two popular whig magazines, *The New Annual Review* and *The Political Herald*. This job helped him studying and understanding the contemporary European political debates at his time, as well as the events which would then lead to the upcoming Revolution. Godwin was thirty-three years old in 1789, and as many of his fellows radical intellectuals, was deeply inspired by the ideals of freedom and equity given by the Revolution.

After the publication of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) many writers took a stand against him in order to defend those principles of democracy sparked by the French political turmoils. Godwin was one of them, and in February 1793 he published his most popular work, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. One specific political event which preceded the publication of the preface of the first edition of *Political Justice* is fundamental to comprehend the complex political turmoils taking place in the United Kingdom at that time. This particular event was the arrest of his fellow radical writer Thomas Paine, after the publication of his pamphlet, *The Rights of Man.* Paine was an English revolutionary and radical, who decided to write back to Burke's conservative criticism of the Revolution.

Burke argued: 'all circumstances taken together, the French revolution is the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world'[57]. Burke believed in the need of a social contrast and, being himself a conservative, he also suggested that there was the need to maintain the political order and trying to improve it. That is to say, Burke was against the ideals of the French revolutionaries because he defended the aristocracy and its privileges. By contrast, Paine was a progressive and liberal thinker, and he strongly supported the French Revolution ideals, in particular those of freedom and equality, thus in his pamphlet Paine fully legitimated the insurgency of the French people against their

[57] Edmund Burke (1790). 'Reflections on the Revolution in France, And on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris' (1 ed.). London: J.Dodsley in Pall Mall. Retrieved 20th February 2019 via Gallica. p. xi

oppressive monarchy. The publication of his pamphlet generated a huge stir in England, so much so that even though he was in France he was processed *in absentia* in his native land and was subsequently convicted of seditious libel against the Crown. However, he was not hanged because he never returned to England.

With regard to Godwin, the philosophical and political ideas of *Political Justice* were not only generated by the French Revolution, even though it was a major influence indeed. In fact, Godwin, unlike Paine, decided to write his work of political philosophy and theory with the aim to give general principles and not specific opinions on the debate of the Revolution in France. His project was that of analyzing the role of the government in general, therefore *Political Justice* should be considered more like a work of moral philosophy rather than a book on modern politics. In fact, Godwin was against seditious revolutions in general, and strongly supported non-violent resistance. As pointed out by George Watson: ‘revolution tends to revert to tyranny, Godwin had argued in 1793, because "there is no period more at war with the existence of liberty" than one of political violence. Free speech is then "trebly fettered", and “slavery is completed”’[58].

Godwin revisited his work a number of times, in fact there are three editions of *Political Justice*: one published in 1793, a second in 1796, the third and last in 1798. Its reception was positive and gratifying, and Godwin rapidly became famous as one of the major voices of the political debate in England. *Political Justice* embraces both the rationalism ideals from the Enlightenment and Godwin’s radical and anarchist ideas on the negative influence of government, which according to him should be abandoned in order for humanity to become free and enlightened. Central to Godwin’s anarchism is the fact that he thought human beings and their rationality to be perfectible, therefore ideally there is no need for a government to rule people, since citizens are perfectly able to coexist peacefully. In particular, he insisted on the importance of the personal — physical and intellectual — freedom of mankind. Men are not born good nor bad; they are born without innate principles and are subsequently shaped by external agents. Therefore men are the ‘product’ of the environment in which they are raised and of the

[58] George Watson, ‘The Reckless Disciple: Godwin's “Shelley" *The Hudson Review*, 39-2 (Summer, 1986), pp. 212-230 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3856809> accessed on 26 February, 2019.

education they receive. This concept was surely influenced by John Locke, the English philosopher who studied the human mind and who 'offered an empiricist theory according to which we acquire ideas through our experience of the world'[59] from which he created the concept of the *tabula rasa*, which means that when we are born our mind is like a blank space, which then is filled and shaped by experience. As far as these ideas are concerned, it is fundamental to mention that Jean-Jacques Rousseau as well studied this topic. Contrarily to Godwin and Locke, Rousseau basically started from the assumption that all men are innately benevolent, thus he created his own pedagogical theory which aimed to educate pupils by isolating them in the state of nature, as will be seen in Chapter Three.

The idea of experience shaping individuals has often been misinterpreted, yet its general meaning is that 'the mind has any number of inherent capacities, predispositions, and inclinations prior to receiving any ideas from sensation'[60]. According to Godwin, government is key for shaping and educating the individual, and in his pamphlet he enquiries on which kind of government is better to improve progress. In fact, Godwin is firmly convinced in the 'human improvableness'[61], showing a real confidence towards the progress of humankind. His trust for human reasoning leads Godwin to think that the government, whose only aim should be the happiness of the citizens, is corrupted and he also affirms that the political system in which we live is imperfect and wrong. But if the government is corrupted it means that it will produce corruption in the citizens too, since we are shaped by the political environment in which we live. Godwin affirms that if all men followed reason and lived aiming to the general well-being of humankind, there would be no need of a government nor legislation. This discourse is at the heart of his radical and anarchical ideals. However, he also admits that this is an utopian view of society and therefore he analyzes some kinds of governments which, according to him, are suitable for reaching the happiness of its citizens.

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[59] 'John Locke (1632—1704)' by Patrick J. Connolly, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/locke/> accessed 2th March 2019

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] Adriana Corrado, *William Godwin Illuminista Romantico*, cit, p. 79

Moreover, in the first edition of *Political Justice* Godwin also criticizes private property, proposing communism as a solution for destroying the social inequality between rich and poor — influencing, among others, the founders of communism, the German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels[62]. It is important to underline, though, that Godwin did not propose to completely eliminate private property; on the contrary, he proposed to equally share the properties among the members of a community.

Additionally, he definitely softened his communist ideals for the second and third edition of his work, where he modified a lot of his radical assertions. As noted by A. E. Rodway, the revision of the latter editions tend to humanize Godwin's ideas[63]. This was also due to the intellectual influence he had received from the union with Mary Wollstonecraft. Their marriage can be defined as a 'marriage between Imagination and Reason'[64], because she helped him to recognize the role of sentiments and passions in human actions, when he only considered human reason and moral. Thanks to her influence, 'especially in his fiction, Godwin acknowledges the tremendous force of human passion, and thus also the pressing need to take it into account in our calculation of justice and virtue, but he remains deeply skeptical of its reliability as an exclusive guide for judgement', as will be seen in Chapter Three. On the whole, in Godwin's thought reason is not opposed to feeling; according to him, it must in fact be aided by a virtuous disposition, a sensitive conscience. He proposes balance between the two poles, a sort of reasonable feeling:

> Without feeling we cannot act at all; and without passions we cannot act greatly. But when we proceed to ascertain whether our actions are entitled to the name of virtue, this can only be done by examining their effects, by bringing them to a standard, and comparing them with a criterion.[65]

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[62] *Ibid.* p. 75

[63] *Ibid.* p. 35

[64] Edited by Richard, Holmes, *Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin: a Short Residence in Sweden and Memoirs of The Author of 'The Rights of Woman'* (New York, Penguin Books, 1987) p. 16

[65] A. E. Rodway, *Godwin and the Age of Transition*, cit, p. 38

As Rodwin points out, the historical period in which Godwin lived, which has been indicated as the 'Age of Sensibility', is 'not rational but reasonable, not passionate but moderate. Rebellion against it will, therefore, be rationalistic and passionate'[66]. This is clear in Godwin's first novel *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) where the human being is no more seen by Godwin as only made of reason, but also as a mixture of passions, emotions, sentiments — as will be further explained in Chapter Two.

In the short period after the publication of *Political Justice*, Godwin became unexpectedly famous: even though the English government decided to not put him on trial due to the high cost of his book — they did not expect it to be a success because not many people would afford to buy it — actually, they were wrong. In fact, many intellectuals would buy Godwin's *Political Justice* and read it. Therefore it immediately gained success and support, which put Godwin in a dangerous position. In fact, the English political climate at that time was nervous and oppressive, due to the regime of Terror as the outcome of the French Revolution, which deeply scared England. This resulted in a period of strong political repression of radical thinkers and politicians by the English government. Its aim was to stop the spread of radicalism, and hence all the members of the London Corresponding Society[67] were tried for high treason in October 1794. In this hysterical political atmosphere in which the government decided to silence all of its possible enemies, Godwin's short period of fame ended and, for his safety, he decided to keep distance from the public eye for a while.

One could consider the years after the death of his beloved wife Mary the beginning of his decline. In her honor, he wrote her biography in *Memoirs of the author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (clearly based on the model of Rousseau's *Confessions*[68]), published it in 1798, generating outrage among readers due to its openness. Indeed, in this work he did not censor anything about Mary's unconventional life, including for example her past affairs. The fact that she was not married to the man with whom she had her first child, Gilbert Imlay, as well as her suicide attempts,

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[66] *Ibid.* p. 14

[67] Adriana Corrado, *William Godwin Illuminista Romantico*, cit, p. 20

[68] Myers, Mitzi. "Godwin's 'Memoirs' of Wollstonecraft: The Shaping of Self and Subject." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1981, pp. 299–316. *JSTOR* <www.jstor.org/stable/25600307> accessed in March, 2019, p. 300

contributed to her bad reception. The English poet Robert Southey commented that 'he [Godwin] lacked "all feeling in stripping his dead wife naked" through disclosures about her father's violence, her Romantic relationships and the gynecological details of her death'[69]. Godwin open-mindedness and frankness caused the indignation of the prude society of his times, even among those that used to respect Wollstonecraft's ideals, forcing him to issue a second, revised edition of the *Memoirs* in the same year[70]. His reputation declined, so much so that in late 1797 the *Anti-Jacobin*, a satirical weekly periodical supported by government funds […], became the leader of a popular campaign to discredit Godwin's teaching'[71]. In 1801 he decided to get married again with Mary Jane Clairmont, a widow who was disliked by many of Godwin's friends[72]. Their marriage was not a particularly happy one, and they also had financial problems.

In order to earn money, Godwin started writing again, even though he was not as passionate as he was in his first writings, his results were unsuccessful. He even needed to ask some of his friends for a financial help in order to cover his familiar expenses, due to 'Godwin's incurable habit of living beyond his means and borrowing against non-existent capital, leading finally to his bankruptcy in 1825'[73]. Among the friends that helped him, the figure of Percy Byrce Shelley, who deeply admired Godwin's philosophy, must be mentioned. To confirm the fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century Godwin was soon forgotten, after Shelley had read - and was influenced - by Godwin's works, he was surprised to hear that he was still alive[74]. Shelley's relation with Godwin started in 1812, when Shelley - strongly affected by the reading of *Political Justice* and aiming to become Godwin's intellectual heir[75] - wrote a

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[69] Rajan Tilottama, 'Framing the Corpus: Godwin's "Editing" of Wollstonecraft in 1798' *Studies in Romanticism*, 39-4, William Godwin (Winter, 2000), pp. 511-531 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601470> accessed on 25 February, 2019, p. 511

[70] *Ibid.* p. 511

[71] Edited by Pamela Clemit, *Lives of the Great Romantics: Volume 1, Godwin* (London, Pickering & Chatto, 1999) p. xvii

[72] Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York, Routledge, 1989) p. 6

[73] *Ibid.* p. 7

[74] Adriana Corrado, *William Godwin Illuminista Romantico*, cit, p. 20

[75] Edited by Esther Shor, *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 29

letter to Godwin expressing the admiration for his philosophical thoughts and ideals, and the two started meeting regularly. They both took advantage from this relation: Shelley aimed to be Godwin's disciple, while Godwin desperately needed financial help from the young poet. However, William Godwin was not the only one in his family who was intrigued by the figure of Shelley; in fact, the new entry in Godwin's family also aroused the interest of the sixteen-year-old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. The two immediately liked each other and they started to secretly meet — famously, at her mother's grave in St. Pancras churchyard — until they finally declared their love for each other. However, when the couple asked for Godwin's blessing, he expressed disapproval of their relationship, due to the fact that Shelley was already married at that time. Therefore, they were forced to elope to France, where they also brought Mary's sister Jane (later known as Claire). The three escapees ran away to Switzerland, Germany, France and then back to England, in the first of their many travels. When they came back to England, penniless, 'in September 1814, [they] met with almost universal disapproval from family and friends'[76]. Godwin himself was enraged - he refused to see them for two years - even though he kept asking for financial aid from Shelley.

In 1807 Godwin's wife, in order to gain some money, convinced him to open the Juvenile Press, a publishing company for children's books. It was an event of considerable importance because they drew attention to the undervalued field of kids' fiction. However, the costs of the publishing company were too high and, in 1825, the Juvenile Library was declared bankrupt. The last part of Godwin's life was again tormented by his debts, as his son-in-law Shelley died in 1822 when he was only twenty-nine, leaving Godwin penniless again. Godwin still tried to write but the result were minor works - such as the novels *Cloudeseley* and *Deloraine.* Godwin, tired of his tumultuous past, tried to reconcile with the society that rejected him, so much so that in 1833 he accepted a job offer as Office Keeper and Yeoman Usher of the Exchequer, an official duty with an income of 200£ a year, which permitted him to live his last years in relative stability. He died in 1636.

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[76] Betty T. Bennett "Shelley [née Godwin], Mary Wollstonecraft (1797–1851), writer." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. May 29, 2014. Oxford University Press,. Date of access 5 Mar. 2019, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25311>

1.4 The Literature of Sensibility and its criticism

One of the examples proving that the literature of sensibility rapidly went from being a huge success to be ridiculed — and then almost forgotten until the mid twentieth century — is the fact that Henry MacKenzie's successful novel *The Man of Feeling* was extremely popular in 1771, the year it was published. Only twenty years later, its moving scenes were the object of satire. This is but one example of the marginalization of the literature of feeling[77], which lasted until only recently, and it shows how problematic it has been for modern critics to define and analyze it. The gender-based criticism referred to in Chapter 1.3 was not the only voice against the literature of sensibility, on the contrary, the antipathy to this literary subgenre between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century was far broader, and the reasons why the sentimental trend went out of fashion so rapidly should be considered in its own peculiarities.

The narrative of this kind is usually fragmented in episodes whose main aim is to engage the readers with emotional response. These segments (or episodes) are useful to focus the readers' attention more on their own emotions and bodily responses rather than on the plot per se, which is of minor importance in this kind of literature. Usually, the figure of the man of feeling encounters suffering people in distress (such as poor, animals, beggars, children, prostitutes) and uses his own fine sensibility to show the readers his virtue by sympathizing with the distress of others. Typically, the scenes involve tears of sympathy and/or sentiments too strong to be expressed by language.

As mentioned above, Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) is perhaps one of the best examples of the literature of sentiment, since it was written in the period in which the shift from the vogue of the sentimental fiction was rapidly becoming an antipathy for it, therefore it embraces both its peculiarities and is a satire of its own characteristics. Furthermore, this novel is crucial also because it embodies the philosophical debates which were going through at that time, for example in the works of Hume and Smith, where there are hints at the importance of sentiment and

[77] Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, cit, p. 15

benevolence for the State[78], which was also a central question for the Scottish philosophers. Mackenzie himself was part of those Edinburgh Scots who romanticized sensibility. In *The Man of Feeling* the hegemony of the reason is thus questioned in favor of the discussion over the innate benevolence of mankind, since the main debate in this book is about whether the human actions are 'fundamentally selfish or fundamentally benevolent'[79]. However, this question is embodied in the unheroic hero of the novel: Harley, the novel's main character, whose over-sensitiveness makes him a comical character, that is to say, a fool. In him, the senses he uses to perceive the world are over-excited, resulting in his weeping in most episodes of the novel. As Sir Walter Scott pointed out: 'the *Man of Feeling* represented a phenomenology of the feeling […], rather the history of the effects produced by the human mind by a series of events, than the narrative of those events themselves'[80]. In fact, this novel is central in the 'culture of tears' as it was a sort of test for the sensibility for its readers[81], which would show if the - female - reader had a real sensibility of mind or not.

Of course, *The Man of Feeling*, and, more generally, the literature of sentiment, was directed to a female audience, since, as stated above, the perceiving of the world through feelings was considered a woman's peculiarity due to the weakness of her nervous system. Nevertheless, in this book the anti-hero is a man, and Harley's model of feminized masculinity, the product of his pathetic excess of sensibility (which is idiosyncratic in his bashfulness), proves him unsuitable for social intercourses and therefore leads to think that sentimentalism may have caused a crisis in the concept of masculinity. The preoccupation for a weakening of manhood caused by sentimentalism was crucial in the end of the eighteenth century. Mackenzie's novel 'preached the latter theory of moral sentiment'[82] and applied it to a male character, who became the perfect example of feminized masculinity. It is clear that Mackenzie did not mean Harley to be

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[78] See Introduction to Henry MacKenzie written by Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, *The Man of Feeling*, cit, p. x

[79] *Ibid.* p. xi

[80] *Ibid.* p. xvi

[81] Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, cit, p. 121

[82] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility, Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, cit, p. 142

taken as a model; on the contrary, by showing his inadequacy and inability in the social practice, the author is perhaps criticizing the sentimentalism as a system for measuring one's virtue. Moreover, Harley's social inability is autobiographical, as it reflects Mackenzies' own feelings when he went to London, where he 'felt a "martyr" to it'[83]. Examples of Harley's inadequate social skills and naiveness are abundant throughout the whole book, which narrates Harley's *Bildung* in a selfish, unfeeling world:

> But we take our ideas from sounds which folly has invented; Fashion, Bon ton, and Virtue, are the names of certain idols, to which we sacrifice the genuine pleasures of the soul: in this world of semblance, we are contented with personating happiness; to feel it is an art beyond us.[84]

The depiction of this unkind modern world clearly contrasts the above-mentioned theories of the innate benevolence of man, in fact, it shows that a too sensitive person ultimately fails in this kind of selfish and individualistic society that values 'fashion and bon ton' more than human happiness.

Mackenzie, through the episodes of his novel, seems to ask whether human beings are really benevolent or not. This may be considered a reflection on the studies of Hume and Smith about community and sympathy, and if on the one hand Mackenzie clearly values the importance of sentiment and sympathy, on the other hand he also believes that they may not be fit for the new commercial society of the late eighteenth century. In fact, it is important to stress that Harley is a representative of the impoverished aristocracy, a social class that was starting to decline in the years in which the novel was written and published, and Harley himself is going through a difficult financial situation after the death of his father. This means that the novel's main character embodies the value and the attachment for his noble past and its clash with the modern commercial world and its capitalistic values. Hence, this can be interpreted as a suggestion that sentimentality might be related only to a certain social class and not to all, as if showing sympathy implicitly meant having a higher social status. In Harley's case, he is forced to go to London in order to obtain a source of income and, throughout the book, he is

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[83] *Ibid.* p. 143

[84] Henry MacKenzie, *The Man of Feeling* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 70

repeatedly confronted with this unknown city ('I confess myself ignorant of the town'[85]) and its inhabitants. He strongly criticizes progress and change made by the *nouveau riches* - the middle class - and in his pathetic inadequacy, which then leads to his failure, one could see, firstly, the failure in trying to stop the progress of the middle class, and, secondly, an allegory of the failure of the sentimental literature as a genre.

One of the most famous literary antecedent of Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, which dealt with the inadequacy of the sentimental hero when confronted with the society, is probably Laurence Sterne's successful novel *A Sentimental* Journey, published in 1768. The clergyman and writer Sterne, like Mackenzie, created both a milestone of the sentimental genre but also a parody of it. Its paradox can easily be noted in the comical ambiguity of his work, in which there are many *double entendres* as well as a number of mischievous wordplays. This sentimental novel is highly interesting due to its brand new way of writing travel literature, which consists in focusing on the sensations and feelings of the inner self - the narrator - rather than describing the external landscapes of the places he visits.

Not only Sterne's man of feeling - namely, Mr Yorick - describes his travels from a sentimental point of view, but, comparably to Harley, due to its over-sensitiveness he is shown as inadequate for what concerns his social skills. Thus, many of the episodes narrated in the book conclude in comic and ridiculous endings. In his novel, Sterne employed a less traditional sentimentalism, which can be defined as ambiguous, so that the readers would find the classic sentimental rhetoric in a novel in which much sexuality is present as well. As mentioned above, the sentimental novels had a predominantly female audience, and in order not to scandalize them - or rather not to scandalize the prudish society in which they lived - eroticism was not present or explicit at all in sentimental novels. On the contrary, in *A Sentimental Journey*, 'love and desire are integral to nature's web of kindess'[86], thus Sterne clearly rejects those moralistic sentimental conventions in which the aspect of human sexuality is fully censored - or considered only from a a male point of view - therefore embracing a less conservative and prude way of writing about sentiments. As pointed out by Parnell, sexuality is

[85] Henry MacKenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, cit, p. 40

[86] See Introduction to Laurence Sterne written by Tim Parnell, *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, edited by Ian, Jack, and Tim, Parnell (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003) p. xx

'typically the rock upon which efforts to imagine both personal virtue and social being founder' therefore Sterne 'seek to reconcile feeling and desire'[87], a crucial topic for his *Sentimental Journey*. However, in order to being able to balance feelings and sexuality in his book, and giving the fact that Sterne could not be published if he talked about uncensored erotic liaisons, he employs wordplay, puns, and jokes, and by doing so he widely utilizes the lexicon of sensibility throughout the novel - the word *sentimental* in the title of his novel demonstrates it.

However, as noted earlier, at the time he was writing, the meaning of the word *sentimental* was different from the negative connotation it started to have around the 1780s/90s. The meaning Sterne implied to describe Mr Yorick's travels was that of 'suggesting a moral reflection or opinion'[88], which, again, derived from Smith's studies on the emotional basis of moral understandings. In *A Sentimental Journey*, as in Mackenzie's novels, one can find episodes in which there are floods of tears of sympathy for situations in which there are people in distress, as for example in the paragraph dedicated to Maria Moulines and her sadness for the loss of his husband:

> I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe them [her tears] away as they fell with my handkerchief. - I then steep'd it in my own - and then in hers - and then in mine - and then I wiped hers again - and as I did it, I felt such indescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combination of matter and motion[89].

Nevertheless, the use Sterne makes of the lexicon of sensibility is also ironic, due to the erotic undertones of some of the episodes narrated in his novel. In fact, he based a great number of episodes of his *Sentimental Journey* on flirtation, sexual tension, and ambiguity on whether or not Yorick's desire was consummated. This becomes clear in passages such as when Mr Yorick is asked to feel the pulse of a woman in a Parisian shop: '[…] if it's the same blood which comes from the heart, which descends to the extremes (touching her wrist) I am sure you must have one of the best *pulses* of any

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[87] *Ibid.* p. xxviii

[88] *Ibid.* p. xxvii

[89] Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, cit, p. 95

woman in the world'[90], 'we both *blushed* intolerably'[91], or, for instance, in the episode when Mr Yorick is in Paris - famously known as the city of transgression - and he describes his meeting with the Marquesina di F*: 'the *connection* which arouse out of that translation, gave me more *pleasure* than any one I had the honor to make in Italy'[92]. It is not a coincidence that Sterne set all of these ambiguous episodes in France and, especially, in Paris. English people thought Parisians to be very libertine, and this *cliché* is recurrent in this novel.

Briefly returning to the gender question related to the literature of sentiment, one could read this particular aspect of the novel as a criticism towards the patriarchal view of femininity. It is important to notice how Sterne emphasizes both men and women's reactions to these erotic encounters, subtly dismissing his contemporary conservative view that completely ignored female sexual interest and saw women only as pure, chaste, and asexual beings. This is one of the main difference between Sterne and other sentimental writers such as Richardson, who in his novel *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748) described a virtuous woman in distress 'whose reward is either death or marriage'[93], focusing on how male sexual appetites repeatedly tried to corrupt the heroine's honour. The female sentimental heroine becomes either a victim of rape or, best-case scenario, a wife, in the case of another novel written by Richardson, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded*.

The last criticism to sentimental literature taken into account in this chapter is the one made by William Godwin. Godwin criticized this kind of sentimental literature in his works, especially in his novels *Caleb Williams* and *Fleetwood, or The New Man of Feeling*. As shall be seen below in chapter two and three, Godwin embraced some of the features of the sentimental fiction but also rejected some others. Nevertheless, he can be considered sentimental for a number of reasons, for example in the way he exalted public benefit and happiness through disinterested good social actions in his *Political Justice* as well as in his novels. As may be noted from the final words of the Preface to

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[90] *Ibid.* p. 42 [emphasis added]

[91] *Ibid.* p. 48 [emphasis added]

[92] *Ibid.* p. 48 [emphasis added]

[93] Henry MacKenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, cit, p. ix

his *Political Justice*, Godwin indeed exalted the importance of benevolence also in his political writings:

> No man can more fervently deprecate scenes of commotion and tumult than the author of this book; no man would more anxiously avoid the lending his assistance in the most distant manner to animosity and bloodshed; but he persuades himself that, whatever may be the events with which the present crisis of human history shall be distinguished, the effect of his writings, as far as they are in any degree remembered, will be found favorable *to the increase and preservation of general kindness and benevolence*.[94]

He clearly believed in a kind of political philosophy whose aim had to be the happiness of humankind. This focus on benevolence and humanity may perhaps be seen as an influence from the philosopher mentioned in paragraph 1.2, namely Smith and Hume, and therefore may as well be seen as part of his sentimentalism.

Godwinian sentimentalism is well balanced with his rationalism, thus, is not always clear and apparent as in other sentimental fiction. Generally, Godwin does not believe that man is innately selfish and egoistic, on the contrary, he gives great values to man's sympathy even though he strongly believe that reason should discipline it. Godwin sees man as a product of social experience — as previously mentioned in chapter 1.4 — and he therefore believes that man sympathizes and functions for the happiness of others, in other words, that man has an innate disposition to help the community:

> There is no joy, but in the spectacle and contemplation of happiness. There is no delightful melancholy, but in pitying distress. The man who has once performed an act of exalted generosity, knows that there is no sensation of corporal or intellectual taste to be compared with this.[95]

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[94] Godwin, William, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness. By William Godwin. In Two Volumes*, (Philadelphia, Bioren and Madan, 1796) p. xiv [emphasis added] First American edition from the second London edition corrected. Philadelphia, 1796. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of Venice. <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=univenice&tabID=T001&docId=CW104561343&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE> Accessed on 28th May 2019.

[95] Allen B. Sprague, 'William Godwin as a Sentimentalist' *PMLA*, 33-1 (1918), pp. 1-29 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/456970> accessed on 2nd March, 2019 p. 6

His sentimental beliefs will be even clearer when analyzing his novel *Caleb Williams*, where Godwin 'undertakes to stir up our feelings by a long procession of wretched creatures, victims of the maladministration of justice and irrational penal codes, all of whom, with sentimental exaggeration, he graces with striking virtue'[96].

Even though his novels are not fragmented in episodes such as Mackenzie's and Sterne's, and the narrative of the plot is of crucial importance, a general feeling of humanity is recurrent and is applied to many of its characters, even though they committed crimes - which shows how Godwin managed to combine his radical political views with his sentimentalism. Godwin's Caleb Williams and Casimir Fleetwood are not similar to the typical men of feelings, and his novels do not make its readers shed floods of tears; however, those characters have a number of traits in common with the men of feeling.

In *Fleetwood, or the New Man of Feeling*, as the subtitle suggests, Godwin again used sentimental features but he is also skeptical about them. Fleetwood in particular is the product of his experience in an evil and unfeeling society, and his over-delicacy ultimately turns him into a misanthrope, which leads him to his failure (and madness). This can be read as the failure of the man of feeling in the modern society, a theme that links Godwin with his literary antecedents. To conclude, Godwin strongly criticizes 'sentimental passivity, [as] he insists that it is nothing less than immoral for an individual to cherish unduly painful emotions that will incapacitate him for useful benevolent activities'[97], thus creating a new philanthropic sentimentalism in which the well-being of the society is central and where 'he repeats the conventional [sentimental] situations and drains them of their tears'[98].

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[96] *Ibid.* p. 10

[97] *Ibidem*

[98] *Ibid.* p. 28

Chapter Two

Godwin's *Caleb Williams*

2.1 Plot and main characters

William Godwin is of particular interest in the literature of feeling because he managed to express his political views — firstly theorized in his renowned pamphlet *Political Justice* — through a novel which possesses political, sentimental, psychological, Gothic and Romantic features. Thus, Godwin created a sort of brand new literary genre which subsequently inspired a number of writers and philosophers. For this reason, in Godwin's most successful novel, *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, he skillfully managed to combine together a number of literary styles and genres, so much so that labelling it merely as a 'didactic' novel would be simplistic and wrong, even though the main title *Things as They Are* (and its clear didacticism) may suggests otherwise. In fact, the novel's main aim is to put in practice the Godwinian radical political ideals, as will be further explained throughout this chapter, but there is also much more to it, to such an extent that *Caleb Williams* should be defined as 'one of the most important and influential novel published in Britain during the 1790s'[99]. This becomes even clearer when analyzing its plot, in which the first-person narrator Caleb tells his own story about solving a mysterious murder and suffering a subsequent persecution, a plot very similar to that of modern crime fiction novels (as a result, a number of critics have also referred to it as the first detective novel ever written[100]).

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[99] See Introduction to William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. by Gary Handwerk and A.A. Markley, (Ontario, Broadview Literary Texts, 2000) p. 9

[100] Monika Fludernik, 'William Godwin's Caleb Williams: The Tarnishing of the Sublime', *ELH*, 68-4 (Winter 2001) pp. 857-896 (Article) <https://10.1353/elh.2001.0032> accessed 28 September, 2018.

This book is structured in three volumes: the first presents the young main character, namely Caleb Williams, who, after the death of his humble parents, starts working as a secretary and a librarian in the manor of the wealthy country squire Ferdinando Falkland. Caleb is first noted by Falkland's steward, Mr Collins, who recommends the young man to his master, thanks to Caleb's inclination towards reading, as well as his passion to learn and his innate curiosity. Throughout the very first pages of the novel, after only few months from the beginning of his employment at the Falkland's manor, Caleb faces his first experience with his master's tyrannical and strange temper, when he surprises Falkland alone in a small, hidden apartment near the library. At the sound of Caleb approaching, Falkland reacts as if he was caught doing something he should not so he shouts and bursts with irrational and furious anger, to Caleb. At that point, Caleb is so terrified by his master's reaction that he promptly asks Mr Collins if he knew the reason for Falkland's distemper and raging reaction, therefore Mr Collins starts narrating the background story of their master. Caleb learns that Falkland was once a very different person, much happier and adored by people, a virtuous nobleman highly preoccupied for his honour and dignity. Mr Collins tells a number of episodes from his master's 'sentimental' travels in Europe, in which Falkland often finds himself in situations were he has to fight for his honour and/or for his sense of justice, specifically in Italy. However, the central episode for *Caleb William*'s plot is the one which happens after his return to England: a quarrel between Falkland and his neighbor Barnabas Tyrell, the person who causes his disgrace.

Tyrell's character is portrayed as the opposite of Mr Falkland's, both for what concerns his physiognomy and also for his intellect. While the first is described as 'a man of small stature, with an extreme delicacy of form and appearance'[101], the former is defined 'muscular and sturdy'[102] and passionate for physical activities. These opposed physical features mirror that of their mind as well: Falkland is well educated, and his sense of duty and the obsession for his honor clearly derive from his love of chivalry readings, Tyrell on the other hand is not interested in literature at all, so much so that the

[101] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 4

[102] *Ibid.* p. 16

narrator compares the activity of his mind as that of an 'overgrown lubber'[103]. Therefore, the first may be labelled as a *man of feeling*, a key concept which will be further developed in the next paragraph, while the second is almost a barbarian: rude, tyrannical and arrogant. Mr Clare, a poet who lives in their community, deeply respected and admired by Falkland — who thinks of him as a luminary — perfectly describes these two characters by defining Tyrell as 'boisterous, rugged, and *unfeeling*' and Falkland as 'too passionate, too acutely *sensible* of injury'[104], employing the lexicon of sensibility to describe their two opposite personalities. In Mr Clare's death bed, while he is talking to Falkland, he predicts the disgrace which the chivalric squire would later cause to himself due to his temper, and he uses these prophetic words: 'you have an impetuosity and an impatience of *imagined dishonour*, that, if once set wrong, may make you as eminently mischievous'[105].

Tyrell loathes Falkland mainly because after his arrival back home in England, Falkland had gained the respect and the admiration of all the community, becoming hugely popular and loved, thus stealing what used to be Tyrell's position. After a number of episodes in which Falkland always demonstrates his moral superiority towards the brute, Tyrell chooses as the victim of his revengeful fury his own orphan cousin and ward, Emily Melvile, the daughter of his father's sister. She was received — and grew up — in Tyrell's house due to her mother's unfortunate marriage, however, Emily does not belong to the family yet she is not as a servant; she could be defined as somewhere in between the two. The narrator describes her as a woman with 'an uncommon degree of *sensibility*, […] sweetness and easiness of temper'[106], and even though she lacks physical beauty, she used to be Tyrell's favorite. Nevertheless, when he discovers her affections and admiration for Mr Falkland, and even more when he learns how those affections had grown as Falkland saved her from a fire, Tyrell feels betrayed and he decides to get his revenge by abusing his power with her, as a sort of punishment. All of the kindness towards her disappears, as the tyrant plans to force

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[103] *Ibidem*

[104] *Ibid.* p. 33 [emphasis added]

[105] *Ibid.* p. 33 [emphasis added]

[106] *Ibid.* p. 49 [emphasis added]

Emily into marriage with a young man, namely Grimes, whom he carefully selected so that he would possess all the opposite physical and intellectual qualities of Mr Falkland: in fact, he is coarse, rude, and repulsive, described by the narrator as an 'uncouth and half-civilized animal'[107]. Of course Emily rejects the proposal, firmly opposing herself with the idea of marriage.

In her character, Godwin perhaps wanted to pay homage to the literary production of his wife Mary Wollstonecraft, creating a female heroine who fights for her right to not marry a man she does not love, showing firmness and courage towards Tyrell: 'You may imprison my body, but you cannot conquer my mind. […] Every hardship I suffer puts still farther distant the end for which I am thus unjustly treated'[108]. Her resistance to Tyrell as far as marriage and free will are concerned links her to the proto-feminist ideals of Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin's first wife.

However, Emily's despotic and unfeeling master does not change his mind in spite of her firmness, thus he proceeds in his unjust and evil plan by imprisoning the young girl in her own apartment. She tries to escape with the help of Grimes, however, he tries to rape her, but, fortunately, Mr Falkland saves her again. Tyrell would not stop his fury towards his cousin and he has her arrested on false charges. At that point the health of the young girl is heavily affected by that series of events due to her emotional distress, so much so that, in the end, she dies. Emily's death could be considered the turning point of the book because the immediate consequence is a furious fight between Tyrell, now detested by everyone, and Falkland at the rural assembly of their community.

Tyrell even physically attacks Falkland and leaves the assembly, however, shortly after, he is found murdered a few yards from the city assembly. Mr Collins, in his narration, defines that day as 'the crisis of Mr Falkland's history. From hence took its beginning that gloomy and unsociable melancholy of which he has since been the victim'[109]. Falkland is immediately accused of the murder but then he uses his spotless reputation among his beloved community and his high sense of honor, and the charges dropped. Two tenants of Tyrell, the Hawkinses father and son, who were subjected by a

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[107] *Ibid.* p. 58

[108] *Ibid.* p. 68

[109] *Ibid.* p. 94

past of torments by the tyrannical squire, are found culpable instead, and they are both hanged.

The second volume of this novel is dedicated to Caleb's thoughts and morbid curiosity triggered by the narration of Mr Collins. At first, Caleb is satisfied by the story of Mr Falkland's past, but then he decides to examine it thoroughly, and, by studying his master's behavior and reactions to him trying to talk about his past, he gradually convinces himself of Mr Falkland's guilt, especially after having found and read a letter from the elder Hawkins to Mr Falkland. Exasperated by Caleb's psychological torture, his master finally admits his guilt and the innocence of the Hawkinses. Nevertheless, the price for this confession is high for Caleb:

> I am the blackest of villains. I am the murderer of Tyrell. I am the assassin of the Hawkinses […] I will benefit you in respect of fortune, but shall always hate you. If ever an unguarded word escape from your lips, if ever you excite my jealousy or suspicion, expect to pay it by your death or worse. It is a dear bargain you have made[110].

Caleb, terrified, tries to quit the service, but his attempt to leave Falkland soon turns out to be just the beginning of his persecution, as Falkland would never let him free to go away and quit his employment now that Caleb knows his murderous secret. Caleb secretly tries to escape from Falkland House to London, but he soon finds out that Falkland falsely accused him of having robbed a large sum of money, jewels, and bank notes from the estate. Falkland's brother-in-law, Mr Forester, writes a letter to Caleb urging him to come back: 'After reading these lines, if you are a villain and a rascal, you will perhaps endeavor to fly. If your conscience tells you, You are innocent, you will out of all doubt come back'[111]. To preserve his virtue and to claim his innocence, Caleb decides to come back and goes through the trial. However, Mr Forester listens to the confrontation and the trial, and finally decides to believe to his brother-in-law and, therefore, he sides with him. Caleb is then arrested and sent to prison. The chapters dedicated to his miserable time spent in prison are clearly a political critique to the State

[110] *Ibid.* p. 133

[111] *Ibid.* p. 154

and the inhumane treatment of prisoners ('I thought this was a Christian country; but this usage is too bad for a dog'[112]) which shall be analyzed in paragraph 1.4.

The third and last volume of the novel begins with Caleb's escape from prison — and also from Falkland's tyranny — with the help of Thomas, Mr Falkland's valet. Shortly after his escape, he is wandering through the woods when he is surprised by a group of thieves who rob him. One of them, called Gines (or Jones in some editions), physically attacks him, and leaves him half naked and wounded. However, another thieve called Mr Raymond, who later turns out to be the Captain of that same group of criminals, saves Caleb, showing great empathy, virtue and honour, and subsequently banishes Gines from their group. The narrator calls him his benefactor, since he shows a lot of compassion towards his distressed conditions after the attack — interestingly, as will be explained in paragraph 1.4, Mr Raymond is a criminal but he shows much more empathy than other men such as the ones involved in justice or politics.

Caleb decides to live with this company of thieves for a while, since he is badly injured and cannot walk, and Raymond takes care of him. Nevertheless, another man who supported Gines first tries to murder Caleb and then even threatens him to give the police his whereabouts, therefore forcing Caleb to flee once again, disguised as a beggar. Persecuted both by Gines and Falkland in a series of accidents, Caleb tries to go to Ireland but gets arrested, however, this time he is not imprisoned because his accusers do not show up. He even tries to live a normal life in London by starting a literary career and then in Wales, which is his happy perfect place for a short period of time, but both Gines and his past haunt him in every place he tries to settle in, and thus he is forced to move often. Finally, in the end of the novel, he manages to go to court and confront Falkland.

At this point, is important to note how Godwin wrote two different endings for this novel, as pointed out by Gilbert Dumas: 'No portion of a novel is liable to be so crucial to its total significance and ultimate esthetic impact as its ending. Godwin himself tells us in his account of the composition of *Caleb Williams* that he first "invented" his third volume, working backwards to the first volume before undertaking the actual

[112] *Ibid.* p. 195

composition from the beginning'[113]. The first ending, published in the manuscript of *Caleb Williams*, is definitely a much more didactic, pessimistic and politic conclusion for the novel, in which Falkland denies his guilt for the murder of Tyrell, and, with the help of his 'sinister and cruel agent'[114] Gines, he tortures Caleb to the point of driving him mad. Of course, this ending reinforces Godwin's critique of the English justice system, as he once again blames it for corrupting the society.

By publishing the ending in which the aristocratic power 'wins', Godwin might have considered the victory of the new social classes as impossible — in this case, the bourgeois middle class represented by Caleb — towards the old declining aristocratic class represented by Falkland, and, thus, it would have been pessimistic and without any political hope. This pessimistic interpretation would have been a paradox, since Godwin had indeed hope for a political reformation, as he claimed in his *Political Justice.*

The conclusion Godwin decided to publish instead is the opposite of the manuscript one. In fact, it is as if the author was dissatisfied by it and, in a short period of time after finishing his novel, completely revised it with what could be called a more sentimental ending. His published ending denotes his change of mind due to its positiveness and hope towards human emotions and kindness: Caleb went to a chief magistrate in Falkland's town and asked him to charge Falkland of multiple murders. During the trial, his innocence is finally recognized and Falkland confesses his murder in front of the magistrate. Nevertheless, Caleb is shocked by the sight of his former master, unable to stand, ghost-like, old and fatigued. Caleb says: 'What a sight was this to me! 'Till the moment that Falkland was presented to my view, my breast was steeled to pity. I thought that I had coolly entered into the reason of the case. […] But all of these fine-spun reasonings vanished before the object that was now exhibited to me.'[115]

The ending can be defined sentimental because of the emotions of sympathy felt by Caleb for his enemy. Caleb is no more asking for vengeance but for justice. Moreover, in the postscript, Caleb is portrayed as sympathetic and pitiful towards his former

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[113] Gilbert Dumas, 'Things as They Were: The Original Ending of Caleb Williams', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 6-3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1966), pp. 575-597 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/449561> accessed on 25 March, 2019, p. 576

[114] *Ibid.* p. 578

[115] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 296

master conditions, therefore giving evidences for this particular study's purpose to show William Godwin not only as a rational radical thinker but as a sentimentalist.

2.2 Mr Falkland and Caleb Williams as men of feeling: *Caleb Williams* and its relationship with the literature of sensibility

Godwin's sentimentalism brings into question whether it is completely against the spirit of *Political Justice* or, as this study argues, whether it should be considered as a sort of evolution of it. As noted by Allen Sprague, 'the truth would seem to be that sentimentalism was already implicit in *Political Justice*, but disguised by Godwin's cold intellectual statement of his principle'[116]. This paragraph's main aim is to examine Godwin's engagement with the literature of feeling through an analysis of *Caleb Williams*, analyzing its main characters, Mr Falkland and Caleb Williams, as men of feeling.

As pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis, Godwin criticized some aspects of this kind of literature, and yet also embraced some of its features, for example by employing the rhetoric of sensibility — the word *sensibility* itself is recurrent throughout the narration — as well as some of the peculiarities of the man of feeling, in order to convey his political thoughts and messages. Hence, Godwin's novelty in writing his first fiction is exactly that of combining his radical political view with a novel which has a mix of features from many other different literary genres in it. Specifically, for what concerns sensibility, *Caleb Williams* deals with nervous bodies, uncontrollable passions, and strong emotions; therefore sensibility in this particular case is mainly related with the central aspect of power, politics, despotism and, thus, threat.

Even though Mr Falkland and Caleb Williams may be presented as enemies in the narrative of the novel, their characters are similar in a number of ways, especially for

[116] B. Sprague Allen, *William Godwin as a Sentimentalist*, cit, p. 3

what concerns the sentimental aspect of their personalities. They both share what can be named as a nervous body, exploited by the author since 'nervous complaints became a useful tool for writers engaged in social criticism'[117]. In fact, Godwin shows how politics and sensibility became deeply interconnected in *Caleb Williams* due to the nervous narration made by Caleb about Falkland's tyranny and persecution, which mainly relied on abuse of power — made possible by his social position and wealth — therefore showing the corruption of the English political and juridical system. Despite their differences caused by their opposite positions on the social scale, Falkland and Caleb both share the 'persecution of a malignant destiny'[118] generated by their vivid imagination and their obsessions. Caleb's morbid curiosity thanks to which 'the mind is urged by a perpetual stimulus'[119], and Falkland's 'excessive sensibility in the matter of honour'[120] derive from their literary interests: Caleb's curiosity was firstly discovered in his passion for learning and reading — which also gave him the fundamental possibility to reach a higher social status from that of his parents — while Falkland's youth was filled with chivalry and romance novels.

This aspect confirms that sentimentalism helped Godwin in reinforcing his ideas that man is the product of his education. Of course it is important to stress that the two characters had different financial means, Falkland had also the possibility to travel, an aspect which could link him to Sterne's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*: 'By inclination he [Falkland] was led to make his longest stay in Italy, and here he fell into company with several young noblemen whose studies and principles were congenial to his own […] nor was he less favored and admired by the softer sex'[121]. However, even though Falkland was described as admired and idolized by Italian women, contrarily to Yorick his main preoccupations were not about sexuality but,

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[117] Peter Melville Logan, 'Narrating Hysteria: "Caleb Williams" and the Cultural History of Nerves', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 29-2 (Winter, 1996), pp. 206-222 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1345859> accessed on 12 March, 2019, p. 206

[118] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 15

[119] *Ibid.* p. 119

[120] *Ibid.* p. 118

[121] *Ibid.* p. 9

rather, morality, as Falkland repeatedly points out: ‘Reputation has been the idol, the jewel of my life’[122].

Returning to Caleb’s pathological nervous behavior, one could find another strong connection between the two main characters in their mutual persecution: as Caleb obsessively pursuits Falkland in the first half of the novel in order to satisfy his pathological curiosity, his master got his revenge by persecuting him in the second half. Caleb became his victim’s victim so it is as if they switched their positions from victim to persecutor and vice versa throughout the narrative. Thus, they both cannot be considered completely innocent or guilty. That is the reason why Monika Fludernik defines Caleb Williams as Falkland’s ‘alter ego’, firstly because he personifies Falkland’s guilt, and secondly because of their mirroring, which is clear both in their personalities but also in a number of aspects of their lives.

Moreover, Caleb’s pathology shown in his desperate pursuit of a confession from Falkland is key to the discourse on sensibility, in fact, a number of critics have noted how Caleb’s unreliability as a narrator may have derived from symptoms of paranoia, persecution-mania and neurosis which makes his narration not credible. A further confirmation may be that Caleb himself defined the state of his mind as ‘fluctuating’, as well as his natural inclination to talkativeness, a feature generally considered as one of the main symptoms of neurosis, which may confirm also all of Caleb’s contradictions. It would seem that Godwin depicted a classic case of neurosis (probably without even being aware of doing so) since he have shaped Caleb’s character as a perfect Freudian example of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the mere fact that Caleb narrates his own story of persecution in his own terms, praising himself for having been able to bear the pain, in order to vindicate himself from Falkland’s tyranny is a strong reason for not believing in the objectivity of his account.

Thus, his story is highly subjective and the narration is nervous, and his morbid curiosity is hidden by a alleged admiration for his master which ‘contrasts strangely with his revelatory language’[123]. As Kenneth W. Graham claims:

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[122] *Ibid.* p. 99

[123] Mitzi Myers, ’Godwin's Changing Conception of Caleb Williams’, cit, p. 606

> […] when Godwin decided on a first person point of view, he changed, consciously or not, the purpose of his novel from an illustration of *Political Justice* to a study of solipsism. The decision reflects a willingness to sacrifice objectivity to subjectivity and political to aesthetic purpose[124]

Caleb's narration clearly shows how his god-like veneration for Falkland rapidly turns into suspicion, which subsequently turns him into a despotic tyrant, he himself describes it as 'a kind of fatal impulse that seemed to hurry me to my destruction'[125]. As stated by Mitzi Myers: 'his [Caleb's] curiosity has become an instrument of complete power and dominion over another human being: he alone of all men now possesses Falkland's inmost self'[126]. At that point, Caleb can no longer be read as a innocent, calm and rational being, since he is somehow possessed by his own strong emotions, which are very similar to those felt by Falkland and described as irrational fits of insanity. Godwin's purpose was perhaps to demonstrate how important morality and reason were in order to virtuously lead emotions and sensibility: men of feeling, who indeed possess exquisite sensibility, could become monsters if they do not possess also reason: he argues that there must be equality between the two poles.

A number of critics — and especially in Gold's reading of *Caleb Williams* — have suggested a Freudian psychological interpretation in order to explain the irrational passions and emotions which connects Caleb and Falkland. In particular, there is the common belief that Caleb's pursuit of Falkland — and vice versa — is nothing but a courtship. The hypothesis of a complex story of Platonic homosexual desire and love between the two characters is reinforced by the narrative itself, in which they both feel emotions impossible to govern, almost too strong to be linked only to sentiments of fear and horror — which would have been more predictable. The first hint is probably given by the fact that Falkland's persecution is irrational, he should not fear him so deeply since — as will be explained in paragraph 1.4 — the law would always believe him and not his servant. Also, he could have easily killed Caleb but he decides not to do so, and, on the contrary he tries to 'comfort' him, as stated by Rudolf F. Storch: 'Falkland not

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[124] Kenneth W. Graham, *The Politics of Narrative: Ideology and Social Change in William Godwin's Caleb Williams (Ams Studies in the Eighteenth Century)*, (Ams Pr Inc, New York, 1990) p. 54

[125] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 118

[126] Mitzi Myers, 'Godwin's Changing Conception of Caleb Williams', *Studies in English Literature*, cit, p. 608

only persecutes, but also keeps Caleb alive. He sends him food and money for comforts in prison'[127]. However, the character that clearly confirms this hypothesis is Caleb with his 'sexual guilt' which demonstrates his own passionate feelings for his master. This is even clearer when Caleb surprisingly finds himself 'finally alive' only in the crucial moment in the novel, which is when he convinces himself that Falkland is a murderer, and he feels a peculiar sensation, very different from any other reaction one could imagine, which he defines as an 'high tide of boiling passions'[128]. In that passage, it is interesting to point out how, after having convinced himself that Falkland is the murderer, he feels 'finally alive', which is a positive emotion perhaps linked to the fact that he had never felt before such feelings and therefore he is rejoicing it, as if he received a perverted pleasure in finally knowing Falkland's secret. He even admits that he would be willing to die for Falkland:

> "[…] Do with me any thing you will. Kill me if you please." "Kill you?" [Volumes could not describe the *emotions* with which this echo of my words was given and received] "Sir, I could die to serve you! *I love you more than I can express*. I worship you as a being of superior nature."[129]

By asserting so, Caleb is actually saying that he is in love with a criminal. There are many hints that affirm this theory: in the first part of *Caleb Williams*, Caleb repeatedly praises his master's kindness and sensibility, he keeps acclaiming him so much so that his infatuation becomes evident. The sentimental lexicon he uses, especially in the moments before and after Falkland's admission of guilt, is key in studying his alleged infatuation for his master, as could be seen in sentences such as 'the sound of it [Falkland's voice] thrilled my very vitals'[130], a sentence he pronounces in the very first encounter with Falkland's rage and distemper, that is when he finds him in the little apartment near the library.

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[127] Rudolf F. Storch, 'Metaphors of Private Guilt and Social Rebellion in Godwin's Caleb Williams', *ELH*, 34-2 (Jun., 1967), pp. 188-207 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872234> accessed on 15 March, 2019, p. 191

[128] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 129

[129] *Ibid.* p. 117 [emphasis added]

[130] *Ibid.* p. 7

As happens in sentimental novels, in that precise moment, when he perceives all of Falkland's rage for the first time, his emotions are so strong — on the verge of sexual pleasure — that his speech fails, which not only is exactly one of the above-mentioned features of the literature of feeling, but could also be defined as '*dissociate sensibility,* [that is to say] an inability to fuse word and thing (or word and concept) expression and emotion'[131]:

> […] I was incapable of any resolution. All was chaos and uncertainty within me. My thoughts were too full of horror to be susceptible of activity. I felt deserted of my intellectual powers, palsied in mind, and compelled to sit in speechless expectation of the misery to which I was destined.[132]

Of course this is but another feature of the sublimity of the novel, since the sublime is generally 'understood as the powerfully felt inability to figure or represent what the mind has nonetheless conceived'[133]. This deep admiration for his master, which is expressed in this almost-erotic language, is even intensified in the crucial moment of the novel, in which Falkland, exhausted by Caleb's psychological pressure, finally confesses his guilt as a murderer to Caleb, and the latter, unexpectedly, takes the opportunity to reconfirm his high regard for him, perhaps hinting that his love for him remains unchanged even if Falkland committed the worst of crimes. Caleb says: 'I still discovered new cause of admiration for my master. His menaces indeed were terrible. But, when I recollected the offense I was given […] I was astonished at his forbearance'[134]. Thus, he seems to be unable to completely condemn Falkland without reproaching his own behavior as well, as if he was trying to connect with him and take part of the guilt.

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[131] Robert Kaufman, 'The Sublime as Super-Genre of the Modern, or "Hamlet" in Revolution: Caleb Williams and His Problems', *Studies in Romanticism,* 36-4 (Winter, 1997), pp. 541-574 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601254> accessed on 15 April, 2019, p. 542

[132] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 130

[133] Robert Kaufman, 'The Sublime as Super-Genre of the Modern, or "Hamlet" in Revolution: Caleb Williams and His Problems', cit, p. 542

[134] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 134

Caleb sees Falkland as a god-like figure, a 'being of superior nature'[135], and even in the moment in which he should despise him the most, on the contrary, he feels guilty for his own curiosity which had disturbed his temper and he renews his loyalty as his humble servant, a submissive self-blame which further reinforces the hypothesis of his homosexual desire for Falkland. As mentioned above, Caleb's choice of words used in describing his emotions may denote a sexual undertone, an element that may connect him with Sterne's Yorick, especially for what concerns the lexicon used to describe his inability in controlling his feelings, with words such as 'impulse'. Nevertheless, the alleged infatuation between Caleb and Falkland is absolutely Platonic, and is shiftily exploited by Godwin as a tool to further criticize the aristocracy.

As Robert J. Corber points out, a number of English radicals, as for instance Tom Paine, accused aristocratic privilege to encourage feminization of men[136]. This strong accusation, stated in a period of time in which homosexuals (also known as 'sodomites') were harshly persecuted, implied the fact that by abolishing the aristocracy — which, allegedly, encouraged sodomy — would stop this feminization of men and develop stronger manliness. Of course this is highly connected with the literature of feeling, which often presents as its main characters feminized male aristocrats, thus Godwin took this opportunity to further criticize classism when he created Falkland's character. In fact, Falkland is indeed a unusual kind of man of feeling who is not interested at all in having romantic or sexual affairs with women, by the contrary, he is much more passionate about his honour and, interestingly, about Caleb's obsession with him. Godwin managed to coincide in his novel the question of desire between males and politics by stressing again the tension between aristocrats, represented by Falkland, and the rising middle class, represented by Caleb. Moreover, not only Godwin created them as highly sensitive and feminized men of feeling, he also made them become monsters due to their uncontrollable passions, which may be read as the terrible consequence of their sodomy.

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[135] *Ibid.* p. 117

[136] Robert J. Corber 'Representing the "Unspeakable": William Godwin and the Politics of Homophobia.' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1-1, 1990, pp. 85–101. *JSTOR*, <www.jstor.org/stable/3704462> accessed on 16 May, 2019.

Caleb's 'hurricane of the passions'[137] misleads his thoughts and confirms his nervous pathology, therefore throughout the novel Caleb cannot stop, firstly, in investigating Falkland's past, as if he receives a sort of perverse pleasure by it. In fact, he himself describes his morbid curiosity as a 'fatal impulse'[138], which satisfies him almost in an erotic way. The desire to get to know more about Falkland's past might be an attempt in order to get more intimate with him, and the willingness to do so by breaking every master-servant hierarchic rule, reveals a deep love for Falkland which further confirms the initial theory of Caleb's paranoia. As claimed by Alex Gold: 'In the theory of paranoia the initial erotic fantasy is essential: "what lies at the core of the conflict in cases of paranoia among males is *a homosexual wishful fantasy of loving a man*"'[139].

Caleb is actually obsessive in thinking of Falkland as his only persecutor, even in cases in which it is clear that someone else is trying to pursuit him — as for example, Forester or Gines. Examples of his paranoia can be found in the third volume, specifically in chapter five, when Caleb briefly saw Mr Falkland's carriage: 'I was too much occupied with my own feelings to venture to examine whether or no the terrible adversary of my peace were in the carriage. I *persuaded myself* that he was'[140], or again when he was arrested while on a boat for Ireland 'I now took for granted that I was once more in the power of Mr Falkland'[141] while he was in fact being mistaken for an Irish robber. Caleb's fixation was, in the first part of the novel, due to his morbid curiosity towards the object of his desire, while, in the second half of the novel, the result of the deep delusion — and subsequent trauma — given by the rejection and the hatred he perceived by Falkland.

This Freudian psychological interpretation of *Caleb Williams* as a repressed homosexual love story is fundamental due to the fact that it is able to explain, in part, the vast sentimentality of this novel and therefore its engagement with the literature of feeling. Hence, according to this theory many of the powerful emotions felt by the main

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[137] *Ibid.* p. 126

[138] *Ibid.* p. 118

[139] Alex Gold Jr, 'The Politics of Passions in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*', *ProQuest Studies in Literature and Language*, Summer 1977, 19-2; p. 149

[140] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 227 (emphasis added)

[141] *Ibid.* p. 233

character of the novel are not only the ones of horror and terror, which will be taken into consideration in paragraph 1.3 when analyzing its relation with the Gothic literature, but also of love and desire, which in this case is not a classic love story but a repressed obsessive desire for a criminal.

Another aspect that associates Caleb and Falkland as men of feeling and which further reinforces Godwin's sentimental literary tendency is the fact that even though their sensibility turned them into monsters, their stories evoke pity and sympathy among the readers. In particular, it is interesting how by reading *Caleb Williams* we become sympathetic towards people who commit crime or who are subjected to social injustice, in fact, as Allen puts it: 'Godwin […] idealizes the social outcasts'[142]. Falkland commits a horrible murder, and therefore one might expect the readers to sympathize with the murdered, however, in this case, due to Falkland's past of respectability, kindness, virtue, education, and 'delicacy of sentiment'[143] as well as his sense of honour, the audience is naturally inclined to understand and forgive his behavior in the end: 'his case was peculiarly worthy of sympathy'[144]. Even Caleb himself, who persecuted Falkland until he finally satisfied his suspicion, responded to his master's confession with sympathy, returning to the state of veneration he had towards him at the beginning of the novel. On the other hand, Caleb is the main victim of the novel, the one who embodies the consequences of the unjust corrupted system. Several times he is portrayed as a desperate and wretched creature, so even though one might condemn him for his irrational and obsessive curiosity towards his master's past, he still wins the sympathy of the readers due to the horrible and unjust persecution he suffers after having discovered Falkland's guilt, especially during his time in prison, which he describes as 'the end of human reason'[145], or even as an instrument of torture: 'there is infinitely more torture in the lingering existence of a criminal, in the silent, intolerant minutes that he spends, than in the tangible misery of whips and racks!'[146].

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[142] B. Sprague Allen, *William Godwin as a Sentimentalist*, cit, p. 11

[143] *Ibid.* p. 19

[144] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 94

[145] B. Sprague Allen, *William Godwin as a Sentimentalist*, cit, p. 176

[146] *Ibid.* p. 174

Other than Caleb and Falkland, there are also other minor characters in the novel whose purpose is exactly that of arise sentiments of pity, indignation and sympathy among readers — which is, notably, the exact same purpose of the tearful episodes of a sentimental novel — as for instance in the case of the Hawkinses, Tyrell's tenants. The story of their distress starts for trivial reasons, when they refuse to obey Tyrell's order to vote his candidate in the county elections and subsequently become the tyrant's object of diabolical persecution. As pointed out by Godwin himself, 'it was mere madness to think of contesting with a man of Mr Tyrell's eminence and fortune, it was a fawn contending with a lion'[147]. Tyrell uses his wealth and power to destroy the Hawkinses's farm and fortune, and he also sends the younger Hawkins to the county jail. Moreover, due to the fact that Fakland and the Hawkinses have this turbulent past story, they are the ones blamed for his murder, and Falkland — to preserve his honour — does not confess his crime. He lets them be tried and hanged instead of himself.

Furthermore, it is not possible to analyze the theme of the virtue in distress, which constantly appear in *Caleb Williams*, without mentioning Emily Melvile, the woman who embodies the sentimentality of the novel. Caleb himself, at the very beginning of the second volume, mimics the usual reaction of the readers of sentimental fiction by asserting: 'I paid the tribute of my tears to the memory of the artless Miss Melvile'[148]. Moreover, Caleb's reaction further reinforces the theory of his similarity with the figure of the man of feeling. Just like the Hawkinses, Emily is an innocent character who unjustly suffers the fury of Tyrell's tyranny, and who subsequently even dies for the distress he caused to her sensibility — also due to the over-delicateness of her feelings. In portraying her character, the author may have attempted another general criticism towards the literature of sensibility as well, since, Isabelle Bour notes: 'sensibility and Smithian sympathy cannot hope to regulate a society in which selfish passions of various kinds are shown to prevail'[149]. In fact, it is important to point out that the years

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147 *Ibid.* p. 41

148 William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 103

149 Isabelle Bour, 'Sensibility as Epistemology in "Caleb Williams, Waverley", and "Frankenstein"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 45-4, The Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 2005), pp. 813-827 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3844616> Accessed on 28th March, 2019 p. 816

in which Godwin wrote and published *Caleb Williams* were also the years in which the literature of sensibility was declining, and therefore even though he employed some of its features, he also stressed its limitedness as a genre. Godwin's aim was to show the inability of the literature of feeling to portray the complexity of the human nature and psyche, since it used to focus on only one part of it.

In writing *Caleb Williams* one could argue that one of Godwin's purposes may have been to show how sentimentality could not survive in their contemporary society, and also how sentimental literature could not aim to fully analyze human psychology and society in the way he was trying to do in writing his novel. Nevertheless, Emily's sentimental subplot is significant not only due to its undeniable link to the novels of feeling, but also because her character can be seen as the female alter ego of the main character of the novel: Caleb.

This aspect of the novel has been analyzed by a number of critics, and it is reinforced by the fact that Caleb is a feminized character just like his master Falkland. Caleb and Emily never meet in the novel — since Emily's story is prior to Caleb's — however, they both are over-sensitive characters who suffer persecution, segregation, and injustice. Moreover, they are orphans, and they share a deep love and admiration for Mr Falkland. By narrating Emily's story, Caleb is perhaps mirroring himself in her story, and therefore he connects with her. As pointed out by Gold, they both have their most passionate encounters with Falkland during fires, and both are doomed from the moment of those fires[150]. In both scenes, Falkland's actions are very similar and the reaction of Emily and Caleb are deeply emotional.

Additionally, Caleb's relationship with women is similar to Falkland's, due to the fact that he does not seems to be interested at all in having romantic — or sexual — affairs with them. On the contrary, every time he meets a woman he wants to make sure that there is no misunderstanding with the readers, and thus he describes them as ugly or old, such in the case of Mrs Marney, his landlady and business partner for the period Caleb stayed in London: 'Excluded as I was from all intercourse with my species in general, I found pleasure in the occasional exchange of a few words with this inoffensive and good-humoured creature, who was already at an age to preclude

[150] Alex Gold Jr, 'The Politics of Passions in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*', cit, p. 142

scandal'[151]. Hence, this parallel between Emily and Caleb might further confirm the above-mentioned interpretation of Caleb's obsession with Falkland as a perverse infatuation.

2.3 *Caleb Williams*'s Gothic rhetoric and its aesthetic of the Sublime as the point of convergence of the human soul: the relationship between sublimity and sensibility

Caleb Williams was published in a period of transition between the brief vogue of sentimentality and the developing Romantic revolution. Interestingly, Edmund Burke, who has been both an 'literary enemy' and a great source of inspiration to Godwin, published his immensely popular treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757, only thirty-six years before the publication of Godwin's first novel.

This treatise has often been thought as crucial in the transition towards the Romantic — and Gothic — literature. Burke opens Section VII of his E*nquiry* by asserting that:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotions which the mind is capable of feeling. [152]

As can be seen, this is unequivocally connected with the 'strongest emotions' of terror, pain, and danger found in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and, moreover, it can even be read as a sort of response to it. As a consequence, Graham points out that it is no coincidence that 'Godwin choose a narrator who perceived the world in Gothic polarities'[153], it is

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[151] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 248

[152] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (London, Thomas M. Lean, Haymarket, 1823) p. 45

[153] Kenneth W. Graham, *The Politics of Narrative: Ideology and Social Change in William Godwin's Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 50

exactly due to the author's engagement with the Gothic that in his first novel, the passions and emotions felt by his characters reach monstrous level and become almost supernatural forces. As far as the supernatural is concerned, these feelings might can be linked with the emotions aroused by the sublime. In fact, the supernatural is not something explicit in *Caleb Williams*, it is allusive and implicit, nevertheless, there is always a tension which moves towards that direction which creates constant suspense and therefore reinforces the Gothic narrative — as shall be seen, obscurity and fear are key in the aesthetic of the sublime. Moreover, this novel's engagement with the key concept of the sublime is not the only reason why Edmund Burke's figure is so important. Numerous critics have pointed out the similarity between Burke and Falkland's character, especially for what concern his alleged latent homosexuality.

As observed by Monika Fludernik, Godwin is possibly alluding to the rumors about Edmund Burke's homosexuality, which were sparked by Burke's courageous and heartfelt intervention in the House of Parliament against the cruel pillorying of sodomites[154]. This biographical event may even lead us to think that the Falkland-Caleb relationship is but the mirroring of another complex relationship: the one between Burke and Godwin. Like Caleb's high regard for his master, Godwin deeply admired Burke, even though he did not share many of his ideas, in particular for what concerned Burke's political views, which were conservative and thus far from Godwin's radicalism and anarchism.

To further confirm Burke's importance, he has been linked with another character in the novel, which is Mr Clare, the enlightened poet Falkland admired deeply, and who was the very first in the novel to be labelled as 'something more than a mortal'[155] and also the very first to be defined as 'sublime'. In his deep intelligence and in his sublimity as a character Godwin perhaps reflected Burke's literary genius and, specifically, the ideas from his *Enquiry*.

Nevertheless, this paragraph's aim is that of analyzing *Caleb William*'s engagement with Gothic literature, and to do so it is important to focus on its sublimity, which in this novel can indeed be defined as the point of convergence of both gothic features and

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[154] Monika Fludernik, 'William Godwin's *Caleb* Williams: The Tarnishing of the Sublime' , cit, p. 858

[155] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 30

sentimentality in the portrayal of the complexity of human souls. In other words, sublimity in *Caleb Williams* could be defined as the perfect mode of expression of the distorted emotions and passions of its main characters.

As previously mentioned, the recurrent feeling of the novel is terror, and therefore, as happens in the Gothic fiction, the whole narrative is built on fear and suspense, which is idiosyncratic in the description of obscure and lonely scenarios. As pointed out by Burke himself in his treatise: 'To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary'[156] due to the fact that it affects one's imagination and it expands one's emotions, which can be noted throughout the whole part of the novel in which Caleb is alone in an obscure prison or is running away from it in the woods at night.

This key Gothic feature is clear also in Caleb's nervous and subjective account of his story as well as in the irrationality of the abnormal emotions felt by both him and Falkland. In fact, this novel is highly influenced by Burke's pamphlet on the sublime, as can be noted in a number of passages in which the word *sublime* itself as well as the iconography linked to it is largely employed by Godwin. Not only it is present in Falkland's character, but also in tyranny in general, since despotism and tyranny are in this novel connected with its horror and subsequently to its relation with the Gothic. Burke himself, as Monica Fludernik points out, wrote how the sublime is connected with power and subsequently with the idea of God[157]. Above all, it is important to stress how in this novel sublimity is not related to the typical Romantic landscapes and scenarios, but to the human psyche instead. Consequently, sublimity implies veneration: Caleb religiously venerates Falkland and often portrays him like a supernatural being.

Furthermore, the aesthetic of the sublime is even more linked to the gothic horror in Burke's *Enquiry* as well as in Godwin's political views due to its link with the bloodshed of the French Revolution — as well as the political revolutions in general, such as the Jacobite Uprisings of the 1715 and 1745. However, the paradox is that for what concerns politics, Burke was, contrarily to Godwin, a conservative who criticized and opposed the French uprising (Godwin too opposed the revolution, as already

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[156] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, cit, p. 76

[157] *Ibid.* p. 867

mentioned, but he had opposite political views from Burke). This can be read as paradoxical, since he also praised sentiments and passions in his *Enquiry* together with other writings, and he also had a 'trust in sentiment as humanity moral's compass'[158]. For example, terror according to Burke is 'a passion that always produces delight'[159], and this affirmation definitely contrasts his horror and disgust for the political terror which took place in France. Moreover, this ambiguity between his *Enquiry* and his political ideals is even more stressed by the fact that, while he trusted the power of feelings, he also claimed he had no faith in reason — while on the other hand it is important to remind that Godwin actually based all of his philosophical views on his faith in human reason and morality.

Thus, both Burke and Godwin may be seen as ambivalent figures for what concerns their political views in the 'Age of Feeling', due to their ambiguity towards their own political and literary positions. To set an example, for what concerns Godwin's *Caleb Williams* also in Caleb's redemption and rebellion against the despotic aristocrat, one could perhaps read a favorable disposition towards the Revolution, nevertheless, this is not confirmed in Godwin's political writings, as already mentioned in the first chapter of this particular study.

Returning to the analysis of the novel from the point of view of its engagement with Gothic fiction, Godwin skillfully turns what has been previously defined as the lexicon of sensibility into a Gothic vocabulary, probably exploiting it to arise a strong emotional response from his public. This can be seen as a sort of evolution from the novel of feeling towards the developing Gothic tradition since both literary genres aimed to arouse emotions from their readers, but the emotions were different, from tears of pity and sympathy to anxiety and terror. To be able to frighten his audience, Godwin employs terms such as: *demon, ghosts, supernatural, devil, horror, blood, madness, wicked, torture, ferocious*, which are key in building a Gothic iconography, as they make the two main characters not simply bad for their crimes, but also supernaturally evil. This becomes even clearer when analyzing Falkland's reactions towards Caleb's

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[158] David Dwan, 'Edmund Burke and the Emotions' *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 72-4 (October 2011), pp. 571-593 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41337154> Accessed on 5 June, 2019, p. 571

[159] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, cit, p. 57

curiosity, which are excessive since the very first pages, when he catches his newly-employed servant spying on him. Falkland shouts: 'Begone, devil!'[160] with a countenance that 'betrayed strong symptoms of confusion'[161]. It is as if the murderous monster hidden inside of him was about to get out, but he managed to repress it with 'a violent effort'[162]. These episodes become even more extreme as the plot of the novel unfolds.

Language is thus fundamental due to its excessiveness: all emotions, both positive and negative, are amplified and make the narration anxious. The psychological torture is mainly portrayed with Gothic images, and by doing so both Falkland and Caleb — but also Tyrell — become monsters driven by uncontrollable passions: Caleb turns into an outcast of society while Falkland into a despotic Gothic monster.

Interestingly, Caleb's description of the prison is also part of the Gothic conventions of the novel. As claimed by Kenneth W. Graham, Godwin was reading the Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* while writing his first prose fiction, thus he may have been influenced by it in describing the gloomy atmosphere of a eighteenth-century English prison:

> […] the massy doors, the resounding locks, the gloomy passages, the grated windows, and the characteristic looks of the keepers, accustomed to reject every petition, and to steel their hearts against feeling and pity. […] It is impossible to describe the sort of squalidness and filth with which these mansions are distinguished. […] The dirt of a prison speaks sadness to the heart, and appears to be already in a state of putridity and infection.[163]

The description of the prison where Caleb is confined is definitely Gothic, but it is not the only part of the novel where the author exploits sentiments of horror and threat. In fact, in the crucial scene where Caleb is depicted as a wretched creature wandering alone, half-naked, and weak in the forest at night, is similar to one of the main passages of one of the quintessential Gothic novels, namely, *Frankenstein* (1818), written by Godwin's daughter Mary Shelley. It has been recognized how Mary was deeply

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[160] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 7

[161] *Ibid.* p. 7

[162] *Ibidem*

[163] *Ibid.* p. 171

influenced by her father's political ideas and literary career, so much so that she also dedicated her novel *Frankenstein* to him: "To William Godwin, Author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, &c". *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein* are similar in a number of ways, as pointed out by A. D. Harvey, who recognized how they both are novel of *pursuit*, in which the pursued and the pursuer have 'a crucial symbiotic relationship with each other'[164].

Even though the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and the creature is often seen as a father-son relationship, while Falkland and Caleb are often thought as lovers, they share some parallels. Firstly, both Caleb and Frankenstein are curious characters, to such an extent that their curiosity becomes the main cause of their ruin. Secondly, the roles of pursued and pursuit are switched from Caleb to the creature to Falkland and Frankenstein. Moreover, even though in different ways, they share the crucial topic of isolation: while *Frankenstein* focuses on the solitude and suffering of the individual without giving political explanations for it, *Caleb Williams* exploits this topic of isolation in order to criticize society. Again, it can be noted how Godwin skillfully manages to use features taken from a specific literary genre for his own political purposes. In order to comprehend the similarity of these two novels and therefore to confirm Godwin's debt with the Gothic literature, it is necessary to compare two passages in which both Caleb and the monster reflect on their situation as outcasts of society. Godwin perfectly describes Caleb's conditions in chapter VII of the third volume of his novel:

> […] the sky had become exceedingly black and lowering, and soon after the clouds burst down in sheets of rain. I was then in the midst of a heath, without tree or covering of any sort to shelter me. I was thoroughly drenched in a moment. […] By and by the rain gave place to a storm of hail. [….] I was ill defended from them by the miserable covering I wore, and they seem to cut me in a thousand directions. […] My mind was in a most disconsolate and repining state. I muttered imprecations and murmuring, as I passed along. I was full of loathing and abhorrence against life, and every thing that life carries in its train.[165]

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[164] A. D. Harvey, '"Frankenstein" and "Caleb Williams"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 29 (1980), pp. 21-27, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30212862> accessed on 9 April, 2019, p. 24

[165] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 244

The terrible weather conditions — reported with a sublime vocabulary — perfectly reflect Caleb's inner self, his desperation and solitude, which are caused by a cruel society. Throughout the whole novel, Godwin exploits the Gothic aesthetic to describe the characters's inner selves, that is to say, their psyche. Caleb is innocent, his only guilt was that of knowing that his beloved master was in fact a murderer, however, he is endlessly persecuted, and its solitude reaches its climax in this particular passage in the novel, where he completely loses hope in humankind. Thus, instead on focusing on his own individuality he extends his pessimistic view towards life and society in general.

On the other hand, Mary Shelley described the creature's state on mind by focusing on its individuality, which is exactly one of the main features of the Romantic and Gothic fiction, as well as one of the main differences with the literature of feeling:

> Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed? I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me, my feelings were those of rage and revenge. […] 'When night came, I quitted my retreat, and wandered in the wood; and now, no longer restrained by the fear of discovery, I gave vent to my anguish in fearful howlings. […] Oh! What a miserable night I passed![166]

Throughout *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley repeatedly uses the iconography of the sublime. There are many stormy nights — above all, the one of the creation of the creature is defined as 'a dreary night […] it was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was almost burnt out'[167]. However, in this specific passage, the sublime is just in the background because all is centered towards the creature's emotions and despair.

Like Caleb, he curses his life and, in particular, his creator, while he wanders alone at night. The main difference with Godwin is that nor the creature nor the author aim to blame society for its condition. While Caleb and his hopelessness become the final product of a corrupted society, the creature still has hope and does not share the same pessimism. Interestingly enough, Edmund Burke too gives his explanation about the relationship between society, passions, and solitude in his *Enquiry*, as he asserts that in

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[166] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein 1818 text*, (New York, Oxford World's Classics, 2008) p. 110

[167] *Ibid.* p. 38

the exclusion of society 'pain is the predominant idea'[168]. Therefore, he admits that a temporary solitude is agreeable, however, he strongly suggests that man was made for living in a social sphere: 'the strongest sensations relative to the habitudes of *particular society* are sensations of pleasure'[169].

As far as the analysis of *Caleb Williams* and its sublimity is concerned, Fludernik has noted how in this novel the concept of the sublime is not necessary related to the conventional iconography of Romantic landscapes — or wild nature in general — but, on the contrary, with what she calls 'moral indications of divinity'[170]. As mentioned above, Godwin uses the sublime to analyze his characters' psychology, but in Fludernik's reading *Caleb Williams*'s sublimity is even more linked to the threat and the terror given by the authoritative figure of God. That is to say, melancholic solitary landscapes which are now part of our knowledge of classic Romantic literature may appear as well, but in this particular novel they are connected with the divine omnipotence which is mainly embodied in the character of Mr Falkland. Notably, Godwin was an atheist, so it is no coincidence that he pushed the divine qualities of a previously positive character into something monstrous. As a result, Falkland's character may be read as a subtle criticism towards Christianity: the authoritative figure rapidly becomes a despot whose rage is unstoppable, at the verge of madness, from a God-like figure to a devilish one.

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[168] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, cit, p. 52

[169] *Ibid.* p. 53

[170] Monika Fludernik, 'William Godwin's Caleb Williams: The Tarnishing of the Sublime', cit, p. 867

2.4 *Caleb Williams,* theatricality, and politics: *Things As They Are*

'What bloody scene has Roscius now to act?'[171]

David O'Shaughnessy gives us yet another reading of *Caleb Williams*, as he claims that it should be read as a theatrical novel. It has often been stressed how the language and the rhetoric of this novel are excessive, at a point that they could be interpreted as theatrical features of it. It is generally believed that between the late eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the novel was far more popular as a literary genre rather than plays. Theatre were still well-liked, but they definitely did not have the same influence as they used to have during, for example, the Renaissance.

However, Godwin was deeply interested in and influenced by drama, he indeed had theatrical aspirations and, consequently, he also wrote theatrical pieces and even produced theatrical designs for a number of productions. Moreover, Godwin was so intrigued by the power of the theatre especially due to its deep association with politics and history: 'Godwin understood the persuasive effect that theatre could have in private as well in public capacity'[172]. Therefore he exploited theatrical features to convey the main aim of his first novel, which is moral instruction. That is to say, *Caleb Williams* probably exploited theatrical conventions in order to be educational, and its morality might be disguised behind a dramatic language and plot, thus, it 'represents Godwin's attempt to appropriate theatricality into just such another form — the novel'[173].

Furthermore, to confirm this hypothesis, there are a number of Shakespearean references — especially for what concerns *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* — throughout *Caleb Williams.* Maurice Hindle and Robert Kaufman have noted the important influence of the Bard of Avon in the novel, firstly for what concerns *Hamlet*, since both the

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[171] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 131
This is a quote from Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, V. vi. 10
Quintus Gallus Roscius was the greatest Roman actor of his time

[172] David O'Shaughnessy, '"The vehicle he has chosen": Pointing Out the Theatricality of *Caleb Williams*', *History of European Ideas 33,* Oxford 2007, 54-71, p. 57

[173] *Ibid.* p. 59

Shakespearean play and Godwin's novel deal with revenge, murder, and power. In particular, Kaufman claims that Godwin's specific interest in *Hamlet* 'appears to lie above all in the play tortured concern with the individual consciousness determined to see through the fog of a society dedicated to "seeming"'[174], therefore may be linked with Godwin's blame on both the society and the politics of his time for corrupting the individuals. Moreover, *Caleb Williams* may also be linked with *Macbeth*, since they share the crucial theme of fear and, of course, the theme of blood — in both the play and the novel there is a murder, or better a 'bloody deed', and throughout the narratives the words *blood* or *bloody* are recurrent. Additionally, he crime is perpetuated in these two works by someone who once was a worthy and noble knight, namely Falkland and Macbeth, who subsequently becomes a corrupted criminal. In the crucial scene when Falkland finally admits his guilt to Caleb, he claims that he 'seized a sharp pointed *knife* that fell in [his] way, cam behind him, and stabbed him to the heart'[175] like Macbeth who, in the night when he is about to do the bloody business of killing Duncan, says 'Is this a *dagger* which I see before me / The handle toward my hand? / Come let me clutch thee'[176] (II. i. 33). In both cases, the murder weapon (a knife) seems to appear out of nothing, they share the same ambiguity. Furthermore, both Falkland and Macbeth are tortured by their crime at the point of madness. Finally, it is important to point out the fact that theatricality was crucial also for the previous discourse on the sublime, since Burke himself defined it one of its main features, thus it would also add emphasis on the Gothic aspect of this particular novel.

Moreover, as stated above, Godwin appeared to be deeply aware of the importance of the theatrical influence not only for the novel in general but also for politics. Specifically, O' Shaughnessy noted the importance of trials as theatrical events and the importance of their theatricality to their outcome. Of course Godwin was highly interested in those political events and also in the subsequent trials, therefore he might be inspired by them for the composition of *Caleb Williams*, especially Muir's, Paine's

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[174] Robert Kaufman, 'The Sublime as Super-Genre of the Modern, or "Hamlet" in Revolution: Caleb Williams and His Problems', cit, p. 546

[175] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 132 [emphasis added]

[176] The Oxford Shakespeare, *William Shakespeare's Macbeth*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990) [emphasis added]

and Palmer's trials for treason — since they were radical thinkers. Muir's case in particular was astonishing, since he was sentenced to fourteen years of jail[177] due to the fact that he was the founder of the first Edinburgh Society of the Reformist Association.

In this intense political climate, Godwin developed a strong sense of justice, and his concern can be noted in multiple passages in his novel. In fact, the echo of these trials can be found in a number of scenes in *Caleb Williams*, in which the English justice system is criticized due to its glaring bias in favor of wealthy aristocrats or noblemen and against poor people. Both this injustice as well as a good example of what could be called a 'theatrical trial' — note the emphasized words in the following quote — may be found in Caleb's first trial for the alleged theft of a large sum of his masters' money and valuable property:

> Mr Forester and three or four of the servants already *assembled* in expectation of me and my accuser. Every thing was *calculated* to suggest to me that I must trust only in the justice of the parties concerned, and had nothing to hope from their mercy. […] To the rest of the persons present I seemed to be merely the subject of detention; but in reality I was of all the *spectators* that individual who was most at loss to conceive through every *stage* of the *scene* what would come next, and who listened to every word that was uttered with the most uncontrollable amazement. […] At first I could not refrain from repeatedly attempting to interrupt; but I was checked in these attempts by Mr Forester, and I presently felt how necessary it was to my future peace that I should collect the whole energy of my mind to repel the charge, and assert my innocence.[178]

In a scene full of theatrical references, Caleb is about to claim his innocence just like Falkland did during his trial for Tyrell's death, however, their class positions and their respectability were different, so they did not suffer the same faith. Interestingly, they both claimed their innocence, but only the real innocent, Caleb, is the one sent to prison.

This is not, however, the first trial of the novel. There is, firstly, the case of the virtuous Hawkinses, which is parallel to this. The Hawkines's case is fundamental in discussing Godwin's political view, because it is a clear example of the inequalities of the law between the rich and the poor, highlighting its corruption as well as showing Godwin's main criticism towards the government, which used its legal system to repress

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[177] G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People*, (London, Methuen, 1938; rpt. 1966), pp. 152-7

[178] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 159/163 [emphasis added]

citizens without even trying to protect innocent people. The old Hawking tries to stop Tyrell's fury by resorting to a lawsuit, but it turns against him:

> Wealth and despotism easily know how to engage those laws, which were perhaps at first intended [witless and miserable precaution!] for the safeguards of the poor, as the coadjutors of their oppression. […] Hawkins had hitherto carefully avoided, notwithstanding the injuries he had suffered, attempting to right himself by a legal process, being of the opinion that law was better adapted for a weapon of tyranny in the hands of the rich, than for a shield to protect the humbler part of the community against their usurpations.[179]

In few words Hawkins is able to explain Godwin's main criticism towards the English legal system. In fact, he strongly believed in the necessity of political change to stop this injustice against the poor.

Even though throughout this chapter *Caleb Williams* has been analyzed not as a political novel but as sentimental, psychological, gothic, and theatrical instead, it is important now to study also his main purpose as the narrativization of Godwin's most popular political treatise, *Political Justice*, since it was the author's main concern. It is impossible to analyze in full Godwin's first prose fiction without mentioning its evident link with his political writings. He started to write *Caleb Williams* only ten days after the first publication of *Political Justice* on February 14th, 1793, thanks to, in his own words, 'the offspring of that temper of mind in which the composition of *Political Justice* left me'.

The 1794 preface of the novel, the one which was withdrawn in the original edition due to the problematic political climate, perfectly explained the author's sociopolitical purpose, and thus how the novel dealt exactly with *Things As They Are*, explaining Godwin's pessimistic view on the consequence of the despotism of corrupted political institutions. He himself defined his novel as: 'a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man'[180]. Godwin describes these political dynamics through a number of legal accidents which appear throughout the plot of the novel. Thanks to these legal accidents, he is able to rise

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[179] *Ibid.* p. 42

[180] *Ibid.* Appendix B

indignation among the readers. These episodes of injustice reach a point in which even a magistrate — who above all should be incorruptible and should side with the oppressed — refuses to believe to Caleb's truth, in the crucial moment in which he finally decides to speak his truth by revealing Falkland's secret: 'It was time that the real criminal should be the sufferer, and not that innocence should for ever labour under the oppression of guilt'[181]. Nevertheless, the magistrate's answer to Caleb's accusations is not exactly the one one may expect: 'A fine time of it indeed it would be, when a gentleman of six thousand a year take up their servants for robbing them, those servants could trump up such accusations as these, and could let any magistrate or court of justice to listen to them!'[182]. Godwin denounced how the courts of justice would listen only if the one making an accusation was a wealthy gentleman, not a servant, condemning this evaluation of men not based on their virtue and innocence but merely on their social class and wealth.

Interestingly, the only characters who genuinely seem to believe Caleb's innocence are not men of law, on the contrary, they are criminals: the former soldier Brightwel, and Raymond, the Captain of the company of robbers. It is as if Godwin was trying to suggest to his audience to listen to the stories of these people and to pay attention on how they treat Caleb, because they actually turn out to be moral and virtuous men, while the real criminals are those involved in an unjust political and legal system. Godwin skillfully exploits Caleb's story to describe his condemnation towards the penitentiary system, which he considered a form of torture, the 'end of human reason': 'one of the ultimate expression of governmental tyranny […] an instrument of Falkland's power, an arm of the government that encourages and protects him'[183]. Through Caleb's imprisonment Godwin creates an account of the English prisons and the prison life of agony and despair, thus becoming one of the very first authors of his time to harshly condemn the serious psychological effects of detainment, since he himself had experience of prisons due to the condemnation of many of his fellow

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[181] *Ibid.* p. 263

[182] *Ibid.* p. 264

[183] Kenneth W. Graham, *The Politics of Narrative: Ideology and Social Change in William Godwin's Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 26/27

radicals and friends — for instance, he visited Newgate Prison in London, where Thomas Muir was detained[184].

As far as this social criticism is concerned, Caleb represents the whole English citizens who were not aware of the scenes of mystery and the tortures of prison life, since the communities tended to not enquire much on the situations of those who committed crimes. Thus, the protagonist, through the stories of his inmates such as Brightwel as well as his own, becomes the example of how prison changes a human being without using physical violence but only through psychological torture perpetuated by jailors who are defined as 'of all men least capable of all sort of feeling'[185]. Caleb thoroughly describes the dungeons where they are confined, the unhealthy putridity, darkness, and misery around them and the effects of sensory deprivation and lack of exercise. He cannot even take refuge by meditation, nor write or read. It is described as a real psychological torture due to the fact that it leads to lethargy of the mind. In this horrible condition, Caleb is full of resentment not only for Falkland, but also for the political and legal system that allows this inhumanity, and he states these strong words as his sense of injustice becomes increasingly strong:

> Among my melancholy reflections I tasked my memory, and counted over the doors, the locks, the bolts, the chains, the massy and grated windows that were between me and liberty. These, said I, are the engines that tyranny sits down in cold and serious meditation to invent. This is the empire that man exercises over man. Thus is a being, formed to expatiated, to act, to smile and enjoy, restricted and benumbed. How great must be his depravity or heedlessness who vindicates this scheme for changing health and gaiety and serenity, into the wanness of a dungeon and the deep furrows of agony and despair! Thank God, exclaims the Englishman [Caleb], we have no Bastille! Thank God, with us a man can be punished without a crime! Is that a country of liberty where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go, ignorant fool! And visit the scenes of our prisons! Witness their unwholesomeness, their filth, the tyranny of their governors, the misery of their inmates! After that show me the man shameless enough to triumph, and say, England has no Bastille![186]

In this long passage which ends with an ironic climax, Godwin digressed from the plot in order to give space to his radical political view towards detainment. This might also be read as a link with the Revolution in France, which famously begun with the

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[184] *Ibid.* p. 28

[185] William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, cit, p. 174

[186] *Ibid.* p. 175

Storming of the Bastille on 14th July, 1789, only few years before the publication of *Caleb Williams*.

The narrator then continues by depicting the effects of these unhealthy conditions by narrating the story of a twenty-two years old former soldier, namely Brightwel, who is convicted due to the alleged robbery of a prosecutor (who swore positively to his person even though he was returning from a alehouse very late and the sum robbed was that of only three shillings). The narrator is clearly hinting that Brightwel might also be innocent. Caleb describes him as a virtuous man and an intellectual (he reads Virgil and Horace), he has great integrity and 'his habits of thinking were peculiar, full of justice, simplicity, and wisdom'[187]. However, Caleb narrates that the soldier, due to the unhealthy condition in which they were obliged to live, dies on the evening of the day in which the judges arrive. Caleb remembers him with these passionate words:

> Were it possible for my pen to consecrate him to never dying fame, I could undertake no task more grateful to my heart. […] I cannot pretend to rival the magnitude of his genius, or to compare with, what the world has scarcely surpassed, the correctness and untainted purity of his conduct. He heard my story, as far as I thought proper to disclose it, with sincere impartiality and […] an unreserved confidence in my innocence. He talked the injustice of which we were mutually victims without bitterness, and predicted that the time would come when the possibility of such intolerable oppression would be extirpated. But this, he said, was a happiness reserved for posterity; it was too late for us to recap the benefit of it. […] He could say, with as much reason as most men, he had discharged his duty. But he foresaw that he should not survive this present calamity.[188]

Caleb is genuinely shocked for the loss of his only friend, the first who really believed in his innocence and the first also to be defined as impartial in his judgement. Ironically, the impartial character is not a judge or a magistrate, but an alleged criminal. The way in which Caleb glorifies and homages him is parallel to the way in which Falkland deeply admires Mr Clare, and their sadness and despair at the moment of the death of both Brightwel and Mr Clare is very similar as well.

Moreover, both of them, described as men of virtue, reason and genius, predicted something that then turned out to be true, Mr Clare predicted Falkland's fate while Brightwel predicted his own death. Nevertheless, Brightwel had a positive view of the future, since he foresaw that one day the oppression of the tyrannic government would

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[187] *Ibid.* p. 173

[188] *Ibid.* p. 185

be extirpated. Like Godwin, Brightwel believed in a future in which government would care about the happiness of citizens. Personally, Godwin was convinced of the necessity of change in order to achieve happiness, and in his *Political Justice* he gave his own utopic account of it.

Another secondary character who is key for showing the political purpose of this novel is the one who could be defined as the 'Godwinian Robin Hood': Mr Raymond. Again, as previously stated, he is the captain of a group of thieves, and therefore a criminal and an outcast of society, however, his virtue and morality as well as his empathy for Caleb's cause make him a positive character who receives the sympathy of the readers. Of particular interest for this paragraph is Raymond's speech about his views on his profession:

> Our profession is the profession of justice. We undertake to counteract the partiality and iniquity of public institutions. We, who are thieves without a license, are at open war with another set of men who are thieves according to law. If any one disapprove our proceedings, at least we have this to say for ourselves, we act not by choice but only as our wise governors force us to act. If any one disapproves our proceedings, at least we have this to say for ourselves, they have this apology in their favour, we risk our lives when we adopt them, and stake our all upon their goodness and cogency. Time will one day decide whether we or our oppressors be the genuine patriots: for the present we are censured, only because they are the stronger party. […] For my own part I glory in the name of a thief; and am firmly persuaded there is not a more gallant and honorable position upon the face of the earth, so long as it is exercised with a generous heart.[189]

These strong words reflect Godwin's principles of justice, as he condemned the social institutions and firmly stated that if they robbed corrupted people who stole money from the poor, they did not act as criminals but as patriots. Furthermore, there is a link between Raymond's and Brightwel's speeches, since they both predicted and hoped in a future where the rulers of the country will be interested in the happiness of the citizens. Raymond then continues his speech as he also asserts that their political system do not allow redemption and they have no mercy, therefore even if they had the good intention to change their lifestyles they could not, since they would end up in prison or hanged.

Again, Raymond's character is extremely positive, he is Caleb's benefactor and one of the two people who genuinely believed in his innocence, as may be noted, for instance, when the thieves learn that there was a ransom of a hundred guineas for giving

[189] *Ibid.* p. 209

Caleb's whereabouts and they instinctively want to betray him for the money. Nevertheless, Raymond takes Caleb's side once more:

> He is not guilty of what is laid to charge. Which of you is so ignorant as to suppose that his escape is any confirmation of his guilt? Who ever thinks, when he is apprehended for trial, of his innocence or guilt as being at all material to the issue? Who ever was fool enough to volunteer a trial, where those who are to decide think more of the horror of the thing of which he is accused that whether he was the person that did it; and where is the nature of our motives is to be collected from a set of ignorant witnesses that no wise man would trust for a fair representation of the most indifferent action of his life? […] If no other person have the courage to set limits to the tyranny of the courts of justice, shall not we?[190]

Again, the thieves's leader — who speaks for Godwin — accuses the partiality of trials, and claims that Caleb's only fault is that of being 'too inquisitive in his master's concerns'[191] since 'Williams has told me the story with such ingenuousness that I am sure that he is guiltless of what they lay to his charge'[192]. The *pathos* of his monologue manages to convince his group of thieves to not betray Caleb, as well as to ask highly important questions to the readers, thus arousing their political conscience and reason.

One of Godwin's aims was that to speak to the readers's morality in order to convince them on the correctness of his political views, and also to denounce their current political situation and institutional injustice. Godwin, just like his characters, hoped for change and future happiness, and he conveyed this thought through 'the agency of feeling' and thus through sentimentalism, which helped him developing his philosophy, as can be understood by the many changes and revisions he made to *Caleb Williams.* One of them is the famous 1832 lengthy Preface published by the Bentley's Standard Novel Edition of the next novel taken into account, which is *Fleetwood*. In that Preface, written thirty-eight years after the first publication of *Caleb Williams*, Godwin narrates the passionate composition of his first novel, therefore reinforcing the importance of it for conveying his political views as a radical thinker but also the essential role the literature of feeling had for it:

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[190] *Ibid.* p. 216

[191] *Ibid.* p. 217

[192] *Ibid.* p. 217

> Despite his reputation as a novelist of doctrine, Godwin always stresses "interest and passion" as essential to fiction; in an unpublished essay, he praises "the ardour, the enthusiasm, & the sublime license of imagination, that belong to that species of composition".[193]

Thus, William Godwin the anarchist, the rationalist, the radical thinker, was indeed affected by the Age of Sentiment, so much so that, as shall be studied in the next chapter, he will dedicate a novel about *A New Man of Feeling*.

[193] Mitzi Myers, 'Godwin's Changing Conception of Caleb Williams', cit, p. 596

Chapter Three

William Godwin's own version of a sentimental novel: *Fleetwood, or: The New Man of Feeling*

3.1 Plot and main characters

Fleetwood, or: The New Man of Feeling, is the third novel written by William Godwin, first published in 1805, and reissued in 1835 as part of Richard Bentley's 'Standard Novels' series. Contrarily to *Caleb Williams*'s immediate popularity, this novel did not receive the same success and enthusiasm as Godwin's fortunate first work. However, it is equally interesting due to the fact that it addresses directly the theme of sentimentality and the literature of feeling, as can be easily seen by the novel's subtitle, *The New Man of Feeling*, which obviously refers to Mackenzie's most popular fictional work, already taken into account in chapter 1.4.

With his third novel, Godwin not only wanted to criticize this sentimental vogue in English literature in order to point out its limitedness, but also wanted to criticize Jean-Jacques Rousseau's view on the education of men, in particular for what concerns his novel *Émile ou De L'éducation*, as shall be further analyzed throughout this chapter. Godwin's aim was that of portraying a 'new' man of feeling, that is to say, his own interpretation of it, since he was indeed fascinated by the cult of sentimentalism but at the same time probably refusing many of the features possessed by the classical anti-hero portrayed by MacKenzie. Godwin decided to focus on the complex psyche of a controversial individual who possesses a great sensibility but is also a misanthrope. Consequently, as shall be seen throughout the analysis of the plot of this novel, the main reason for Fleetwood's final abhorrence against humankind has to be found in his upraising: *Fleetwood* is indeed a novel which narrates Casimir's uncommon

bildungsroman, in particular, it focuses on the effects on a young sensitive man who is raised and educated in isolation.

In the Preface of the first edition of the novel, Godwin firmly asserted that he did not want to repeat himself, thus, while in *Caleb Williams* he wrote about 'very surprising and uncommon events' and in *St. Leon* he mixed 'human feelings with incredible situations'[194], now Godwin claimed that his aim was to narrate a story which, according to him, 'for the most part have occurred to at least one half of the Englishmen now existing'[195]. In fact, the plot of this novel is indeed much simpler and linear compared to *Caleb Williams*'s. *Fleetwood* it is definitely not a novel full of action, but — just like any sentimental novel — rather a narration deeply engaged with the internal turmoil and feelings of its main character, Casimir Fleetwood, as well as his growth from a young boy to a man, and his complex relationship with society.

Nevertheless, the readers should not completely believe Godwin's words in the Preface, because even if he definitely narrated a more common adventure, the main character turns out to be rather uncommon: a misanthrope and a mad man whose sensibility is brought to the extreme and reaches points in the novel which should be considered disturbing. Sir Walter Scott, the world famous Scottish novelist and writer, harshly criticized this aspect of *Fleetwood* when he reviewed the novel for the *April Edinburgh Review* in 1805:

> It can hardly be called a story, which has neither incident nor novelty of remark to recommend it […] All that is remarkable in the tale is the laboured extravagance of sentiment which is attached to these ordinary occurrences. There is no attempt to describe the minuter and finer shades of feeling; none of that high finishing of description, by which the most ordinary incidents are rendered interesting[196].

Thus, since the very beginning of this analysis, one can understand how complex and controversial this book has been to absorb, especially for literary critics.

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[194] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, edited by Gary Handwerk & A. A. Markley, (Canada, Broadview Literary Texts, 2001) p. 47

[195] *Ibid.* p. 48

[196] See Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's "Fleetwood" and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education' *Studies in Romanticism*, 41-3, William Godwin (Fall, 2002), pp. 375-398 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25601570> accessed on 23 September, 2018, p. 376

The novel is structured in three volumes, the first opens with a description of Casimir Fleetwood, the main character of the novel, the only son of his beloved father. Casimir narrates his own story in first person, and he himself describes it as 'the narrative of his errors'. He starts by describing the wild and sublime nature in which he grew up, in Merionethshire, near Cader Idris[197]. He begins his *bildungsroman* by asserting that he has no memory of his mother, who passed away when he was very young. For that particular reason, his father decided to move with him into the Welsh wild nature when Casimir was very little:

> My earliest years were spent among mountains and precipices, amidst the roaring of the ocean and the dashing of waterfalls. A constant familiarity with these objects gave a wildness to my ideas, and an uncommon seriousness to my temper. My curiosity was ardent, and my disposition persevering[198].

Since the very beginning Godwin started to shape one of the main purposes of the novel, which was that of criticizing the educational system first theorized by Rousseau in his pedagogical novel *Émile*. Godwin had a complete different opinion on the delicate topic of educating young people, in particular, he believed that 'private education is almost necessarily deficient in excitements. *Society is the true awakener of man*; and there can be little true society, where the disparity of disposition is so great as between a boy and his preceptor'[199]. Hence Godwin's main aim in creating this character was probably that to demonstrate the inefficacy and the possible danger of Rousseau's pedagogical theory. Instead of isolating the pupil, Godwin insisted in the importance of a good society to shape an individual.

Like Rousseau's main character Emile, Casimir grows up in a place far away from society, in almost complete solitude — he has no interactions with other humans, apart from his father — and is surrounded by nature. The explicit romanticism of this novel and, especially, its tight bound with the sublime is very much present in these first pages, in which the scary grandness and beauty of nature have a deep effect on Casimir:

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[197] A mountain in Gwynedd, North Wales

[198] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 53 [emphasis added]

[199] *Ibid*. p. 429, See APPENDIX A Selections from William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature in a Series of Essays* (1797) [emphasis added]

‘I sat for hours on the edge of a precipice, and considered in quiet the grand and savage objects around me, which seemed never to have changed their character from the foundation of the world’[200]. His numerous reveries while wandering alone — sometimes accompanied by his only friend, his dog — as a solitary savage, surrounded by Romantic landscapes, have a strong influence in shaping Casimir’s personality, in fact, he himself often declares that he is aware of his complex temper.

This can be easily noted by taking into consideration the relationship with his private tutor — also, from the fact that he receives a private education at home it is easy to guess that Casimir is indeed a privileged member of society. He is educated by a private educator who Casimir defines as a man of honor, a good man. Yet, he claims that he felt intellectually superior to his tutor, he considers himself inclined to learning and very *curious* — one could note a link here with one the other men of feeling studied in the previous chapter, Caleb Williams — and therefore he feels that to listen to his preceptor’s lessons is somehow degrading for him. Nevertheless, he does not rebel against him nor disrespect him, and, moreover, when he departs for continuing his education at the university of Oxford he even admits that he did not part with him without pain.

Godwin’s growing curiosity towards human feelings and sensibility brought him to portray Casimir, a complex character, a mixture between the archetypal man of feeling and Rousseau’s pupil educated in the state of nature. Despite his Romantic upbringing, he does not become the Godwinian version of the Byronic hero, on the contrary, the author focuses on his emotional sphere as a man of feeling. His over sensitiveness may be first observed from his innate benevolence. For instance, one of the first episodes narrated in the novel, is about Casimir who, as usual, is standing on the edge of a precipice watching the lake underneath him and the rural scenery he deeply loved, when all of a sudden he realizes that a young boy, a peasant, — who was chasing one of his lambs — fell into the lake. He manages to swim fast and save the boy as well as the lamb, creating a bond with the family of the boy, named William. However, this is one of the very few positive episodes in which Casimir is shown as a benevolent man of feeling who is also capable of actually helping others. In fact, the more he meets men

[200] *Ibid.* p. 55

the more he develops an increasingly stronger misanthropy and inability to adjust himself in society, as shall be noted during the time he spent at the university of Oxford and in France, which leads him to acquire one of the main features of the sentimental anti heroes: the inability to act. This duality in his personality is clearly described by Casimir himself at very the beginning of the novel:

> I felt that it was the one of another, and not of myself, that prompted my deed; I experienced a disinterested joy in human relief and human happiness, independently of the question of whether I had been concerned in producing it. […] There is, however, as I have intimated, a very subtle and complicated association in human feelings. […] Humanity and self-complacency were distinct causes of my beneficence, but the latter was no less powerful than the former in nourishing it into a habit[201]

As shall be seen in the development of *Fleetwood*'s plot, the self-complacency and self-centeredness Casimir mentioned in the above quote, will turn out to be his dominant trait.

The day of Casimir's departure for Oxford offers a canonic sentimental scene, in which he has to part with his beloved father. As happens in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, this emotional moment is key to understand the deep sensibility possessed by both Harley and Casimir. In both cases the protagonists struggle due to the fact that parting with their loved ones at home means to finally grow up and leave their childhood and their comfort zones behind. In fact, walking through the door of their homes in order to start their journeys, symbolically defines the very beginning of their *bildungsroman*. In Casimir's case, the scene offers yet another archetypal feature from the literature of feeling, which is the shedding of a flood of tears in the climax of the emotional moment: 'In a word, my father and I, allowing for those failings which in some form or other are inseparable from the human character, were excellent friends; and it was not without *many tears shed on both sides* that we parted, when I mounted the chase in which I sent out for Oxford'[202]. Tears, just like in other sentimental fiction, are exploited as a bodily response to emotional arousal, in order to show one's sympathy. Nevertheless, if for sentimental writers — such as Sterne — the flood of tears indicates a positive bodily response, a sort of curative effect for the human soul, in Godwin it has not the same

[201] *Ibid.* p. 60

[202] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 66 [amphasis added]

meaning, it simply denotes an over sensitiveness of the character which, if exasperated, may cause mental disorders.

When in Oxford the whole tone of his mind starts to change, especially during the very beginning of his experience at university, when he is melancholic because he deeply misses his solitary wanderings surrounded by the Welsh nature and its Romantic landscapes:

> In Merionethshire, I had been a solitary savage. I had no companions, and I desired none. The commerce of my books and thoughts was enough for me. I lived in an ideal world of my own creation. The actual world beneath me I intuitively shunned. I felt that every man I should meet would be either too ignorant, too coarse, or too supercilious, to afford me pleasure[203].

As a result, the first weeks in which he finally experienced a real contact with his fellow species give him pain. He was used to the grand Romantic surroundings and now he finds himself in a city that is, according to him, flat. More importantly, he is not used to be in contact with other people, due to his solitary upbringing he finds himself uncomfortable and frustrated among other people, when even their way of speaking is new to him. Instinctively, Casimir automatically rejects people since he presumptuously considered them intellectually inferior to him. Thus, even to have a simple human connection with another human being becomes an issue, in fact Casimir — not only during his time at the university but also throughout the whole novel — seems indeed unable to cultivate normal and healthy relationships.

Nevertheless, also thanks to his young age, he soon adapts to his new situation and starts to get used to this new chapter of his life. Driven by his curiosity, he starts to observe his fellow students as if he was studying animals. This cold detachment may be seen as the pathological premise of his misanthropy, due to the fact that he does not feel in community with them at all, he feels superior and, thus, he uses them as a sort of sociological experiment. Godwin himself in his writings on the topic of education warned the audience that 'the pupil of private education is commonly either awkward or silent, or pert, presumptuous and pedantical'[204], which is exactly how Casimir behaves

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[203] *Ibid.* p. 70

[204] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 430 APPENDIX A, Selections from William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature in a Series of Essays* (1797)

in his first period at the University. Finally, he manages to become friends with a group of fellow students, however, they turn out to be not the best choice. Since he was afraid to be the one ridiculed, he joined the ones who ridiculed others, the 'rioters'. In Casimir's own words: 'I soon became like to the persons I had so lately wondered and despised'[205]. Even though Casimir points out that his benevolence and humanity are still intact and that he does not take part in all of their activities, he actually takes part in many others, such as the midnight orgies, which will be the very beginning of his licentiousness and dissipation.

After his years in Oxford, which he defined as 'the period of the development of the passions'[206], Casimir is sent by his father to make a *grand tour* of other European countries, and he begins this sort of sentimental journey from the same first country as Sterne's Yorick: France, where he finally enters the reality of life. Of course, the choice of beginning from this particular country was no accident, in fact, Godwin decided Paris as the setting for narrating Casimir's failed relationships with evil and unfeeling women. Additionally, the Parisian episodes of the novel might also be considered the starting point of his misogyny as well, as shall be studied in paragraph 1.2, when analyzing the question of gender. As in Sterne's renowned sentimental novel, Paris is portrayed as the city of transgression and licentiousness, where Casimir meets with one of his friends from Oxford, Sir Charles Gleed, who is an opposite character to that of Casimir: 'Our characters were strikingly contrasted. He was set, disciplined, and regular; I was quick, sensitive, and variable. He had speciousness; I *sensibility*'[207].

Since Oxford allegedly was the main cause of the decline of Casimir's morality, in Paris he soon becomes a dissolute Don Juan, also called *un homme à bonnet fortunes*. In particular, he has two affairs, one with a woman called 'the Marchioness' and the other with the Countess of B—. They both are described as archetypal evil *femmes fatales* who break Casimir's heart in different ways but causing the same effect on him: deep suffering, delusion, and pain. Moreover, they both are the cause of his departure from France in an altered state of mind: 'My soul was in tumults. I loathed existence and the

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[205] *Ibid.* p. 72

[206] *Ibid.* p. 93

[207] *Ibid.* p. 98 [emphasis added]

sight of the day; and my self-love was inexpressibly shocked to think that I could have suffered so gross a delusion'[208]. After the time he spent in Paris, he himself declares to be a misanthrope, as he recognizes the emotional trauma he carries from the two affairs with the two women and its deeply negative effect on his mental health.

Within this tumult of strong negative emotions, Casimir decides to travel to Switzerland, with the purpose of meeting his father's best friend, the virtuous Mr Ruffigny, a former banker, highly regarded and loved by the elder Fleetwood. Godwin gave particular importance to this character due to its similarity to Rousseau, that is to say, with his philosophy. Godwin perhaps wanted to build a sort of dualism between Mr Ruffigny, Rousseau's alter ego, and Casimir, who, on the contrary, was the living proof of the inconsistency of his philosophy and thus of Godwin's criticism toward him — even though he highly respected and estimated Rousseau, he did not agree on both his political and philosophical views.

Only two days after Casimir's arrival at Ruffigny's house, Casimir is struck with the news of his father's death. Ruffigny — now the only living connection in Casimir's family line — in a highly Romantic style, chooses the sublime landscapes provided by the Swiss wild nature to inform Casimir of his loss, in order to have a major impact on him. As pointed out by Casimir himself: 'My sensibility was increased by the preparation, and the impression I received was by so much the deeper'[209], his natural reaction as a man of feeling is that of shedding a flood of tears in that specific moment and also in a number of episode after the news.

Only few days after this crucial scene, the two characters then decide to travel back to England, to visit Casimir's father grave, and, since Casimir was his father's only son, he naturally becomes the heir of his father's property, so he needed to take charge of it and his own income. During the journey back to England, Mr Ruffigny decides to narrate the story of his life, how he became friends with the eldest Fleetwood, and why he will be forever thankful for the whole Fleetwood family line. In his story, Godwin decided to denounce an important aspect of his contemporary British society, which was the exploitation of child labour in the years of the Industrial Revolution, therefore again

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[208] *Ibid.* p. 115

[209] *Ibid.* p. 127

using fiction to address political and social issues, as he did in his previous novels — especially in the case of *Caleb Williams*. Ruffigny narrates how he spent his childhood and youth working in the silk-milks of Lyon and how the Fleetwood family rescued him.

However, what is crucial about Ruffigny's character is perhaps Godwin's 'deep discomfort with Rousseauean contractualism, especially in educational contexts'[210], in fact, 'Godwin's Rousseau is an intellectual prodigy, and an ethical failure — at once brilliantly innovative, and tragically blind to his own perpetuations of social hierarchism'[211]. There is, thus, an ambivalence for what concern the relationship between Rousseau and Godwin, and this ambivalence is embodied by Mr Ruffigny. As far as Fleetwood's early education is concerned, Godwin criticized Rousseau's isolation of both tutor and pupil. Contrarily to Godwin, Rousseau did not believe in that men are negatively shaped by a corrupted society, he claimed that 'the benevolent impulses which in a state of nature restrain man from injuring his neighbor and supply the place of law, are instinctive, and derive their validity, not from the reason, but from the feeling'[212].

To Casimir, Ruffigny becomes a god-like figure who intimidates him, and thus Casimir's instinctive reaction is to imitate him. After having finished his own narration — which also concludes the first volume of this novel — Mr Ruffigny and Casimir finally arrive to Fleetwood's mansion in Merionethshire and they decide to stay there, isolated, for two months. Then, they both depart for London for business, and as he returns to the social life in the Capital, Casimir starts developing a strong infatuation for a married woman named Mrs. Comorin, yet another 'evil' female allegedly incapable of real attachment. Mr Ruffigny strongly condemns Casimir's feelings towards her, and in a bitter letter to him he asserts:

> You sacrifice the serenity of an honourable mind to the tumult of the lowest passions in man. […] You will have a succession of mistresses; there will not be one vestige of the

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[210] Anne Chandler, '"A Tissue of Fables": Rousseau, Gender, and Textuality in Godwin's "Fleetwood"' *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 53 (2004), pp. 39-60 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30210528> Accessed on 30th April, 2019 pg. 40

[211] *Ibid.* p. 40

[212] B. Sprague Allen, *William Godwin as a Sentimentalist*, cit, p. 4

> refined and the ideal, what is noblest in taste and most exquisite in moral feeling, left within you. […] Casimir, my heart bleeds for you. Think what my feelings are; the feelings of Ruffigny, to whom the name of Fleetwood is a name for every thing sacred.

Again, from his harsh words towards Casimir's feelings towards Mrs. Comorin, it is clear how the character of Mr Ruffigny embodies morality and reason without feelings, and Godwin aimed to show that without a balance of these two poles one could not be happy. On the other hand, living a life only guided by feelings and passions without reason is equally erroneous, as shall be seen in the developing of Casimir's story. Nevertheless, after he reads Mr Ruffigny's letter, Casimir is so deeply moved that he decides to go back to reason for good, and he does so for a long period of time, for more than six years — basically until Ruffigny's death[213].

During this long period of his life, Casimir's temper undergoes yet another change, he himself admits that 'the ebriety and extravagance of youth were at an end with me'[214], as if he almost tries to bury his own sentimentalism in order to become more virtuous, again probably with the aim to imitate his tutor and mentor Mr Ruffigny. He also becomes more saturnine and, yet again, he confirms his misanthropy, due to the fact that, apart from his tutors and his father, he had only seen the world's 'most unfavorable specimens'[215]. In other words, even though he is staying in the place of his happy childhood in Merionethshire, Casimir is deeply unhappy and lonely, so he decides to move to London again, even though he is not pleased with the society he finds there. He is devoured by a constant feeling of *ennui*, thus he starts to travel to the Continent for many years, and he restlessly moves from capital to capital. Nevertheless, after all of his travels he is still unhappy because he has finally realized how lonely he is and, thus, he starts looking for a friend.

At this point of the story, Casimir is now forty-five, and he is not pleased with anyone, since, according to him, no one has the power to arouse his attention. However, his curiosity is finally excited when he is told of a gentleman, a Scottish philosopher

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213 Interestingly, Rousseau's Emile too had a brief period of sexual freedom, however, like Casimir, he preferred to return to his tutor's guidance.

214 William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 213

215 *Ibid.* p. 215

called Macneil, a man ‘of the warmest philantrophy’[216] who was supposed to know the celebrated Jean-Jaques Rousseau personally. Interestingly, Godwin actually cites Rousseau’s name in Chapter XII, Volume II of his novel, and he creates yet another character not only very similar to the enlightened philosopher, but who also knows him personally and who talks about him with Fleetwood:

> “I saw much of Rousseau” said my host. “He reposed many confidences in me. He often told me that he felt less suspicious and embarrassed with me, than with almost any man he ever knew; […] Rousseau was a man of exquisite *sensibility*, and that sensibility had been insulted and trifled with in innumerable instances, sometimes by the intolerance of priestcraft and power, sometimes by the wanton and ungenerous sports of men of letters. He lived, however, toward the close of his life in a world of his own, and *saw nothing as it really was*; […] I was convinced, from a multitude of indications, that Rousseau was not in his sober mind.[217]

Even though in his narratives and through the discussions between him and Casimir he sometimes criticized the philosopher, Macneil’s character was actually studied to embody Rousseau’s ideals. He is described as a man ‘who has a sublime faith in the essential goodness of humanity’[218]. Again, just like in Ruffigny’s case, Casimir finds another mentor to follow, yet another ‘intellectual hero’ who soon becomes a fatherly figure — very similar to Rousseau — to mimic.

Mr Macneil is the father of three young girls, Amelia, Barbara, and Mary. Just like her husband, Mrs Macneil is a highly interesting woman with a rather uncommon history. In fact, when she was very young, an old, ugly and avaricious Italian man, her music instructor, managed to win her regard and, before her sixteenth birthday, conveyed her from Italy to England — her native country — and made her a prisoner from his father. She met Mr Macneil in that situation, because when he heard her story he immediately decided to save her and, subsequently, he became her declared lover.

After having spent some time with this out of the ordinary family, Casimir starts to develop feelings for the older sister, Mary: ‘While I talked with her, I forgot my prejudices against her sex; the Marchioness de L— and the Countess of B— seemed

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[216] *Ibid.* p. 247

[217] *Ibid.* p. 243/244

[218] B. Sprague Allen, *William Godwin as a Sentimentalist*, cit, p. 24

daily more and more the shadow of a dream; […] she stole away my heart'[219]. Mary Macneil is presented as the first positive woman of the novel, a sort of female version of the man of feeling, since she possesses an exquisite sensibility — as shall be seen also when she will have to face mourn and tragedy — and, generally speaking, due to the fact that she possesses a number of qualities that are usually linked to the man of feeling, such as the emotional transparency. Therefore, she is presented as the perfect companion for Casimir. Nevertheless, as shall be analyzed later, in paragraph 1.2, their marriage will be troublesome.

Macneil's family then decides to move to Italy, mostly due to the pressure of the British society towards Macneil's wife[220]. Macneil knows that Casimir wants to marry one of his daughter — he actually almost forced him to change Casimir's mind on the topic of marriage, as shall be taken into consideration in paragraph 1.1 —, thus, he decides to leave Mary in England with Casimir. Mary settles in London for a period of time while Casimir was fixing some business in Wales, when they both receive the tragic news of her family's fate: the whole Macneil family died in a shipwreck caused by a terrible tempest, while they were going to Italy. Not only all of Mary's family died, but she also finds herself poor, since the Geonese banker to whom Macneil left his will and money robbed him. Immediately, Casimir goes to London to her, he consoles her, and even though the desperation of the mourning girl was so deep and lasted such a long time almost to affect their relationship, they finally decide to get married.

The third and last volume of the novel opens with the decision of the newlyweds to move to Merionethshire, in Casimir's father mansion. As shall be analyzed in paragraph 1.2, since the day of their arrival in Wales, Casimir's temper starts to be increasingly saturnine and irritable towards his young and innocent wife. He himself blames his own nerves for his unprovoked rage, but this starts to deeply affect the couple. Casimir does not seem suited at all to his new marriage life. He immediately starts to show the first symptoms of jealousy and madness and he soon starts to blame Mary's behavior for his

[219] *Ibid.* p. 259

[220] One could note a link between Macneil's wife and Godwin's wife Mary Wollstonecraft, since they both had to endure a harsh social pressure. The first due to the fact that she had two husbands — and both of them lived —, the second due to the fact that she did not marry Gilbert Imlay and she had a daughter from him, creating a huge scandal and forcing her and Godwin to get married against their will when they found out her pregnancy.

'illness'. Jealousy in particular is one of the main causes of it, especially after the arrival of two of Casimir's cousins, namely, Kenrick and Gifford. Their arrival at Fleetwood mansion was influenced by Macneil's will, which advised Casimir to call his nearest existing relations, and it brings happiness to Mary. She becomes friends with Kenrick and the many visitors he always brings home.

Shortly after the arrival of Casimir's cousins, Mary becomes pregnant and Gifford, who turns out to be the villain of the novel, starts to put into practice his evil plan of harming the good reputation of his brother in order to earn Casimir's inheritance and estate, by insinuating that Mary has cheated on Casimir with Kenrick. In order to carry out his plan, Gifford persuades Casimir of his wife's adultery through a number of events and, finally, Casimir — now totally insane — not only accuses Mary and leaves her, but also declares that the child she is carrying is illegitimate. Ironically, Gifford skillfully uses Casimir's emotions to manipulate him.

Casimir decided to depart immediately for the Continent, his mind is again under tumultuous contrasting feelings and he declares that he 'no longer distinctly knew where [he] was, or could distinguish fiction from reality'[221]. The climax of his madness is reached in the day of his wedding anniversary, where Godwin decided to reintroduce in his fiction the disturbing and the uncanny element from the Gothic literature analyzed in *Caleb Williams*. In fact, Casimir decides to 'celebrate' the recurrence by having made wax figures of both Kenrick and Mary. He dresses them up with clothes, he prepares food and he also has an artist to play music for them. In the end of this perverse show, he tears them apart. This scene is indeed disturbing and it may be read also as the only gothic moment of this novel, which also proves the fact that even though in the Preface the author claimed that this was a realistic fiction, it is actually not.

In this particular scene, Casimir's final transition from being a man of great sensibility to being a lunatic is clearly shown, especially when he says that he even saw the two wax figures moving, grinning, and chattering. After this disconcerting moment, Casimir states:

> I am firmly persuaded that, in the last hour or two, I suffered torture, not inferior to those which the North American savages inflict on their victims, when the apparatus of torture

[221] *Ibid.* p. 387

> was suspended, I sunk into immediate *insensibility*. […] The ceremonies of this evening had a terrible effect upon me. For fifteen days I never left my bed. For the most part of the time I was really insane, but I was too weak to break into the paroxysms of insanity, and those about me were scarcely aware of the degree of my derangement.[222]

Casimir's madness finally takes the form of a real physical disease, which should be seen as a warning from Godwin of the possible effects of letting the uncontrolled sensibility, the passions and the feelings prevail over reason: not only one may become unable to relate to others, but also may develop madness and physical pain. Thus, Godwin yet again uses fiction to give his audience moral and ethical instructions.

Furthermore, in Gifford and Casimir's plot, Godwin clearly decided to exploit the intense theatricality of his writing, already mentioned in chapter 2.4, by paying tribute to Shakespeare again, just as he did in *Caleb Williams*. In fact, one can easily notice the parallel between the traitorous and greedy Gifford and the character of Iago, from Shakespeare's *Othello*. Casimir Fleetwood is Godwin's own version of Othello, the jealous husband whose trust is 'gradually corrupted'[223] by the evil Gifford-Iago. Nevertheless, the ending of *Fleetwood* is far less tragic than the one of the Shakespearean play, in fact, in Godwin's novel Casimir recovers from his disease, he goes to Paris and he is almost assassinated, he is rescued by Kenrick, and then he finally finds out what Gifford really is, a villain who has deceived him and who has now been incarcerated in the Bastille. In the end, Mary, Casimir, and their child are reunited, and she forgives him, while Kenrick marries Scarborough's daughter Louisa[224], and Gifford is executed.

Nevertheless, just as in *Caleb Williams*'s case, even *Fleetwood*'s ending is rather unsatisfactory both from the point of view of Casimir's *bildung*, who is unable to express his feelings and his shame to Mary and therefore does not complete his growth as a man of feeling, but also for what concerns Mary's own fate. Even Sir Walter Scott, in reviewing Godwin's third novel for the *Edinburgh Review,* commented that "we close

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[222] *Ibid.* p. 388

[223] *Ibid.* p. 34

[224] Scarborough was Casimir's old neighbor.

the book with the painful reflection that Mary is once more subjected to his tyranny" [225] therefore hinting to a complex question of gender and misogyny within this novel which shall be analyzed in the next paragraph.

3.2 The 'New Man of Feeling' and the complex question of gender in the novel: the mask of sensibility used to hide misogyny

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!'
John Keats, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*

The aim of this paragraph is to demonstrate the reason why Casimir Fleetwood, the intricate character portrayed by Godwin under the name of the 'New' Man of Feeling, should be considered an archetypal sentimental anti-hero mostly due to his halved masculinity. During his *bildung*, Casimir is shown as socially unfit as well as self-destructive, especially for what concerns the relationship with his younger wife Mary — as well as in his previous relationships in Paris. Moreover, like other sentimental characters, he is highly feminized in the way he deals — or, better, is unable to deal — with his passions and strong feelings, a trait which definitely does not exists in a stereotypical masculine behavior. After experiencing chauvinistic social circles such as the ones in Oxford and Paris, Casimir himself defines those stereotypical masculine behaviors as 'gross', therefore he consciously dissociates with them.

In creating Casimir Fleetwood, Godwin has probably been influenced by his wife Mary Wollstonecraft, due to the similarity of her accusation towards the passive role women were forced to have in society — confined in the domestic sphere — contained

[225] Colin, Carman, "Godwin's *Fleetwood*, Shame, and the Sexuality of Feeling," *Nineteenth-Century Prose,* 41, nos. 1/2. Guest editors R. Weston and B. Tharaud (Spring-Fall 2014) 225-276 p. 21

in her *Vindication*[226] and the isolation of Casimir in his domestic comfort zone in Wales. Additionally, it is important to point out that Godwin's views on the controversial topic of sentimentalism had changed during his lifetime, mostly due to his marriage to Wollstonecraft. Nevertheless, he remained mostly skeptical towards the literature of feeling in general, due to its complete lack of reason — in fact, he strongly believed that feelings should be regulated by reason. He criticized the hegemony of uncontrolled feeling of his contemporary literature and philosophy through his novels, in particular in the case of Fleetwood, through Casimir's social relationships.

The crucial figure of Mary Wollstonecraft, taken into account in the first chapter of this work, is crucial also for Godwin's criticism towards Rousseau, since the philosopher was widely known for being a misogynist. It is clear also in his *Emile*, in which he showed how, according to him, the education of women had to be completely different from that of male pupils: he basically reinforced the patriarchal idea that women should be confined in the domestic sphere and they should be instructed to become mere objects for the male's desire. The particular topic of the importance of the education of women, in contrast with Rousseau's chauvinistic views, was the main point of discussion of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication.* Thus, it is highly probable that the proto-feminist ideals of Godwin's first wife had influenced his work so much so that he realized *Fleetwood* as a sort of lengthy criticism to Rousseau's misogynistic view of pedagogy. Furthermore, one could also see how Godwin was affected by the death of his wife, and how this reflects on his later works. It was as if Godwin felt the need to embrace his late wife's causes and philosophical views.

Specifically, this paragraph aims to emphasize Fleetwood's failure in his relationships with women. The first example, one of the key starting points for his misanthropy as well as his misogyny, has to be found in the period he spent in Paris, widely known to be the 'city of sin'. As stated above, in France he has two mistresses, and what is interesting in these relationships is the way these unruly powerful female characters threaten his masculinity so much so that Casimir unconsciously becomes feminized, thus even closer to the figure of the man of feeling. In fact, these female

[226] See chapter 1.2

characters possess a more masculine behavior than his, especially in the case of the Marchioness, who is described as an archetypal *femme fatale*:

> Her passion seemed particularly to prompt her to the bold, the intrepid, and the *masculine*. An impudent and Amazonian stare, a smack of the whip, a slap on the back, a loud and unexpected accost that made the hearer start again, were expedient frequently employed by her to excite the admiration of those with whom she associated. In the theatre she would talk louder than the performers; in a dance, by some ridiculous caprice, she would put out those with whom she was engaged; she was never satisfied unless the observation of all eyes were turned on her. […] the Marchioness was a universal favorite, at least with the male sex.[227]

It is important to stress how, in a period of time where female were asked to be sensitive and bashful, here the gender roles are subverted, therefore Casimir's natural reaction was to feel intimidated by her strong personality.

The figure of the *femme fatale* is probably another feature Godwin had taken from the Gothic and Romantic literature, even though it had reached its climax as a literary and artistic subject later in time, specifically in the mid-nineteenth century Decadent movement — in particular in the works of French decadents. In their works this 'evil woman' is often described as basically the very opposite of the classical female portraits of Renaissance art and literature, where innocent and virtuous women were always compared to angels. On the contrary, in this part of *Fleetwood* the gender roles are reversed: the unfeeling yet fascinating woman has an active role in society and in the sexual sphere, while the feeling male is passive. The Marchioness, the first woman described in this novel and also the first one to have a long term affair with Casimir, is in fact a woman who exploits her sexual freedom and power to manipulate men. The starting point of Fleetwood's misogyny is probably this feeling of uncertainty and inferiority in front of this fatal woman who limits his masculinity: while he looks for love and affection he finds deception and heartbreak.

The second female character, named the Countess, is esthetically different from the Marchioness, as she is described as an archetypal Renaissance woman, sweet and angelic; nevertheless, neither she embodies the classical woman whose aim is to be the perfect wife confined in her 'natural' domestic sphere, even though she is definitely

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[227] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 104 [emphasis added]

more feminine than the Marchioness. The Countess is indeed an adulteress, moreover, she is also described as unfeeling and unable to maintain a long-term relationship. Like Casimir's previous affair, even the relationship with the Countess ends with 'disappointment and despair'[228]:

> Unfortunately, however, the Countess, though she seemed to feel with her soul, had the spring of her sentiment and actions in her eyes. Where she attacked herself, it was with such a show of ardour that the lover must have been captious and difficult indeed, who was not satisfied with the sincerity of passion she displayed toward him. Yet the passion of the Countess was rather an abstract propensity, than the preference of an individual. […] Like the wanton bee, which flits from flower to flower, equally enamoured with each in turn, and retaining no painful recollections of that which was last quitted, to render the qualities of the next offerer less agreeable and exquisite. [229]

As argued by Evert Jan van Leeuwen, 'within the decadent Parisian salon culture, Fleetwood's masculinity is shown to be upheld only through polarization with a prescribed feminine identity. It is undermined as soon as he associates with a woman who refuses to play her part'[230]. The evidence of the deep suffering Casimir suffers for this reversion of roles in which he feels threatened by the masculine and dominant presence of the Marchioness, is embodied in his 'second choice' of the Countess, an 'angel' who 'rose upon him like an evening star, mild, radiant, tranquil, and soothing'[231]. The Countess is thus a character who, externally, is a much more feminine choice — which should have reinforced the masculinity he needs to sustain his social mask of the un *homme à bonnet fortunes* — but, in the end, she is shown as manipulative, and able to use him through her sexual power, just like the Marchioness, therefore proving the fact that even though she does not share the physical traits of the *femme fatale* she actually is one.

Bearing in mind that according to Godwin men are the 'products' of the environment in which they are raised, and given the fact that these two negative experiences with the female sex were the only ones he had in his lifetime, his experience with the female

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[228] *Ibid.* p. 113

[229] *Ibid.* p. 113

[230] Evert Jan van Leeuwen, "MONSTROUS MASCULINITY AND EMOTIONAL TORTURE IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S FLEETWOOD; OR, THE NEW MAN OF FEELING" *Sexed Sentiments,* Rodopi, 2011.< https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042032422_007 > accessed in March, 2019, p.125

[231] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 114

universe was, at that point, completely negative. Therefore, Casimir admits he started to 'abhor and revile'[232] women in general. His misanthropy was thus turning into misogyny due to his inability to properly choose a good social circle and positive relationships — with both men and women — and, since the corruption of the Parisian decadent society was too much for his sensibility, he finally decides to flee from the city that caused him so much pain. However, the emotional trauma he suffered soon resurfaces in the relationship with his wife Mary Macneil.

Mary's character is indeed different from the two mistresses he had in Paris, she is the very opposite of these two 'evil' and 'unfeeling' women, as Casimir had previously described them. In fact, she is portrayed as a sort of woman of feeling. However, her sensibility, which at the beginning was a positive trait that linked her with Casimir's personality, is not able to prevent the failure of their marriage. Casimir anticipated this failure in a previous conversation he had with Macneil, in which they discussed the controversial topic of marriage, which is of great significance also for Godwin's political views. In this discussion, Casimir gives voice to Godwin's own negative views on the institution of marriage:

> I am impressed with no favorable disposition toward the female sex. I cannot be blind enough to credit what some have maintained, probably more from love of the paradox than any other cause, that there is any parity between the sexes. […] I have another disqualification for marriage worse even than this. I am grown old in the habits of a bachelor. I can bear no restraint. You, sir, happy as you are in your family, must be fully aware that it is impossible for two persons to associate for a day without some clash with their different inclinations. It is like hounds in a leash; the chain is upon their necks, and not upon their wills. […] I am too proud to suffer my temper to be much ruffled by so fugitive an inconvenience.[233]

While on the other hand Macneil — Rousseau's alter ego — tries to dissuade his strong positions against marriage, reinforcing a patriarchal and chauvinistic ideology in which there are standard gender roles:

> Mr. Macneil laughed at the vehemence of my satire against marriage. "No," said he, "I do not absolutely insist that you shall fix upon a lady of forty-five years of age […] No, if you marry, Fleetwood, choose a girl whom no disappointments have soured, and no misfortune have bent to the Earth; let her be lively, gay as the morning, and smiling as the

[232] *Ibid.* p. 114

[233] *Ibid.* p. 253

> 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. […] But the main error into which you have fallen, is to suppose that the way of living between a man and his wife, bears any resemblance to that with a chance companion in a post-chaise, or between an ordinary host and his guest. The first principle of society in this relation, if it is actuated with any spirit of kindness, is the desire each party feels to be the sacrifice of the other. Instead of regretting the unavoidable differences of inclination, they become, where the topics to which they relate are not fundamental, an additional source of pleasure. […] Marry, Fleetwood! If you live, marry! You know nothing of happiness if you do not![234]

Macneil is actually trying to change Casimir's mind using happiness as his tool to finally convince him. In fact, Casimir's solitary journey to the Continent before meeting him and his family, was utterly unhappy. Even though he considers himself a misanthrope — and he clearly is one — he was looking for a friend to help him being less lonely, and now this friend gives him an advice he did not expect. Macneil keeps engaging on this particular subject, urging him to get married to achieve happiness, and therefore Casimir finally asks him one of his daughter as a wife.

Even though at this point Casimir is indeed convinced to the positivity of marriage by Macneil's speeches, against all of his previous doubts, he still feels the need to ensure his virility by imposing his masculinity to Mary, probably due to his past trauma as a feminized man of feeling. In doing so, as noted by van Leeuren, he exerts his masculine power by becoming a sort of gothic despot masqueraded as a benevolent sentimentalist, using his desolate patriarchal gothic castle in Wales as a prison for his young and innocent wife[235]. Mary thus turns into a gothic heroine, imprisoned in a scary and Romantic place, under the control of a evil and misogynystic despot. Again, Casimir is shown as a mad man who exploits his sentimentality to hide his true self, as jealousy rapidly becomes his only feeling.

As shall be analyzed also in the next paragraph, he excuses his mental disease through sentimentality. Even though Casimir is presented as a man of feeling, in his marriage he shows no sympathy towards Mary, on the contrary, he:

> relies on her – as he did on the Countess – to underscore his masculinity and her free and public association with others actually underscores her earlier asserted individuality and

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[234] *Ibid.* p. 255

[235] Evert Jan van Leeuwen, "MONSTROUS MASCULINITY AND EMOTIONAL TORTURE IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S FLEETWOOD; OR, THE NEW MAN OF FEELING", cit, p. 133

> not his masculinity. […] Fleetwood's domestic despotism is magnified into monstrosity. He reduces Mary to a slave, a puppy on a leash, refusing her to question his orders.[236]

However, he is able to manipulate her in this way not because he is a man, but due to the fact that she is an orphan with no fortune, while he has money and a mansion, just like her father did with her mother. Thus Mary — both emotionally and financially — depends upon Casimir. As claimed by Colin Carman, 'he makes no secret of the fact that what he first felt for Mary Macneil was *not* romantic love but rather pity after the Macneils drowned on their way to Italy, leaving her orphaned and penniless'[237].

Furthermore, he not only becomes increasingly irascible and despotic, but also reaffirms his misanthropy as he refuses to socialize with his wife's guests and friends. The mere idea of meeting new families seems to cause a 'painful twinge'[238] to him, as he says: "I had all my life shrunk from this mummery, this unmeaning intercourse. I had travelled from one side of Europe to the other, in search of persons whose conversations should be tolerable to me."[239] Nevertheless, even though the couple moved away from London as well as from Mary's homeland[240], she keeps having suicidal thoughts and symptoms of depression due to her family's tragic death, therefore Casimir finally consents to have social intercourses in order to help her. However, this turn of events in which he is almost forced to participate in social interactions, probably worsened Casimir's lack of masculinity, due to the fact that it makes him feel as he is not able to exert his 'masculine power' over her anymore.

This causes a number of mood swings in which Casimir feels, firstly, deeply ravished, and subsequently, disheartened, for example in the episode when Mary suddenly leaves him while he was reading to her one of his favorite poems, to go

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[236] *Ibid.* p. 134

[237] Colin Carman, 'Godwin's Fleetwood, Shame, and the Sexuality of Feeling' *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 41, 1-2. Guest editors R. Weston and B. Tharaud (Spring-Fall 2014): 225-276 p.16

[238] *Ibid.* p. 296

[239] *Ibid.* p. 296

[240] Mary was born in Scotland

observing plants near Idris[241]. At first he does not seem upset about this episode, on the contrary, he even seems happy that his wife has finally found joy among the Welsh nature he himself so deeply loves:

> 'What an honest and sincere mind is hers, that soars to admire the tremendous precipice and the gathering tempest, and can then descend to the frailest and minutest herb which clothes the face of our mother-earth! […] Would I destroy in Mary this noble relish, this generous affection, that embraces all creatures of God? — God bless her, even in her caprices! They prove the youth and elasticity of her mind; they mark the morning of life; they are the symbols of that truly feminine character, which so delightfully contrasts with my own sex, and constitutes the crown and essence of the life of man. I will turn a botanist myself! While these reflections passed in my mind, I was almost tempted to pursue Mary, and join her in her herborising excursion'. […] Saying this, I put on my hat, I walked out of the hall door, and hurried along the avenue.[242]

Nevertheless, even though he even goes outdoor to join her, he suddenly changes his mind, with an unexpected mood swing he stops and declares:

> 'No! I will not go to her! She has used me ill. She has wounded me in a point, where I am most alive. Fletcher [the poet he was reading], my old friend, friend of my boyish days, whose flights I have taught the echoes of the mountains to repeat, whose pages I have meditated in my favorite closet, —she has affronted me thee, Fletcher; and for thee; if not for myself, I will resent it. No, this I will not do, I will not be an uxorious, tame, wife-ridden husband. Has she shown any disposition to comply with me? If I begin, I can never continue to sustain this part. 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. […] I cannot be contented to be reduced to nothing.

Thus, one can note how he does not recognize his pathological bipolar disorder, on the contrary, he genuinely thinks that if he was to follow his wife's 'caprices' he would then become 'wife-ridden'. He feels that his — already fragile — masculinity is under attack. As van Leeuwen points out: 'in fear of a total reversal of gender roles that Mary's dissident behaviour brings about, Fleetwood crashes head on against the rocks that he has feared he would hit all along.'[243]

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[241] Mary is a botanist, therefore highly interested in the plants and flowers offered to her by the wild Welsh nature. That afternoon, she forgets she had an appointment with the son of their neighbor to guide her finding some rare plants.

[242] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 302

[243] Evert Jan van Leeuwen, "MONSTROUS MASCULINITY AND EMOTIONAL TORTURE IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S FLEETWOOD; OR, THE NEW MAN OF FEELING", cit, p. 18

Subsequently, Casimir's bodily reaction to these tumults of passions and contrasting chain of thoughts is that of being exhausted and in despair. His state is indeed miserable, and it is important to highlight how in a short passage of the novel which describes a seemingly innocuous event that for most of people might be ordinary, Casimir, the man of feeling, perceives it is in extremes. His temper suffers a lot of mood swings in short periods of time: he starts from being happy, to be angry and then sad. As Colin Carman has noted, there is a similar repetitiousness in the way 'Fleetwood suspects his wife of being either unfaithful or secretive, but then castigates himself for doubting her in the first place'[244]. Godwin was perhaps hinting to the fact that this uncontrolled sensibility might be hiding a mental illness, a proper disease, and therefore his aim might be that of make a strong impression to the reading public in order to warn them, in the same way as he did in one of his most didactic novel, *Caleb Williams*.

Hence, paradoxically, the new man of feeling is described as unable to use reason to control his passions, especially for what concerns his wife. Fleetwood himself is aware that his saturnine and irascible temper are due to his peculiar character he had developed in the Romantic wandering of his lonely childhood, and perhaps the crucial moment in which he fully realizes it may be found in the first days the newlyweds spend in Casimir's gothic mansion in Wales. During the first days together, Casimir finally understands how different a life as a married man is from the Romantic solitary life he used to have in Wales. Specifically, he is extremely — almost pathologically — jealous even of the objects of the house which are part of his childhood memories. This is clear in the episode of the closet, mentioned in the previous paragraph, which is described as one of Casimir's favorite apartments in his house. He wants to except total control over his wife in order to confirm his masculinity, but he is unable to successfully do it. As pointed out by Handwerk, "He [Fleetwood] clearly recognizes the this situation and begins to feel that Mary consciously uses against him"[245]. Using Casimir's own words:

> Here then I was, torn, not now from my closet and my private staircase, but from my paternal mansion, and the haunts, where once my careless childhood strayed. Lately the most independent man alive, I was become a mere appendage to that tender and charming

[244] Colin Carman, 'Godwin's *Fleetwood*, Shame, and the Sexuality of Feeling', cit, p. 17

[245] Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's "Fleetwood" and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education', cit, p. 395

> trifle, a pretty woman. I adored my wife; but I had cultivated high ideas of the prerogatives of my sex, and I did not altogether relish the being thus reduced to a cipher.[246]

Again, it is clear how Fleetwood blames her and not himself for his own lack of masculinity — or, at least, for being unable to play the social role he so much desires — and therefore he releases his resentment by turning into a patriarchal despot.

Therefore, if in the third volume of Casimir's *bildung* the audience is now looking for a character development concerning the new man of feeling, this expectation is completely deluded by Godwin that choose madness over reason to explain Casimir's sentiments. In fact, this was exactly one of the limitations of the literature of feeling — and also of sentimentality in general — criticized by Godwin. As pointed out by a number of critics, such as Colin Carman and William Shield, Casimir exploits Mary due to the fact that sensibility is not enough to satisfy his emotional needs: 'one limitation of sensibility is its uni-directionality whereas "sympathy is a moral neutral mechanism that enables the transmission of any sentiment, from outrage to joy, among two or more people'[247]. Fleetwood is basically blaming Mary for the failure of their marriage as well as for his irrational jealousy, which he claims is due to his over-sensitiveness, but then this over-sensitiveness also becomes the scapegoat for his irrationality. That is to say, he excuses his madness thanks to his condition as a man of feeling, and that is why Carman defines Casimir a man of negative feeling[248].

To conclude this paragraph, it is important to stress how, through this fictional work as well as in his other writings, Godwin managed to express his own interpretation of the question of manliness in the 'Age of Sensibility' and, specifically, how it was related to a complex issue related to gender. This particular topic has intrigued a number of feminist scholars interested in the works of William Godwin, since it probably derived from the proto-feminist studies of his wife Mary Wollstonecraft, as a sort of intellectual heritage she had left to his husband.

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[246] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 325

[247] Colin Carman, 'Godwin's *Fleetwood*, Shame, and the Sexuality of Feeling', cit, p. 5

[248] *Ibid*. p. 14

3.3 The man of goodwill corrupted by the social environment: the relationship between sensibility and social ineptitude in Casimir Fleetwood's character

> Even knowledge and the enlargement of intellect are poor, when unmixed with sentiments of benevolence and sympathy. Emotions are scarcely ever thrilling and electrical without something of *social feeling*.[249]
> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*

As pointed out by Gary Handwerk, *Fleetwood* should be read more as a treatise rather than a novel, since a number of critics have recognized in Godwin's third work a rewriting of sentimental fiction that amounted to a fundamental attack upon both the genre itself and its attendant philosophy of sympathy[250]. As can be noted by Godwin's own words in the citation above, taken from from his *Political Justice*, Godwin was indeed interested in the connection between sensibility and social feeling, thus, he exploited his third novel to analyze it. In Casimir he created a character whose social ineptitude and cynicism have a deep connection with his sentimentality. The link between these two topics gets even clearer when looking at Casimir's own struggle throughout his *bildung* in the dealing with other men and women. To describe *Fleetwood*, in Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley words: 'what began as a focused account of the development of the mind and sensibility of a single individual opens out into a widely ranging survey of British social history'[251]. That is to say, in Casimir's character one can find both a criticism to the excesses of the literature of feeling as well as a harsh criticism towards the Godwin's contemporary society, which forms an integral part of the author's own particular way to write fiction. Paradoxically, at the beginning to the novel, Casimir claims to be capable of human sympathy and benevolence, at a point that he even affirmed that it was the main feature of his Romantic character, however, these claims are contradicted by his own actions when he

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[249] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness. By William Godwin. In Two Volumes*, cit, p. xiv [emphasis added]

[250] Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's "Fleetwood" and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education', cit, p. 377

[251] See Introduction to William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 19

is shown as disgusted by the social circles he enters[252] or in the way he is easily manipulated by other people.

Casimir is depicted as shocked by he very first social environment he attends, at the University of Oxford, since the very beginning of his first experience out of his comfort zone he does not feel like he belongs to that chauvinistic, competitive and evil environment, he still feels innocent as he was during his childhood back in Wales. However, he decides to try and mimic his fellow colleagues, even though he secretly despises their behaviors, which he sums up as a 'dull and unfeeling brutality'[253]. Moreover, mimicry will be one of Casimir's recurrent ways of escaping his true self, since he uses this technique of hiding behind a social mask and an 'intellectual hero' to follow both with Ruffigny and Macneil.

Returning to his social ineptitude in Oxford, Casimir is deliberately choosing not to act against a society he despises, he choses to repress his own real feelings and basically be an inept. In his own words:

> Though I had assumed an impudent and licentious character, I despised it; and I made conscience of debauching new converts into the inglorious school, which was usually the object and end of these brutal jests. I was contented to associate with those whose characters I judged to be finished already, and whom I persuaded myself my encouragement would not make worse; and thus with wretched sophistry I worked my mind into the belief that, while I yielded to a vicious course, I was doing no harm.[254]

He clearly thinks that since he did not personally bully or harassed other students, he would still possess the fine qualities of the man of feeling he had during his childhood in Wales, above all sympathy. Nevertheless, he seems not to be aware that his main failure lies the fact that he had been corrupted by this social environment, and thus his unconscious escape is that of hiding his true personality behind a social mask. The only times he actually acts as a man of feeling against injustices are very few, and one of them is in the episode of Whiters, in which he shows to the readers, as a sort of catharsis among all of his errors, his humanity.

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[252] In addition, as studied in the previous paragraph, Casimir's subsequent complete refusal to have intercourses with society would then become another great issue in his marriage

[253] See Introduction to William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 74

[254] *Ibidem*

In this regard, it is important to stress the fact that Godwin actually appreciated some of the features of sensibility, he did not totally despised the genre, in particular for what concern the focus on the importance of humanity and benevolence, since he himself was strongly interested in this topic[255], especially for its relation to politics. It is interesting to note how Godwin frequently mentioned key words such as: benevolence, humanity, and kindness also in his *Political* Justice, particularly for what concerns its connection with morality, justice, and progress:

> Morality is that system of conduct which is determined by a consideration of the greatest general good: he is entitled to the highest moral approbation, whose conduct is, in the greatest number of instances, or in most momentous instances, *governed by views of benevolence*, and made subservient to public utility.[256]

In fact, Godwin, just like Hume and Smith, indeed believed in the innate benevolence of mankind. Of course, Godwin's aim for this work was not political, on the contrary, he himself stated that for this specific novel he was more interested in analyzing the human psyche and sensibility, however, there is indeed some didacticism — as well as social criticism[257] — which is clearly derived by his philosophical and political beliefs. Godwin's didacticism is recurrent throughout the episodes of the novel, especially for what concerns the impact of Casimir's education on his *bildung*.

To further study the topics of sentimentality and social ineptitude, one could also link the two novels taken into account in this particular work, namely *Caleb Williams* and *Fleetwood*, as there is indeed a connection between Casimir's character as a man of feeling — and its increasing despotism and madness analyzed in the previous paragraph — with Falkland's strange temper in Godwin's first novel. In fact, *Caleb Williams*'s Falkland can be defined both a man of feeling and a despot. Like Falkland, who does not have a social life and spend the most of his time alone in his estate and his library, Casimir as well used to have a social life but then retreated to complete solitude and misanthropy in his desolate 'gothic castle'. Thus, men of feeling in Godwinian fiction,

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[255] See Chapter One, paragraph 1.4

[256] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness. By William Godwin. In Two Volumes*, cit, p. 109 [emphasis added]

[257] Especially for what concerns the social circles Godwin describes, as well as the harsh critique of child labor and exploitation in the years of the uprising of the Industrial Revolution.

despite the fact that they indeed possess humanity, end up alone and incapable of controlling their passions.

Moreover, Godwin is slowly demonstrating how Casimir's isolation in Wales during his childhood and adolescence, as well as his subsequent negative social experiences in Oxford and in Paris, have indeed deformed his way of dealing with other people, basically creating a sociopath. As stated by Handwerk, Casimir's failure as a husband indicates how seriously flawed Godwin found Rousseau's pedagogy to be in its reliance upon staged moral lessons to create effective moral dispositions,[258] to further lay the groundwork for his future mental disorders.

This may also add importance to Godwin's belief that a person is shaped by the surrounding environment, that is to say, that a persons's character is indeed shaped by external circumstances, and if the said social circumstances and institutions are corrupted it would therefore deform also the person growing up in it. Again, this is especially true in the decisive shift from the Romantic surroundings of Casimir's birthplace in Wales to the 'real' world in Oxford, in which indeed he suffers a negative impact from a society he had never seen before. Thus, Casimir can indeed be defined as a negative character due to the fact that he is a bad example for the audience, and probably Godwin exaggerated this figure of the sentimental anti-hero this much for the didactical purpose of his novel. As claimed by van Leeuwen:

> Rather than chastising his anti-hero for his mistakes, Godwin is more intent on showing how the coercive pressures of dominant ideological institutions such as education, law, as well as rigidly gendered cultural customs and traditions, make monsters of individuals who fail or refuse to perform their prescribed socio-political gender roles.[259]

Once more, in a novel which apparently had nothing or little to do with politics, Godwin was able to skillfully criticize and condemn the corrupted institutions just like he did — more explicitly — in *Caleb Williams*. It is important to note that, as claimed by Handwerk and Markley, 'the sentimental novel rarely challenges the status quo, and in most cases seem to have contributed to reinscribing social conventions rather than

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[258] Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's "Fleetwood" and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education', cit, p. 398

[259] Evert Jan van Leeuwen, "MONSTROUS MASCULINITY AND EMOTIONAL TORTURE IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S FLEETWOOD; OR, THE NEW MAN OF FEELING", cit, p. 121

challenging them'[260]. Godwin, who had an active role in British politics, and who himself embodied the challenge to the status quo, obviously had to criticize this aspect of the literature of feeling, by clearly showing Casimir's inaptitude and failure. In other words, Godwin 'recognized the latent potential of the genre for social criticism' and skillfully used the genre's deficiencies in order to denounce the many faults of his contemporary society in Britain.

As first studied by Carman, another crucial link between sensibility and social ineptitude in Casimir's character may be found in the way he continuously feels a sentiment of shame throughout the novel, archetypical in Casimir's blushing — again another feature Godwin borrowed from the sentimental fiction, especially from MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling*. One of the number of examples in which Casimir feels ashamed for his sentiments and therefore for his condition as a man of feeling is in the episode of his infatuation for Mrs Comorin and the subsequent indignation of Mr Ruffigny, who, at that point in the novel, has basically become a fatherly figure for Casimir. Ruffigny is described by Carman as the character who 'plays a pivotal part in shame's reestablishment because he is a *shaming agent* and a relic from Fleetwood's family history'[261], especially in the period of time after Paris and after his emotional trauma with the other adulteresses.

As a result, Casimir feels ashamed for his feelings, and therefore his first reaction is that to hide his relationship. However, Mr Ruffigny soon discovers his liaison:

> Ruffigny perceived me, long before I had an idea that I was become a spectacle to him. The public of the situation restrained my familiarity with this new mistress of affections within certain bounds; but Ruffigny saw enough, to leave no doubt in his mind as to the true explanation of the scene. My fair friend was too vivacious a temperament, not to play a hundred whimsical tricks in the course of an hour; I caught the tone from her, and made myself no less ridiculous. In the heyday of youthful blood, I was capable of little restraint; and my infant passion inspired me with unwonted eagerness and activity. In one of my idlest and most forward sallies I caught the eye of Ruffigny; my face became as red as scarlet.[262]

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[260] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 20

[261] Colin Carman, 'Godwin's *Fleetwood*, Shame, and the Sexuality of Feeling', cit, p. 13

[262] William Godwin, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 207

From the purely moralistic point of view of Ruffigny, the fact that Casimir has another — exclusively sexual — affair with a married woman after his Parisian 'errors' is indeed a great disappointment and therefore he is so outraged that he not only accuses Casimir of bringing disgrace to his late father's name, but he also writes a shameful letter to him. Interestingly, shame, to him, is linked with free sexuality. Casimir's first reaction, as a sort of teenage response to a severe father, is that of feeling angry. They also have a proper discussion: '"Is it possible" said I, as I sallied into the street "to conceive any thing so unreasonable as Ruffigny?"'[263]. However, Casimir immediately feels again guilty and shameful, and in this state of mind he also starts to question his infatuation for Mrs Comorin:

> Nothing was clear and perspicuous in my mind. I suspected that my present passion was a vapor only, was lighter than vanity; my thoughts whispered me, that all I had seen most worthy and excellent on earth, was my deceised parent and Ruffigny. My soul was chaos. A certain sentiment of remorse led me, sooner than usual, to quit the company and hasten home.

It is clear how Casimir's sentiments are indeed confused and in tumult after the discussion with Ruffigny, as he starts, again, to feel ashamed for what he did, particularly after having read the disappointment in Ruffigny's letter, who had already recognized that specific feeling in Casimir: 'Shame my dear Fleetwood, shame is ever the handmaid of vice. What is the language you have held me for the last three weeks? What shall I name you? Mean prevaricator!'[264]. After these harsh words, Casimir repents and finally promises to live a life only ruled by moral feelings, probably in order not to feel ashamed and guilty anymore. However, as pointed out by Godwin, there is no possibility of happiness in a life only guided by moral feelings or, on the contrary, only guided by the tumult of passions. There is the need of balance between the two.

Some critics have even hypnotized that this recurrent sentiment of shame felt by Casimir may be the final proof of his queerness. Just like in *Caleb William*'s case, there are in fact a number of readings that not only see the unhappiness of the same-sex

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[263] *Ibid*. p. 208

[264] *Ibid.* p. 211

marriage as Godwin's own critics to it, but as a proof of Casimir's homosexual tendencies. In Carman's own words:

> Is Godwin suggesting that a man who seeks emotional fulfillment in a same-sex romantic friendship is doomed to a life of unhappiness? […] Shame is what sets Godwin's feeling man apart from others and renders him queer. […] Fleetwood is a self-defeating character whose shame is an obstruction to interpersonal connection on every level. Godwin's title is something of a misnomer insofar as Casimir Fleetwood never arrives at a heteronormative state of manly pride but, regressing into the shameful feelings that function as a substitute for connecting with others, faces impasse after impasse. Godwin's new man of feeling may not be an inspiring model for contemporary queer readers since he fails to transcend the restraints of shame, but the novel, read from a queer perspective, is no less instructive. [265]

In other words, Casimir argues that the shame Casimir feels is given by the fact that he is unable to show his real identity, just like in Caleb's case, and therefore he feels forced to use a number of social masks to hide his true identity. However, in doing so, he becomes a despotic tyrant, a misanthrope, a misogynist, and he almost dies for a mental illness that leads him to complete madness.

On the other hand, defining Casimir as a queer character only due to his lack of masculinity as well as his recurrent feeling of shame could be seen as an exaggeration for a number of other critics as well for this particular study. If in *Caleb Williams* Falkland and Caleb's relationship is more explicitly homoerotic, as suggested in chapter two, in *Fleetwood* one can indeed find a complex character who does have a tumultuous relationship with the other sex, as he experienced traumas for his past heterosexual liaisons with women, nevertheless, this may not be enough to label him as homosexual.

As have been argued throughout this chapter, Casimir is indeed a peculiar man of feeling, a sentimental character who, ironically, is unable to express his emotions and his true nature in a social environment. Nevertheless, it would be unjust to portray him only as a negative character. In fact, he may also be seen as a man of goodwill, in the Christian sense of the word. That is to say, he tries to live a life guided by morality and virtue but, in most of the cases, he is unable to sustain this social mask. In portraying this kind of character, one could link Godwin and another author who lived in the 'Age of Feeling', namely Henry Fielding (1707/1754). Fielding was not a proper sentimental

[265] Colin Carman, "Godwin's *Fleetwood*, Shame, and the Sexuality of Feeling", cit, p. 22

author, however, just like Godwin, not only was he deeply engaged with sentimentalism, but he also borrowed features from this particular kind of literature. In Fielding's most popular novels, namely, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, in their didactical and political backgrounds and, in particular, in their protagonists, one can definitely see the connection with Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and *Fleetwood* and their characters. For instance, Tom Jones is indeed an honest and virtuous young man of goodwill, highly similar to the young and curious Casimir in his adolescence in Wales. Nevertheless, Tom Jones as well is corrupted by external agents and institutions while he is growing up, and therefore he commits a number of mistakes which flaws his virtue. In the end, which is positive, just like Casimir, he repents for his mistakes and therefore confirms the fact that he is indeed a man of goodwill.

Furthermore, Fielding exploited the theme of sexuality which then will be used also by Godwin to describe Casimir's dissipation, however, contrarily to Godwin, Fielding described it as positive — and he used it also to add a comical twist to his novels. As argued by Paul Kelleher:

> The celebrated architecture of Fielding's novel not only accommodates the seemingly unruly forces of lust, but also rearticulates this passion as constitutive of moral fee and social order. Tom Jones represents male heterosexual passion as a source, perhaps *the* source, of moral judgment and ethical conduct, for in its pages, it is sexual passion that infuses law with spirit and duty with blood.[266]

Thus, while for Casimir sexuality is a source of shame and guilt, a social sphere in which he is unable to control his passions, in Fielding's fictional works it is a positive trait of the human nature which confirms one's masculinity and virtue.

Hence, as happens in *Fleetwood*, also in Fielding's novels one could find the crucial struggle of not seeming manly enough, that is to say, the stress to confirm one's manliness. Probably, both Godwin and Fielding shared the purpose to distance themselves to that kind of sentimental literature aimed to a female audience — such as Richardson's novels — in which masculinity is, in a way, forgotten or threatened. Kelleher states:

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[266] Paul Kelleher, "'The Glorious Lust of Doing Good': *Tom Jones* and the Virtues of Sexuality." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 38-2/3, 2005, pp. 165–192 <www.jstor.org/stable/40267623> accessed on 17 May, 2019, p. 165

> Sentimentality registers as an aspect of Fielding's elevated and unimpeachable literary genealogy - his novels share the form and spirit of Shakespeare's comedies. But when the matter at hand requires situating him vis-à-vis Richardson, Fielding's 'robust masculine sentimentality' is detached from the body of his work, and instead, is refigured as a robust masculine protest against and negation of Richardson's feminized sentimentality[267].

However, if in Fielding's case his 'proto-sentimental' novels may be similar to Shakespeare's comedies in the way they ironically deal with emotions, in Godwin's novels are indeed more similar to Shakespeare's tragedies. In fact, as previously mentioned, *Fleetwood*, which could be defined as the Godwinian *Othello*, did not aim to be ironic, comical, or sarcastic towards the literature of feeling. On the contrary, through Casimir's character the novel perhaps aimed to point out the flaws of a genre which, according to Godwin, probably had a lot of potential also for other purposes.

That is the reason why Godwin's third work probably deserved much more success than what it actually had, due to the fact that it is a rather challenging novel in which not only Godwin managed to discuss philosophical and political issues through a character which is not completely good nor completely bad — and which possesses great psychological depth — but also because Godwin turns out to be the very first author to have criticized without irony or sarcasm the evident flaws of the literature of feeling without considering it a completely negative and pointless genre. In fact, at first, critics did not understand how Godwin's character could embody a 'new' version of the men of feeling they already knew.

In Handwerk and Markley's words, this novel and 'its mix of genres, its jarring shifts in tone, and, in particular, its depiction of Fleetwood's gradual slide into insanity, made it an uncomfortable novel to read and a hard one to assess.'[268] A number of reviewers and critics did not share Godwin's explanations for Casimir's extreme sentiments which then turned into insanity. The fact that Casimir would contradict himself — since he was indeed selfish, a flaw that does not suit a character which aim to be a man of feeling — puzzled even more those critics.

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[267] *Ibid.* p. 166

[268] See Introduction to William Godwin written by by Gary Handwerk, and A. A Markley, *Fleetwood*, cit, p. 35

Nevertheless, probably, just like in his first novel, Godwin decided to exaggerate his character's emotional traits in order to surprise and shock the audience, to disturb them with the final purpose of instructing them through an unusual narrative in which he managed to skillfully balance and intersect a philosophical, social, psychological and sentimental analysis and criticism.

Conclusion

'The sublime and pathetic are barren,
unless it be the sublime of *true virtue* and the pathos of *true sympathy*'[269]
William Godwin, *Political Justice*

The purpose of this thesis has been that of presenting an underestimated and lesser-known novelist, William Godwin, who was particularly prolific in the so called 'Age of Feeling', under a different perspective. In fact, thanks to the analysis of two of his novels, *Caleb Williams* and *Fleetwood*, this thesis aimed to prove his evident engagement with the sentimental trend which was highly popular in the British literature in the eighteenth century. Since the main criticism and studies have always focused more on Godwin's political philosophy — also when analyzing his novels — his rationalistic side has been more privileged than his sentimental tendency by the majority of literary critics. Nevertheless, as pointed out throughout this particular study, his relationship with the sentimental literature is profound, and, to examine it in full, this thesis started from an analysis of the background of the years before and during Godwin's life, called the 'Age of Feeling', together with the difficulties in defining it, especially regarding its vocabulary.

Moreover, in order to point out the importance of this topic not only for what concerns literature, but also for a number of other scientific fields, philosophical and medical studies have been mentioned. This thesis briefly examined some of these significant discoveries which brought the attention towards the human feelings and sympathy, as well as highlighting the importance of the debate on whether we as human beings possess an innate benevolence or not. As a result, it has been noted how these crucial innovations, in the tumultuous yet rich years in which the shift from the Enlightenment to the Romanticism took place, were essential for shaping the literature of feeling, and, additionally, they may be the reason why it actually became such a literary 'cult' for a short period of time.

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[269] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on Morals and Happiness. By William Godwin. In Two Volumes*, cit, p. 349 [emphasis added]

For what concerns Godwin as an author, he absorbed all of these discoveries and debates — as has been argued throughout his biography, especially for what concerns his relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft — and he elaborated his own version of sentimentality, both for what concerns his political thoughts but, as examined in this thesis, especially for his fictional works. His political ideals are evident, as in both his novel the main point of his criticism, which is the corruption of the institutions and the subsequent effects on shaping the individual, is present. However, the sentimental aspect is highly relevant as well, as has been pointed out by the examination of the main characters of the two novels studied. This is the reason why this study hoped to stress the importance he did give to human emotions and passions in his literary production, since he was the very first author to suggest that reason was necessary to balance feelings and vice versa.

The first novel taken into consideration and Godwin's first fictional work, *Caleb Williams*, was crucial for this thesis in order to see the balancing of his two sides, the political and the sentimental, merging into a novel that could be defined groundbreaking — also due to the fact that it brought forward many other literary genres as well, as for instance the Gothic. One could have noted Godwin's interest in human sympathy from his very first political phamplet, *Political Justice*, in which he was indeed concerned by the British society and how its corrupted institutions may harm people's lives. Nevertheless, this study also aimed to unhinge *Caleb Williams* from its reputation as being a mere didactical fictionalization of Godwin's most known pamphlet, by stressing the author's skillful balancing of social critique and sentimentalism throughout its narrative — in particular for what concerns sympathy.

This thesis showed that the peculiarity of Godwin's sentimentalism was that he also criticized it within his fictional works. In fact, to demonstrate the effects of living a life only guided by emotions without reason, he created characters which are an exaggeration of the archetypal men of feeling. This has been especially clear in analyzing *Fleetwood, or: the New Man of Feeling*, in which he portrayed an 'ignoble form of sentimentalism'[270]. In particular, in Casimir Fleetwood, the author brought together all the limits of the man who possess exquisite sensibility, creating a selfish

[270] Allen B. Sprague, 'William Godwin as a Sentimentalist' PMLA, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1918), pp. 1-29 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/456970> accessed on 2 March, 2019, p. 23

misanthropist, a misogyny, and a mad man. In this second novel analyzed in this thesis, there has been a focus on the pessimism and disillusionment of the author towards the genre itself, as well as a critique to another sentimental philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As a result, in a typical Godwinian style, in *Fleetwood* — as in *Caleb Williams* — the author brought his criticisms to excess, so much so that he became didactical, by insinuating that the risk of being like Casimir is that of becoming insane, basically a monster, intersecting yet again the Gothic element which was more prevalent in *Caleb Williams* — and which also canonized Godwin as a pre Romantic writer.

To conclude, the way in which Godwin dealt with sentimentalism, how he was influenced by it and how he also rejected it, might be an explanation for his popularity in his own time and might also explain his decline. In fact, like the 'Age of Feeling', Godwin's works have been for many years unremembered and not studied in depth until, roughly, the twentieth century. This is especially true for what concerns his novels, which are more connected to sentimentalism than his political writings. Nevertheless, recent studies have demonstrated the importance and the influence of his figure in his own time and also after his death, as he was able to merge together radicalism, social commentary, and an Enlightened faith in reason with his more sentimental developments. For this reason, William Godwin might be defined as 'a paradoxical union of reason and feeling'[271]. His works have inspired the Romantic writers as well as a number of future philosophers, and he can indeed be considered the bridge between two opposite worlds in the English British history, a radical author who cared for the happiness of mankind and who used the power of literature in full in order to express his revolutionary ideas.

[271] *Ibid*. p. 2

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